



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 NOVEMBER 2021**

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY PROGRESS UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the first progress update on the Marketing and Communications Strategy (**APPENDIX 1**) which was approved by this Committee on 17 October 2019. (Minute 469 refers) and delayed due to the Coronavirus outbreak.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Committee acknowledges the amount of work carried out by the team to communicate Covid-19 guidance and the impact it has had on the team's ability to deliver any face to face engagement and tourism specific activities;
- (ii) That the direction of travel of the Marketing and Communications Strategy, be supported acknowledging that where possible the team have delivered communications activities and that this is continuously being monitored as the pandemic guidelines and potential winter impacts evolve.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Communications, Marketing and Engagement function sits within the Strategy, Performance and Governance Directorate and includes the centralisation of our digital tourism approach.
- 3.2 Due to the Covid Pandemic, the focus of the team was diverted to support our community Coronavirus response. We worked closely with the Community Theme Lead and the Maldon and District Community Voluntary Service (CVS), producing a weekly support pack as well as supporting the NHS / Government guidelines via our social media channels and our website.
- 3.3 In addition to this, the team has also managed to support and undertake a number of other initiatives going above and beyond when required.
- 3.4 There are a number of corporate projects in progress, and the team actively lead the communications workstreams for these, identifying key milestones, messages, supporting consultations and engagement activities.

4. DIGITAL / TOURISM

- 4.1 Following the closure of our Tourist Information Centres, the development of our Digital / Tourism offer focused on supporting our Tourism businesses as well as developing the Council's online presence in general.
- 4.2 Whilst we had made a good start on some external campaigns, much of our planned activity had to be put on hold due to the Coronavirus pandemic, as the attention of the team had to focus on the Council's internal and external response to Coronavirus.
- 4.3 Our Tourism campaigns were quickly changed to develop a focus on a 'Stay Away' message with a video produced to promote this message, and this was highlighted as an exemplar in the East of England of how to effectively communicate this message.
- 4.4 Despite the Coronavirus pandemic, during the spring / summer of 2021, a new website platform was developed for Visit Maldon District. This replaced the existing content with the additional options to enable access for businesses and organisations to manage and update their own content, including photos. This site has much more functionality enabling the ability to upload video and provides a booking facility. This functionality gives us a firm footing to compete with the wider tourism market. The website has been praised by the host company (Simple View) and is used in demonstrations as a good example when pitching to prospective clients.
- 4.5 The team's ambition is to actively promote the website directly to businesses and the tourism sector to encourage take up of listings (free of charge) to ensure the website is the trusted place to go for local information.
- 4.6 Partnership opportunities have been initiated such as with Ordnance Survey who are able to share the web information to their various online apps, again ensuring our District information is relevant and up to date. Visit Essex also share the same web host, so events listings will be shared with further opportunities in the future.
- 4.7 Another clever feature of the website is the 'near' feature enabling any attraction or open space to cross promote 'what is nearby', including events. This enables us to increase cross promotion and show the connectivity across the District.
- 4.8 A suite of 30 walks in leaflet format are currently being updated and rebranded (21 complete so far) – with the intention of linking through to the Ordnance Survey mapping app and where relevant, Go Jauntly which is another popular walking app. Each walk has a listing which includes a downloadable PDF to be printed at home for those wishing to have a paper copy of the route and map.
- 4.9 In terms of Culture and Heritage activity, Lottery funding provided in Dec 2020 enabled numerous tourism attractions to become more sustainable and to diversify post COVID. A number of promotional activities were conducted at the start of the year and as the relaxations were introduced – including a video of various venues welcoming visitors back, in a safe way. A free and adaptable booking app was developed to enable organisations to take online bookings in an easy and cost-effective manner – no matter the size of organisation.
- 4.10 The last few elements of the Heritage and Culture project will be delivered in the coming months, including collaborative social media workshops with the Communications and Marketing team in partnership with representatives from the tourism sector. Also, a training plan is being developed to help enable and empower

our enthusiastic volunteers to promote the District, with a focus on accessibility and inclusion at the forefront of excellent customer service.

