

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 7 March 2023
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bellamy, Bowler, Bowser, Cain, Denton, Eastwood, P. Fielding, W. Fielding, Green, Hayward, Lodge, Mitchell, Osborne, Smith, Webster and Williams.

46 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

47 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Bowser declared a non-pecuniary interest as the Cabinet Support Member for Core Services.

Councillor Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Board Member at Berneslai Homes and as the Cabinet Support Member for Regeneration and Culture.

48 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 07 February 2023 were received.

49 Draft Communications & Marketing Strategy 2023 - 2025

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Michael Potter – Service Director, Business Improvement, HR and Communications, Barnsley Council

Katie Rogers – Head of Communications and Marketing, Barnsley Council

Alison Dixon – Communications and Marketing Manager, Barnsley Council

Cllr Robin Franklin – Cabinet Member for Core Services

Councillor Franklin introduced members of the committee to the draft communications and marketing strategy 2023-2025. The strategy set out service aims, ambitions and approach in addition to new priority criteria that was planned to help manage service capacity.

Members noted that the draft strategy emphasised use of digital technology and questioned what was being done to ensure that those without digital access were not

left behind. The environmental impact of printed material was acknowledged however it was queried as to whether this was still used to reach vulnerable communities.

Members were advised that the Communications and Marketing service took a multi-channel approach in a field that is in continuous development, with exploration given to sharing information on new platforms where they had gained popularity, for example TikTok. In terms of accessibility, media was published with subtitles and translation options (including British Sign Language) wherever possible, and work took place with graphic designers to ensure documents were accessible to all. Additionally, the Communicating and Marketing service was working with Council services to look at producing interactive and understandable content, as opposed to traditional documents that were text heavy. Social media was identified as the most widespread source and the source where audience engagement was highest.

Paper-based content was still produced for some campaigns, however it was explained to Members that information that was identified as frequently changing was not suitable for print. Improved data optimisation now meant that vulnerable groups could be targeted better and paper literature distributed where required. The Communications and Marketing service were working with services to have a physical presence out and about in the borough as a means of providing in-person information, advice and guidance and signposting to other services. Officers also advised they had good working relationships with the Barnsley Chronicle as a mechanism for getting information out in physical print.

Members questioned how success was measured for the Communications and Marketing service, given there was less tangible evidence available than some other services. Officers advised that without financial targets or metrics, a different approach was taken. Success was measured in terms of outcomes for services, that people have all the information the needed to engage with campaigns, take up offers and make positive changes in their lives. The *How's Thi Ticker* campaign was given as an example, with a large uptake of residents having their blood pressure checked being deemed a campaign success. All campaigns were evaluated against Communications and Marketing aims, service priorities and Council-wide priorities. Members were advised there were some tangible measures of evaluation including Google analytics and social media analytics, which revealed customer journeys and identified where links had been accessed.

Members raised concerns over the use of certain platforms being unsafe and questioned what safeguarding measures were in place. Officers advised that safeguarding practices were in place for all social media channels used. The Council approach had been cautious in uploading to newer platforms such as TikTok, posting was infrequent, and officers were given training. TikTok was used predominantly at that time for town centre economy and events campaigns, with monitoring ongoing and posting access limited to the Communications and Marketing service. In terms of some longer-established platforms such as Twitter, Members were advised that industry discussion was taking place as to how safe it was to use at present. Facebook was identified as a particularly strong channel that had stood the test of time through adapting and there were fewer concerns here.

Members questioned how much the demographic of a target audience influenced the channel of promotion used and were advised that this was taken into consideration.

Facebook typically had a 30-45 age range audience, with TikTok reaching a younger cohort. It was also advised that the concept that the older demographic did not have access to digital channels had changed since the Covid-19 pandemic had made them more digitally engaged. Members were advised that demographics of social media post reach could be pulled off and analysed on platforms such as Facebook.

It was queried by Members as to whether QR codes were deemed to be a successful tool in campaigns. Officers advised that since the Covid-19 pandemic, they had become more commonplace and therefore were good to include in campaigns at that present time. It was additionally explained that QR codes provided clear analytics as to where people were accessing material from.

Members sought clarification as to what the politically restricted nature of the Communications and Marketing Officers' roles meant in practice. It was advised that in their personal and professional lives, Officers were not to affiliate or actively participate with a political party.

Officers were questioned as to what criteria was used to monitor comments made by those engaging on the Council's social media channels, including whether any element of filtering or editing took place. It was advised that an acceptable use policy appeared on all social media channels and that although comments both agreeing and disagreeing with content were welcomed, there was a scale as to what was deemed appropriate. Abusive language, hate crime and slander would result in the Communications and Marketing service stepping in, firstly through private messaging posters to delete or amend their comment. If this proved unsuccessful, the comment would be deleted, and the poster dealt with offline with support from legal colleagues and the Police where appropriate. In rare extreme cases of less than a handful per year, individuals may have access revoked. The service was encouraging other Council officers to fill in violence and aggression forms where they had suffered online abuse.

Members questioned how the service dealt with the spread of misinformation online. Covid-19 conspiracy theories was used as an example of where the Council deleted comments of this nature, as they could be damaging to the health of residents. Although the Council did not have control of community social media pages, relationships were established which meant that Officers could approach page owners to take action.

