Subject:	Communications Strategy	**Status:**	For Publication

Report to: Full Council	**Date:**	15th December 2010

Report of: Head of People and Policy

Portfolio Holder: Finance and Resources

Key Decision: Yes / ~~No~~

Forward Plan [X]   General Exception [ ]   Special Urgency [ ]

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   The Communication Strategy sets out how Rossendale Council will organise and communicate to residents and stakeholders. It looks to create a communication culture which uses a variety of media to communicate and values listening to customers and shaping services to meet their needs.

1.2   The Communications Strategy sets out the way forward for the Council in relation to how the Council will deliver value for money communications whilst responding to a changing external media environment, particularly the recent growth in the use of social media.

2.   CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1   The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-

- Delivering quality services to our customers
- Promoting the Borough
- Providing value for money services

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3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendations in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- **Council Reputation** - Effective communications play an important part in maintaining the Council's reputation. Ceasing to produce the Rossendale Alive newsletter carries the risk that the Council will have less direct influence over the messages that local people receive about the Council.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 The Council's Communications Strategy has been reviewed in light of the medium term financial strategy but also in recognition of the need to explore ways in which the Council can improve the way it communicates with its residents.

4.2 As part of the review, production arrangements in relation to Rossendale Alive have been reconsidered and options explored in relation to reducing the costs. Currently, three Rossendale Alive newletters are published a year. The newsletter costs approximately £6,000 per edition to design, print and distribute. The Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the following options for the future of the Rossendale Alive newsletter.

- Option 1 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and securing advertising revenue to offset production costs, delivered by the postal service.
- Option 2 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and securing funding from other public services, delivered by the postal service.
- Option 3 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and exploring a Community Delivery option.
- Option 4 – 2 inserts per year into the Rossendale Free Press or Rossendale Independent.
- Option 5 – Rossendale Alive Annual Review once every year, delivered by the postal service.
- Option 6 – Two editions per year of Neighbourhood News for each Neighbourhood Forum Area, delivered by a door to door distributer
- Option 7 – Reduce the number of editions of Rossendale Alive from 3 to 2 per year.
- Option 8 – Cease production of any newspaper completely.
- Option 9 – Continue production as is.

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4.3   Most local authorities produce their own newsletter, as a means of communicating with the public about services. Research by the Local Government Association indicates that 92 per cent of councils do so.

4.4   Councils provide hundreds of services, but independent research by IpsosMori has shown that two-thirds of the public know nothing or next to nothing about local government, which could be suggested is fundamentally unhealthy in a modern democracy. One of the ways Councils have tried to rectify this disconnection is through producing a newsletter.

4.5   Local authority publications provide basic information about how to access services and inform residents about how their council tax is being spent. Newsletters will include content such as opening times for popular services like leisure centres, information about events provided by the Council, details about consultations with residents around issues such as planning, and useful contact numbers.

4.6   However, the time is now right to review our methods of communication due to the medium term financial strategy and the need to prioritize areas of expenditure, but also in light of the Council's plans to utilize other forms of communication and build it's capacity to communicate as detailed within the Communication Strategy.

4.7   The Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee having fully considered all the facts proposed that production of the Rossendale Alive newsletter should cease (Option 8) and that this was their recommendation to Full Council.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5.   SECTION 151 OFFICER

5.1   Financial implications are noted in para 4.2 above and compare to current budget resources.

6.   MONITORING OFFICER

6.1   Council publications that use advertising have come under criticism in other local areas on the basis that they competed unfairly with other local media and took much-needed advertising away from them, although I am not aware of a successful legal challenge on this basis.

7.   HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1   No Human Resources implications arising for the report at this time.

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8.   CONCLUSION

8.1   It is four years since the previous Communications Strategy was adopted by the Council. The new strategy builds on the work that this been completed, whilst identify cost saving options for the future and recognising the growing importance of social media. The new strategy will enable the Council to build its capacity to communicate effectively.

