

Place & Resources Scrutiny Committee 16 November 2021 Dorset Council External Communications

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader of the Council

Executive Director: M Prosser, Chief Executive

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

That the committee notes the information provided in this report.

Reason for Recommendation:

This report provides an update and overview of aspects of Dorset Council's external communications work, as requested by the Chair of Place & Resources Scrutiny committee.

1. Executive Summary

This report provides briefing on aspects of Dorset Council's external communications work, as requested by the Chair of Place & Resources Scrutiny committee. The following information was requested and is answered within this report:

- The protocol for notifying Dorset Council Councillors, and particularly, ward councillors, before communications are provided to the media – how this is referenced in the policy and is this happening?
- An overview of how social media is used by the council to get messages out

- Are we reaching younger people? – example provided of recent consultation on climate change where the figures were low for younger people.

2. Financial Implications

None.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

None.

4. Climate implications

None.

5. Other Implications

None.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

8. Appendices

8.1 The council's external communications strategy is provided at Appendix A, and the council's media protocol is provided at Appendix B.

9. The protocol for notifying Dorset Council Councillors, and particularly, ward councillors, before communications are provided to the media

9.1 In line with the council's media protocol, all press releases issued by Dorset Council must be approved by the relevant senior officer and Portfolio Holder prior to issue. We also seek to inform the relevant ward councillor/s if a release is about an issue within their specific ward: this should be done either by the Communications Officer or an officer in the service in question.

9.2 It should be noted that it is the responsibility of all officers across the council to keep ward councillors briefed about activity within their ward, as part of their day-to-day work. This is not the sole responsibility of the

Communications team. Officers are regularly reminded of this responsibility in employee events and briefings.

9.3 Immediately prior to each press release being issued to the media, it is shared via email with all Dorset Councillors for their information. All Dorset Councillors also received a weekly e-newsletter with a summary of all news and updates shared by the council.

10 **An overview of how social media is used by the council to get messages out**

10.1 Dorset Council has five main corporate social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. There are also numerous social media accounts for specific council services such as libraries, country parks, the Family Information Service, Travel Dorset, and more. The five main corporate social media accounts are managed by the central Communications team.

10.2 To give an indication of the reach of these accounts, the number of followers on the main corporate social media accounts is listed below:

- Facebook - 24.5k (6.1% increase since January '21)
- Twitter - 42.9k (2.1% increase)
- Instagram - 4.7k (23.4% increase)
- LinkedIn - 3.1k (32.3% increase)
- YouTube – 10.5k (16.4% increase)

10.3 Content is tailored to the audience following on each platform. We use a range of content including photos, gifs, videos and polls to make the content as engaging as possible. We also share relevant posts from partner organisations such as Dorset Police and Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group.

10.4 Dorset Council is a member of many local community Facebook groups across Dorset and we share relevant local news with those groups for community awareness and greater reach and engagement.

10.5 It should be noted that social media is not just used for “getting messages out”. Social media is about having two-way conversations. Council social media accounts are used to respond to customer service queries received through the platforms, and to answer questions and comments about key council projects via our news stories etc.

- 11 **Are we reaching younger people? – example provided of recent consultation on climate change where the figures were low for younger people.**
- 11.1 It is correct that the response rate to the climate change consultation from younger people was disappointing with only 0.6% of respondents to the main survey aged under 18 years, and only 16.4% of respondents to the version of the survey specifically designed for young people. This was disappointing because we know that climate change is an issue that many young people care about deeply. The consultation unfortunately took place during a Covid lockdown which reduced opportunities to engage with young people via schools and colleges.
- 11.3 We recognise that, as a council, we need improve our channels and methods for engaging young people.
- 11.2 In response, the Communications team is currently working with the Youth Participation team in Children’s Services to develop a new approach to engaging with young people on social media. Young people will be involved in this work, including in the content creation. We will be reviewing the platforms we use and developing our messaging and content to better appeal to and engage young people in Dorset. The project will also consider other means of better engaging with young people – e.g. through interactive online engagement software.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.