It was queried as to how staff were protected online. Members were advised that updated social media guidance had been issued, including strengthened steps staff and managers needed to take. Officers subject to online abuse would be provided with HR support and given guidance on securing and protecting their own social media channels. The Communications and Marketing service would also work with legal colleagues and the Police where required. Staff were being advised to view online abuse in the same way as verbal abuse and reporting was encouraged.

Members enquired as to how the Communications and Marketing service went about advertising and what budget they had available to spend. It was advised that budgets came directly from services and that there was no specific Communications budget. The service instead looked at key campaigns and worked with services on tactics and deliverables. Online digital advertising was frequently used, and this provided

good value for money and good analytics. Billboards and press campaigns were used less frequently but were used on key campaigns where their widespread impact was essential to campaign success. Facebook advertising was identified as the main advertising channel the service used – posts could be targeted through determiners such as postcode and demographic, costs could be monitored, and audience amended as a campaign ran. Members were also informed that other advertising opportunities were being explored such as podcasts and streaming services and that the service were open to new and innovative options that did not incur a high cost. It was questioned by Members as to whether the lack of a core budget for the Communications and Marketing service was a disadvantage. Officers advised that the current arrangements were working well and that there were rarely issues with services allocating budget for their key campaigns.

Members queried the impartiality of the Communications and Marketing service in promoting specific businesses as part of developments in the town centre. It was advised that tenants of The Glass Works development did pay a service charge for marketing, explaining the prominence of these businesses in campaigns. All businesses across the town centre and in the borough were supported and stories would be included in campaigns where relevant. A query was additionally raised on the use of an external PR agency for the launch of Cineworld at The Glass Works, with Members advised this was part of a contract to market tenants in The Glass Works centre.

The content of promotions being verified for accuracy was challenged by Members, with the potential for misreporting successes being identified as a concern. Officers advised that expert colleagues were worked with as sources of data and insight, such as those in Public Health. There was a level of trust between professionals that the information was accurate and campaigns were appropriate for Barnsley.

Officers were questioned as to how they were promoting the night-time economy, with concerns raised over fear that residents of the borough may be priced out of some of the more expensive town centre premises. It was questioned whether promotions were extending far and wide. Members were updated on the launch of the Barnsley Town Centre brand which hoped to challenge some preconceptions about the town and bring in new patrons. The campaign would showcase restaurants, pubs and leisure activities and look at targeting a midweek audience in addition to the weekend, working with businesses such as theatres. The Purple Flag Status of the town would also be used in promotions, which identified it as a safe place to come at night. It was explained that some of the campaign work centred around the night-time economy was influenced through social listening, with people visiting from outside the Barnsley borough area. In this particular area, a recent story on night-time safety initiatives had been picked up through broadcast news outlets such as ITV Calendar, BBC Look North and BBC Radio Sheffield.

In addition to the promotion of the town centre economy, Members also suggested the promotion of local economies across the borough, with an example being given of the Trans Pennine Trail promoting cafes along the trail. Officers agreed that this was a good idea where more work could be done and signposted Members to the work around Principal Towns where Communications and Marketing were working closely with the Area Council teams to spread the word about the work of businesses and organisations in their localities. An equal balance of promotion across the

geography of the borough was strived for with Members asked to provide information that could contribute to positive stories in their ward and provide a good promotion opportunity for local organisations.

Members questioned whether the social media audience over 75 years of age had lessened since the end of the height of the Covid-19 Pandemic and how this could be detrimental to lonely and isolated people. Officers advised that the data was unavailable locally but anecdotally there did not appear to be a drop-off in engagement. A strong partnership had been developed between Council Digital Champions and colleagues at Age UK to combat digital exclusion in the elderly population.

Members shared their frustrations in the role of the Ward Alliances message being one that was difficult to get out – this resulted in a lack of engagement and bidding for available funding. It was questioned as to how the service could assist. Officers advised that the brand for Area Councils and Ward Alliances was being explored again after a hiatus due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was hoped this work would break down barriers where the public was confused as to what services and opportunities were available. In addition, tools were being given to the Area Council teams so they could promote activity in their area day-to-day without the constant support of the Communications and Marketing service. A 10-year anniversary celebration of the Area Councils and associated marketing had recently taken place with a presence at Barnsley Markets arranged for the weeks ahead.

Members put forward the challenge as to whether management of the Council's website would be better placed with the Communications and Marketing service as opposed to its current place in the Digital team under Customer Services. It was agreed this would be explored.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the Communications and Marketing service should look at additional ways in which local economies and businesses outside the town centre are promoted to increase footfall and support thriving communities; and
- (ii) That Members should share case studies of any local businesses that align with the Council's sustainability agenda or 2030 priorities of Healthy Barnsley, Growing Barnsley, Sustainable Barnsley, Learning Barnsley, Enabling Barnsley; and
- (iii) That the Communications and Marketing service should look at what more can be done to reach people over the age of 75 to support a reduction in isolation and loneliness; and
- (iv) That the Communications and Marketing service should look at additional ways in which Ward Alliances could be promoted to increase reach; and
- (v) That the Council should consider whether it is more appropriate for the management of the Council's website to sit within the Communications and Marketing service as opposed to the existing location within the Council structure.

Chair