9.   RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1   Members agree to cease production of the Rossendale Alive newsletter after the March 2011 edition.

9.2   Members authorise the Communications Manager to explore options in relation to a more cost effective A to Z as detailed within the Communications Strategy.

9.3   Members agree the Communications Strategy.

9.4   All future minor amendments to the Communication Strategy to be delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

10.   CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1   Councillors, Council Staff, Executive Management Team, Place Survey, Cultural Survey, Policy Overview and Scrutiny, soft feedback from consultation events and opportunities. Free Press and Lancashire Telegraph were also asked for their views.

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11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required   Yes / ~~No~~

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached   Yes / ~~No~~

12. BIODIVIERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required   ~~Yes~~ / No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached   ~~Yes~~ / No

Contact Officer	
Name	Nick Molyneux
Position	Communications Manager
Service / Team	People and Policy
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Background Papers	
Document	**Place of Inspection**
New Reputation Guide – Local Government Association	www.reputation.lga.gov.uk
Rossendale Culture Review - August 2009 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Borough Council Staff Survey - January 2010 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Members Questionnaire on Communications	Stubbylee Hall

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Community Impact Assessment

Checklist & Signature Sheet

This should be commenced at the start of the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) process.

Name of Strategy/Policy/ Service or Function:	Communications Strategy

Initial CIA X   Full CIA ☐

Please check the following steps have been completed before signing below:

- Sections 1 to 4 completed
- Action Plan completed (where appropriated)
- Notified all relevant Officers/Service Areas/Partners

Signed: …………………………………………………..

Job Title: Communications Advisor   Department: Communications
Date commenced Assessment: Date completed:

Received by and date received in the People & Policy Team:
Please sign the CIA as indicated above, retain a copy and send a copy of the CIA to:

Liz Murphy
Head of People and Policy
Rossendale Borough Council
Stubbylee Hall
Stubbylee, Bacup
Rossendale
OL13 0DE
lizmurphy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

MANAGEMENT ACTION REQUIRED (to be completed by the Head of P&P)

- Referred back to Assessor for amendment :   (date)
- Refer to Committee: (specify committee & date)
- Considered by Community Impact Assessment & Scrutiny Group: (date)
- Published/made publicly available on: (date)

Signed:………………………………….. (Head of P&P) Date:
Date of Review[1]:

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[1] This date will be set on an annual basis as default for review unless otherwise specified by you.

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COMMUNTIY IMPACT ASSESSMEMT
INITIAL SCREENING FORM

Name of Community Impact Assessment (the policy, decision, strategy, programme, procedure, action plan, function or service etc.):	Communications Strategy	
Officer Name(s):	Gill Hoyle	
Job Title & Location:	Communications Advisor	
Service Area/ Team:	Communications	
Telephone & Email Contact:	gillianhoyle@rossendalebc.gov.uk	
Date Assessment: 11th November 2010	Commenced: July 2010	Completed: Nov 2010

Is the policy[2] or decision under review (please tick)

New/Proposed X   Modified/adapted☐   Existing ☐

1. Scope of the Community Impact Assessment
This Community Impact Assessment aims is to ensure that all communication undertaken by the Council is as inclusive and accessible as possible to all people in Rossendale.
2. Aims & Objectives – summaries the main aims/objectives of the policy, decision, strategy, action plan, project or procedure (please refer to CIA Guidance for details)
The Communication Strategy sets out how Rossendale Borough Council will organise and communicate to residents and stakeholders. It looks to create a communication culture which uses a variety of media to communicate and values listening to customers and shaping services to meet their needs.   **Objectives** 1. To raise awareness of what the Council does, the services it provides and how to access them, so as to maximise service take-up, increase the number of people who feel that the Council keeps them informed and have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. 2. To facilitate inclusive communications with minority and "hard to reach" groups in Rossendale and council services that are accessible to the whole community.

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[2] Policy can be defined as a policy document, decision, strategy, function, service, action plan, programme, procedure, initiative or process.

