

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 20 December 2022

LGA peer review on communications: Feedback report

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to** note the report from the July 2022 LGA communications peer review, which is attached as Annex 1, and the council's actions taken in response to the recommendations in the report.

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. This report contains no recommendations, meaning cabinet is not required to make a formal response. It may, of course, wish to respond to any of the observations detailed below when it considers this report.

Executive summary

3. An LGA peer review of the council's communications, marketing and engagement function was undertaken from 6 to 8 July 2022.
4. We would like to thank the members of the peer review team for conducting the review and for their very helpful feedback and recommendations: Cllr Rory Love, Kent County Council; Cllr Steve Morpew, Norfolk County Council; Smyth Harper, Head of Communications, Lancashire County Council; Kamran Hussain, Communications Manager, Milton Keynes Council; Emily Taylor, Digital Communications & Campaigns Manager, Telford & Wrekin Council; and David Armin, LGA associate consultant, who was the review manager.
5. At its meeting of 18 October 2022, cabinet noted the observations from the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcomes of the peer review. This was based on a preliminary report from the LGA.
6. Cabinet is now being provided with the full report from the LGA and with an update on actions taken following the recommendations contained within the report.
7. The LGA peer review team made seven key recommendations:

- (a) Involve the communications team at an earlier stage when projects are initiated and around significant decisions.
 - (b) Establish a close working relationship between the leader and the director and head of communications to ensure understanding, delivery and communication of key priorities.
 - (c) Clarify and streamline the approvals process for communications and the media.
 - (d) Explore support and training around political awareness for the communications team and use this as a pilot for the wider organisation.
 - (e) Cabinet, the senior leadership team and the director and head of communications to agree a shared vision for video content.
 - (f) Make use of relevant metrics and insight to evaluate and inform future comms plans.
 - (g) Continue to build on work with the senior leadership team and Cabinet to develop the overarching narrative for Oxfordshire so that it can be understood and owned by all staff and members.
8. Further details about the strengths and issues identified by the peer review team can be found in the LGA report, which is attached as Annex 1. A [recording of the LGA's feedback session](#) is also available.
9. The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that, on balance, the initial feedback from the LGA was extremely positive. Reviewers were extremely complementary about the competence and leadership of the team and found the level of resourcing to be adequate.

Action plan

10. The communications team developed an action plan based around the seven recommendations and has been implementing this since July 2022. A summary of actions taken or underway is outlined below.

Recommendation 1: Involve the communications team at an earlier stage when projects are initiated and around significant decisions.

11. A communications grid, which details planned activity, is circulated on a regular basis to members of cabinet, the senior leadership team and the extended leadership team. This not only provides a forward look at what activity is planned over a two-month and a six-month period, but also an opportunity for new projects and communication requirements to be flagged to the communications team.
12. A review of forward plan templates has been undertaken and the inclusion of questions about whether a communications plan is needed for the project and the involvement of the communications team is underway. Examples include the council's main forward plan, papers to the senior leadership team and informal cabinet, and project initiation documents.

13. Colleagues in the strategy team are supporting the development of a more proactive approach to communicating the overarching vision and direction of policy before scrutiny and cabinet papers are published.

Recommendation 2: Establish a close working relationship between the leader and the director and head of communications to ensure understanding, delivery and communication of key priorities.

14. A regular timetable of fortnightly communications planning and review meetings is in place.

Recommendation 3: Clarify and streamline the approvals process for communications and the media.

15. A media protocol is in place, which has been shared with members of the senior leadership team and cabinet to ensure all parties are aware of the support available to them and processes to be followed.
16. Media training took place for cabinet members in summer 2021; this was supplemented in September 2022 with a refresher session for cabinet and the senior leadership team, with a focus on answering public questions prior to the Oxfordshire Conversation Q&A events. More indepth media training for cabinet members is being planned in the new year.
17. Work is underway to build closer relationships with the local media, particularly with a view to profiling the leader and chief executive. Regular meetings with the editors of Oxford Mail and BBC have been set up with the head of communications and the media and communications manager for reciprocal information sharing and to explore editorial and broadcast opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Explore support and training around political awareness for the communications team and use this as a pilot for the wider organisation.

18. Members of the communications, marketing and engagement team have attended the LGiU political awareness training course, where it is deemed beneficial to help support them in their roles. The communications management team is also providing support and mentoring for new members of the team or those less experienced.
19. The communications, marketing and engagement team will continue to offer a programme of ongoing training and information sharing opportunities for members.

Recommendation 5: Cabinet, SLT and the director and head of communications to agree a shared vision for video content.

20. A video strategy was shared and agreed with cabinet members in the summer and is being implemented. This included adopting a more fleet of foot approach to video production, particularly around cabinet decisions. A review

of the engagement we have received on a variety of video content is now underway.

Recommendation 6: Make use of relevant metrics and insight to evaluate and inform future communications plans.

21. This was a recommendation accepted as already grounded in the communications, marketing and engagement team's day-to-day work. The team compiles detailed metrics for each marketing and communications campaign to assess its performance. A quarterly report is circulated to members of cabinet, the senior leadership team and extended leadership team, which provides metrics and insight for marketing campaigns, social media engagement, media coverage, newsletters, consultations and internal communication.
22. Further opportunities have been explored, and will continue to be explored, as part of maintaining best practice outputs. These include moving email communications to staff and members to an online platform so that audience and engagement levels can be accurately measured.

Recommendation 7: Continue to build on work with the senior leadership team and cabinet to develop the overarching narrative for Oxfordshire so that it can be understood and owned by all staff and members.

23. A number of workshops have taken place over the summer and autumn with cabinet and the senior leadership team to explore the council's vision and the accompanying narrative to communicate that vision. The narrative will be included in the updated strategic plan 2023-2025.

Financial implications

24. There are no budgetary implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by Bick Nguyen-McBride
Assistant Finance Business Partner
Bick.Nguyen-McBride@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal implications

25. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by Paul Grant
Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Paul.Grant@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff implications

26. There are no staff implications arising from this report.

Equality and inclusion implications

27. Equality and inclusion implications have been and continue to be considered as part of the development and implementation of the action plan.

Sustainability implications

28. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Risk management

29. There are no direct risks to manage arising from this report. Communications risks are identified and mitigated against, where possible, in the development of any activity led by the team. This includes in the implementation of the action plan.

Claire Taylor

Corporate Director – Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

Annex 1: LGA peer review of communications – full report

Contact officers:

Susannah Wintersgill
Director of Communications, Strategy and Insight
susannah.wintersgill@oxfordshire.gov.uk
07554 103526

Kerry Middleton
Head of Communications, Marketing and Engagement
Kerry.middleton@oxfordshire.gov.uk
07586 479081

December 2022