

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 10 November 2021

Subject: Communications & Resident Engagement Update

Lead officer: Matt Burrows

Lead member: Owen Pritchard

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Recommendations:

- A. The report is for information only but comments are welcomed from Members on any of the details within it
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report aims to update the Commission on progress made in Communications & Engagement (C&E) since September 2020, when we last updated Members.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The focus of our last report to the Commission, in September 2020, was on how the Communications & Engagement service was supporting the Council to engage with residents, staff & businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.2. While that work remains ongoing, the slowing of infection rates and deaths, and the release of most restrictions, has seen us shift from a crisis management to recovery approach as the Council looks to the future.
- 2.3. Overall, the service is performing well. How we inform & engage residents is one of the council's six Key Performance Indicators in the Resident Survey. Over the last two years, despite a small drop in perceptions in this area, it has been the strongest performing indicator, suggesting we are making good progress in the way we engage our communities, although there remains much to be done.
- 2.4. This update outlines the work the division has done both during the last 12 months, as well as its plans for the future emerging from the Your Merton borough-wide consultation.

Overview of Covid-19 communications since September 2020

- 2.5. **#MertonTogether (Winter 2020)**
- 2.6. This was the Council's winter campaign in 2020, bringing together partnership-wide messaging on winter support for the vulnerable, stay warm stay well, and getting help during Covid-19 restrictions, such as medicine & food deliveries through our local partners.

- 2.7. The campaign brought together Merton Council, MVSC, Age UK Merton, Love Wimbledon, the Chamber of Commerce, the Dons Action Group, Wimbletech and other key local partners. A single web page was created to host links to volunteer, care & donate locally.
- 2.8. The campaign drove more than 5,000 residents to find out more on the webpage, as well as generating additional volunteers for Dons Action Group and MVSC.
- 2.9. **Surge Testing (January-June 2021)**
- 2.10. Surge testing was carried out twice in the borough during 2021, in the early part of the year and again in late Spring. The C&E team led the communication of this to affected residents.
- 2.11. During the first surge testing at Pollards Hill, the team led a proactive strategy including:
- *Direct Communications:* Door-to-door deliveries of leaflets advising residents to get tested, with translations available;
 - *Media relations:* proactive engagement with regional & national media included a half-day filming with the Leader & New Horizon Centre for Sky News, as well as on-site features with Times Radio.
- 2.12. During the second surge testing in the St Mark's area of Mitcham, delivery included:
- *Direct communications:* Leaflets directly to affected streets & employers.
 - *Digital communications:* Utilising our digital marketing platform, we set up email reminders to those registered to take a test, encouraging them to return overdue results. This resulted in a return rate of more than 90%.
- 2.13. **Vaccinations & Testing (Ongoing)**
- 2.14. Testing & Vaccinations have been promoted each week, including walk-in vaccination pop-ups communicated each morning through social media to 25,000 followers.
- 2.15. Our weekly Covid-19 resident bulletin, emailed to more than 120,000 residents, highlights ways to get tested and how to get your vaccination locally.
- 2.16. We have also run targeted digital campaigns to reach younger people to encourage them to take up the vaccine.
- 2.17. **Recovery & Shop Local (September 2020-present)**
- 2.18. The Council has worked with local businesses, Chamber of Commerce & Love Wimbledon to help inform local businesses of their obligations as restrictions were lifted, and has just launched a Shop Safe, Shop Merton

campaign in the lead-in to Christmas. A regular business email bulletin helps us reach more than 2,000 local firms.

Overview of strategic communications since September 2020

2.19. Beyond the demands of the pandemic, the division has been working to align communications around the outcomes of the Your Merton engagement campaign, future council priorities, and the top priorities for residents in communications.

Your Merton (Summer 2021)

2.21. From June until August 2021, the C&E team led the engagement delivery of Your Merton, the council's largest-ever community engagement exercise.

2.22. The engagement comprised three key elements – the bi-annual resident survey of 1,000 people, a series of direct focus groups with residents, businesses & service users, and a dedicated website where anybody who lives, works or studies in the borough can give us their views on specific places and areas.

2.23. Overall, more than 10,500 responses were generated, mainly through digital and outdoor marketing campaigns, as well as through My Merton magazine and our social media channels.

2.24. The emerging Council priorities to be brought to a future Cabinet meeting will then form the basis of our 2022 communications priorities for residents.

Love Merton (Summer 2021 – ongoing)

2.26. Our two current campaigns, Love Local & Keep It Clean, are part of the wider Love Merton message. These are ongoing, behaviour-change and information campaigns to encourage pride in the borough and local activities.

2.27. *Love Local* is aimed at promoting local events, attractions and supporting local high streets. It includes promotion of events such as the annual fireworks, summer carnivals & festivals, and using local parks and open spaces.

2.28. The campaign is run through My Merton, the My Merton e-newsletter and our social media channels, totalling a reach of more than 100,000 residents.

2.29. *Keep it Clean* is the Council's campaign to promote a cleaner, greener borough.

2.30. This includes weekly promotion of recycling improvements, flytipping prosecutions, anti-littering campaigns and promotion of the Council's climate change action plan. The campaign runs on all social media channels as well as through our digital newsletters.

- 2.31. **Digital communications**
- 2.32. Since September 2020, the C&E team has been working to maximise the digital communications & marketing platform which was launched last year.
- 2.33. This allows much more tailored communications to residents, who can now sign up for a range of specific newsletters, & updates on our website.
- 2.34. This list now includes Public Health, Libraries, My Merton news (an e-version of the magazine), What's On in Merton and Climate Change, with around 20,000 new subscriptions in 12months.
- 2.35. Continuing this growth and introducing new alerts & sign-ups for residents will continue to be a priority in 2022.

- 2.36. **Other Channels**
- 2.37. The Council is already active on Twitter, Facebook & Instagram (for our What's on promotions), with a total of almost 30,000 followers.
- 2.38. It has now also launched itself on NextDoor as an additional way to communicate with local residents. This potentially adds a reach of around 30,000 local residents to council messages.

- 2.39. **Internal & employee communications**
- 2.40. Throughout the pandemic, internal communications has worked to ensure colleagues can stay engaged and informed about key decisions, working practices and council policy.
- 2.41. Delivery has included a new Intranet website for staff, the introduction of CEO listening sessions, Director Video Briefings and Manager Engagement sessions, all designed to help managers keep staff informed and to give staff a platform to hear from the leadership team.

3 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 3.1. N/A

4 TIMETABLE

- 4.1. N/A

5 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Additional capacity to support some of the Covid related campaigns has been met from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) and other external grant funded regimes.

6 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. N/A

7 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

7.1. N/A

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1. N/A

9 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1. N/A

10 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1. N/A

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