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3. To demonstrate that what the Council is doing is relevant to local people and addresses the aspirations and needs of our community including the need to provide value for money services.

4. To improve the Councils reputation by helping stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of our priorities and achievements, the decisions we make and the reasons why, including explaining the challenges and limitations we face.

5. To promote the consultation opportunities provided to our communities and stakeholders to engage with and influence council priorities, policies, services and decisions and demonstrate that the Council listens to local people.

6. To build a strong brand for the Council, ensuring that our corporate identity is used consistently and appropriately throughout the organisation and clearly linked to the services we provide.

7. To facilitate effective two way dialogue with council employees and ensure that employees are informed of corporate information and messages in a timely and appropriate way so that they can be effective advocates for the Council.

8. To encourage the provision of timely and relevant information to Councillors to assist them in fulfilling their Community Leadership role and help them to become more effective ambassadors for the Council.

9. To maximise our influence with the local media, encouraging them to publicise the Council's positive achievements and to give fair, accurate and balanced coverage to issues where the Council is being criticised.

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3. Impact – Could a particular group of people be affected differently in either a negative or positive way?

	Positive Impact – it could benefit	Negative Impact – it could disadvantage/ affect differently	Neutral Impact (Neither)	Please indicate whether this is high (H), medium (M) or low (L). If a negative impact is identified please complete a Full CIA [3]
Women	☐	☐	X	
Men	☐	☐	X	
Race (Ethnicity or Nationality) – BME or Majority Population - please state which group(s):	X	☐	☐	
People with a disability (physical, learning/ mental health)	X	☐	☐	
Lesbians, gay men and bisexual people	☐	☐	X	
Transgendered people	☐	☐	X	
Older people (60+)	X	☐	☐	
Younger people (17-25), and children	X	☐	☐	
Religious / Faith groups[4]	X	☐	☐	
Other excluded groups (e.g. careers, rurally isolated, gypsies & roma travelers, people on low incomes etc.). Please state which group(s):	X	☐	☐	

Is a Full Community Impact Assessment required? Yes: ☐ **No:** X   **Head of P&P signature:**

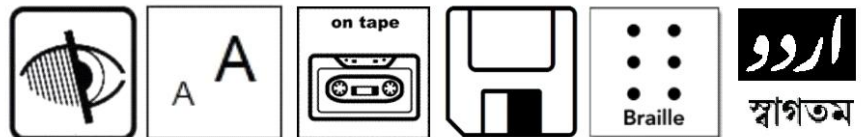**Lead Officer signature:**   **Date:**

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[3] If you have identified any negative impact you *will* need to complete a Full Community Impact Assessment. If there are no negative impacts identified you do not need to complete a Full Community Impact Assessment.
[4] Faith groups cover a wide range of groupings, the most common of which are Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus. Consider faith categories individually and collectively when considering positive and negative impacts.

Communication Strategy

Responsible Section Team	People and Policy	Version	2.2
Responsible Author	Communications Manager	Status	Draft
Date last amended	16.11.2010		

1. Introduction

This Communication Strategy sets out how Rossendale Council will organise and communicate to residents and stakeholders. It looks to create a communication culture which uses a variety of media to communicate and values listening to customers and shaping services to meet their needs.

2. Communication Objective

The Council has identified a number of key objectives for this Communications Strategy. These are based on an analysis of national research findings, good practice and the use of local consultation and performance data, the evaluation and review of the council's previous communications strategy and an internal audit of current communication tools and techniques.

1. To raise awareness of what the Council does, the services it provides and how to access them, so as to maximise service take-up, increase the number of people who feel that the Council keeps them informed and have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

2. To facilitate inclusive communications with minority and 'hard to reach' groups in Rossendale and council services that are accessible to the whole community.

3. To demonstrate that what the Council is doing is relevant to local people and addresses the aspirations and needs of our community including the need to provide value for money services.

4. To improve the Council's reputation by helping stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of our priorities and achievements, the decisions we make and the reasons why, including explaining the challenges and limitations we face.

5. To promote the consultation opportunities provided to our communities and stakeholders to engage with and influence council priorities, policies, services and decisions and demonstrate that the Council listens to local people.

6. To build a strong brand for the Council, ensuring that our corporate identity is used consistently and appropriately throughout the organisation and clearly linked to the services we provide.

7. To facilitate effective two way dialogue with council employees and ensure that employees are informed of corporate information and messages in a timely and appropriate way so that they can be effective advocates for the Council.

8. To encourage the provision of timely and relevant information to Councillors to assist them in fulfilling their Community Leadership role and help them to become more effective ambassadors for the Council.

9. To maximise our influence with the local media, encouraging them to publicise the Council's positive achievements and to give fair, accurate and balanced coverage to issues where the Council is being criticised.

10. To promote a positive image of Rossendale as a great place to live, work and visit in line with the Rossendale Alive Sustainable Community Strategy.

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3. Target Audiences

The purpose of identifying target audiences is to be able to make our communication more effective and to maximise the impact of the formal communication activities. By identifying specific audiences we can aim to gain a better understanding of them, and how to meet their communication needs.

Rossendale Council Borough Council has a number of stakeholders and a large number of people and organisations that it must influence in order to secure its strategic objectives. These include:

- Borough residents
- Specific demographic groups e.g. young or older people
- Disadvantaged and underrepresented groups
- Media
- Social media users
- Local Strategic Partnership
- Partner organisations e.g. Police, NHS, Lancashire County Council
- Local businesses
- Voluntary and Community organisations, the Rossendale Community Network and CVS
- Funding agencies
- PLACE – Pennine Lancashire Leaders and Chief Executives
- Government and political stakeholders - including local MPs
- Tourists and potential visitors
- Internal audiences - including elected members and council employees

Although the list is by no means exhaustive it does demonstrate the breadth of people and organisations that the Council needs to communicate with and influence.

4. Background to Rossendale

Rossendale lies in the south east of the County of Lancashire, close to the Manchester conurbation. It is one of six Pennine Lancashire Authorities and has ambitious plans for the future; these are set out in the Rossendale's Sustainable Community Strategy, Rossendale Alive (2008-2018) and Rossendale Borough Council's Corporate Plan (2009-2012). The Strategy and Corporate Plan are organised around outcomes relating to People, Places and Prosperity so it is clear what the Borough is trying to achieve.

The Borough's population of 67,000 is slowly increasing and is spread between urban and rural areas, resulting in a population density of 480 people per square kilometer, creating communication challenges in relation to reaching disparate rural communities.

Of the 67,000 people, 5.5% of the population are from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. The two largest religions in Rossendale are Christian (76%) and Muslim (2.9%) There is a need therefore to ensure that are communication channels are reaching a range of diverse communities within our population.

In terms of demographics 31.8% of the Borough's population is aged 24 or below, slightly higher than the Lancashire and national average. 14.5% of the population is aged 65 or over, which is lower than

the Lancashire at 17.0% and England and Wales at 16.4%, therefore the tools, activities and media utilised to engage with residents needs to appeal to different demographic groups.

5. <u>Links to other strategies</u>

The Council has identified, through consultation with local people and partners priorities which will have the greatest possible impact upon the services they provide and the quality of life for everyone in the borough. These are articulated in the Councils' Corporate Plan for 2009-2012:

The Communication Strategy is closely linked to a number of other major Council Strategic plans:

- Sustainable Community Strategy
- Corporate Plan
- Customer Access Strategy
- Organisational Development Plan
- Tourism Strategy

6. <u>External Communication</u>

The Council recognises the value of external communication in developing services that meet the needs of local communities, informing people how to access local services and in demonstrating what the Council does is relevant to local people. A variety of mechanisms are used to communicate the Council's message.

(i) The Council newsletter, Rossendale Alive has been a successful mechanism for communicating Council priorities, progress on Council's projects and activities and signposting to a range of services provided by the Council and its partners.

(ii) Council leaflets within the One Stop Shop are regularly reviewed and provide information about Council Services to customers.

(iii) The Council produces a well received A to Z of Council Services which signposts residents, the version is updated annually on the Council website.

(iv) The Communities Team regularly update and review the Council Community Notice Boards with Community and Council news.

(v) The Council has established a number of successful mechanisms for communicating and engaging with its communities including: Local Democracy Week which is often focused on consulting with younger people who live in the Valley, Neighbourhood Forums which provide a mechanism for engaging with representatives from the community and consultation meetings which take place in relation to specific issues which matter to local people.

(vi) The Council has a well established brand based on the umbrella "Rossendale Alive".

(vii) There remain communication challenges in relation to the need to challenge negative perceptions. People's views and perceptions of the Council are formed in numerous complex and different ways – their experience of the services they use, how council staff behave, what their neighbours and Councillors say about the Council, what they read in the papers and, in many cases historical negative perceptions.

(viii) There is a need to maximise the amount of positive media coverage, media monitoring demonstrates that approximately 52% of the media coverage of the Council is positive with 31% of the coverage neutral and 17% negative. Of the 17% that is negative less than one third of this can be justified criticism of the Council.

(ix) The Council has developed good personal relationships with the media, in addition with the diversification of the local media the Communications Team has provided support to the development of Radio Rossendale – a community radio station based in Haslingden which has been broadcasting throughout the valley since Spring 2010. The Council also welcomes the arrival of the Rossendale Independent newspaper which is now the only local newspaper with an editorial base in the borough.

(x) Technological changes have lead to the Council developing social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook as mechanisms to communicate its message. In addition websites such as Aboutmyarea.com, askRossendale.com, Rossendaleonline.com and the Council's own website create opportunities to promote the Borough and for the Council to communicate its messages effectively to local people.

(xi) There is a need to build the capacity and confidence of the organisation in relation to dealing with communication issues by ensuring that communication is prioritised within service areas and there are a range of skills available in relation to the writing press releases and writing articles. There also needs to be a shared understanding in relation to how to maximise publicity potential and those stories which are recognised by the media as newsworthy stories.

(xii) In relation to social media, there is a need to build the capacity of the organisation by developing the skills and confidence of employees to use social media and ensure that they have appropriate IT access.

(xiii) Council Members, in their Community Leadership role, must be capable of articulating the needs of the community and challenging partners on behalf of the community. Effective communication is a key part of this work - influencing decision makers, mobilising support and making the case for change.

7. <u>Internal Communication</u>

The Council recognises the value of effective internal communication; this promotes a coordinated and seamless approach to service delivery. In addition, it ensures that employees have the opportunity to contribute to and are kept informed in relation to any anticipated changes. Effective communication also ensures that employees are aware of the Council's vision and how they personally contribute to that vision, a variety of different methods should be used to maximise the number of people who get the message:

(i) The Council has a well established monthly Team Brief with all employees receiving a consistent message in all service areas.

(ii) The Daily Message email has been established as a mechanism for updating people in relation to issues on a daily basis. The Operations Team have taken measures to print off the messages to ensure that all employees have sight of the message. The number of people who can send a message has increased to build capacity and as part of contingency planning.

(iii) The Grapevine staff news letter is produced every 4 months and is well received by employees. The newsletter looks to promotes understanding of the people and duties undertaken within different teams and to promote the Council's values in relation to team work and customer care.

(iv) All employees receive an annual appraisal and performance is monitored through regular one to ones which are supplemented by team meetings.

(v) The Council has recently established a Staff Forum comprising representatives from all service areas as a mechanism for consulting staff and involving staff in the Council.

(vi) The Council has a well established Staff Suggestion Scheme where suggestions will be considered by the Management Team. Feedback on the suggestions is done personally

feedback has been increased in relation to the scheme through the publication of articles in Grapevine.

(vii) The Council's Intranet has not been fully utilised by many service areas. It is used most effectively by the People and Policy Team to communicate policies which impact on employees and by the Communications Team to provide resources to support collegues throughout the council. It is also used for room booking, the staff suggestion scheme and to log ICT support queries. It is hoped that the introduction of SharePoint during 2010/2011 will encouraging improved file sharing and communication between different teams.

(viii) The Council produces a Members Bulletin every 2 months to keep members up to date with council news this has been developed. Cabinet Members are consulted on significant decisions and there is an expectation that ward members will be briefed on significant changes that will impact in their ward.

8. Drivers for change

- The growth of social media creates opportunities to communicate with different audiences, instantly and flexibly.
- The decline in reaching traditional media requires us to consider if our methods of communication are reaching our target audiences.
- The need to achieve efficiencies in light of the Medium Term Financial Strategy requires us to consider the way we communicate and if effective communications can it be achieved in a more core cost effective way.

9. Communications Strategy

- The Council has developed and produced a successful Council newsletter. Consultation with local people demonstrates they find the articles useful, that it is a valuable mechanism for signposting people to services provided by the Council and its partner agencies and that is used to help people find out about local events. People also consider that the newsletter is value for money. The newsletter is also used to communicate financial and performance information and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Council in delivering it services. However, there is a need to consider the luxury of using this form of communication in the light of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It is proposed that the last edition of the Rossendale Alive will be March 2011.

- It is important that the Council utilises a number of mechanisms to communicate with its employee. The Grapevine staff newsletter is well received by staff, however there is a need to be as cost effective as possible. Options to reduce the frequency of the newsletter and consider alternative methods of production will be explored.

- The Council's A to Z is recognised as valuable by customers. Research conducted by MORI in 2009 for the Local Government Association found that the majority of residents (55%) value a local 'A to Z of services' as the most useful form of council publicity and signposting of council services. However, in light of the medium term financial strategy it is necessary to explore options for producing and distributing the A to Z at a lower cost.

- The Council has established a number of mechanisms for engaging with it's communities on those issues that affect them. These mechanisms will continue to be used to communicate

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council news and activities.

- The Council has framework for assessing potential reputation risks. All high level risks require a communications plan to be produced in consultation with the Communications Manager

- To build the capacity and confidence of the organisation in relation to dealing with the media, the following officers will receive additional training and have the authority to speak to the press on none contentious issues (those issues that do not present a High or Medium level reputational risk – see above) - All Directors, the Head of Finance, Head of People and Policy, Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, Communities Manager, Planning Manager, Area Managers, and others at the request of a Council Director. Where an issue is a subject of the Programme Board and/or it is recognised that there are high reputational risks associated with that issue, the Communications Manager should be the lead media contact.

- The ability and capacity to promote good news stories within the media will be increased by the training and development of a number of key employees to communicate directly with the press and write effective press releases. A camera will made available for all officers to be able to take photos to publicise good news stories and the work of the Council.

- The Council has a well established brand based on the umbrella "Rossendale Alive"; there is a need to ensure that branding continues to be used in a visible and appropriate way.

- The initial use of social networking sites has been well received. It is proposed to increase the number of employees who can use the sites so that the Council's key messages can be more widely communicated. A policy for the use of social networking sites will be developed to protect the Council's brand and reputation.

- The effectiveness of communication can be improved by a clear understanding of the Council's customer base, the use of customer and mosaic data will be explored in relation to targeting Council communications.

- The Council faces serious financial challenges whilst at the same time needing to clearly communicate. Further work will take place to explore potential efficiencies in relation to Tourism and Leisure promotion.

Monitoring and Review

During the course of the previous communications strategy a number of performance measures for the communications services were established and a baseline has now been established. There is a balance between performance management and delivery of action. It is proposed that a snap shot of performance measures will be undertaken in six months in relation to the number of positive articles in the local media. The actions detailed within the Communication Strategy will be monitored via covalent through the People and Policy Business Plan, which is reported to Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Management Team.