- 4.11 The team have worked on Essex County Council's, 'Path to Prosperity' Coastal Communities project, which comes to an end in October 2021. The team have developed promotional materials and participated in Essex wide initiatives, which have led us to build good working relationships in particular with Rochford and Chelmsford Councils. This has led to joint work underway to promote the River Crouch – 'Crouch Aware' initiative. Our in-house expertise has been used to cross promote river safety, picking up of litter and coastal protection including 'bird aware' as well as general marketing of the area. This work will continue after the project concludes via the River Crouch Coastal Communities Team, as a shared resource.
- 4.12 Interpretation panels are also underway to help deliver on the Central Area Master Plan project from Hythe Quay to Fullbridge and will include the history and the points of interest to this working part of the river.
- 4.13 The team played a strategic role in the Covid-19 high street recovery plans and supporting communications to our local businesses, including the visual prompts and public health advice notifications. The team procured and designed many of the responsive communications across the District.
- 4.14 Future Tourism campaigns to support our visitor economy as we emerge from the pandemic will include:
- Promotion of the Maldon District visitor website to the Tourism and Business sectors to increase free self-promotion;
 - Currently identifying promotional activities that fall under the Welcome Back fund criteria;
 - Develop walking and cycling opportunities across the District - Green travel;
 - Campaigns developed by a wider 'District Tourism Team', a partnership of the local tourism industry;
 - Develop a joined-up events calendar with promotional offers throughout the winter months such as discounted accommodation, breakfast deals;
 - Accessible Maldon District – promotion of the District for those who may need mobility aids, or may have additional considerations with an aim of encouraging inclusion;
 - We are undertaking volunteer training in the District to help improve customer service and awareness of accessibility issues;
 - Develop initiatives to improve the lower high street, Maldon;
 - Crouch Aware – awareness campaigns in partnership with Rochford and Chelmsford Councils;
 - Social media training will be delivered to attractions and businesses to improve their visibility online and help them to work together on joint campaigns and promote their businesses.

5. SOCIAL MEDIA

- 5.1 Despite the challenges faced with Coronavirus, we have managed to raise our profile on our social media channels and to promote our online digital services. We have seen a marked increase in our social media.

- 5.2 **APPENDIX 2** highlights the statistical analysis of our social media channels.
- 5.3 In the first full quarter of 2020, our presence on social media developed greatly, particularly our Promenade Park / Tourism page in line with the new digital tourism approach.
- 5.4 A consequence of Covid-19 has meant that the uptake of digital services has become the norm with our website currently ranked as 47 out of 435 on the local authority index and our social media engagement increasing massively mainly due to our work on Covid-19 Communications.
- 5.5 We have introduced a new Maldon District Council Instagram account which went live at the end of September 2021, enabling us to engage with our residents aged 25-34. (In the UK, this age group accounts for 30.1% Instagram users).
- 5.6 In general, we have observed a significant increase in the impact that our corporate communications have had throughout the pandemic period. We attribute this in large part to the public desire to stay informed and have access to assistance and local authority services while the Council's operations shifted to a digital only approach to comply with COVID-19 Government Guidance.
- 5.7 We saw a slower but expected, smaller growth and impact in our tourism communications due to the restrictions of movement during the pandemic and public requirement to limit social interactions for much of 2020.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 We have provided more support through online engagement to the community due to the restrictions placed on us by Covid.
- 6.2 During 2021, we will be developing an exciting and robust approach to community engagement with the aim of supporting strong, active and inclusive communities, who feel informed and involved in decision-making.
- 6.3 This strategic approach will enable us to engage with a wide cross-section of the community on a number of our key priorities and projects.
- 6.4 We will be undertaking our annual residents and business survey in November 2021 with a 'You Said, We Did' feedback available on the website when the survey is launched.

7. FILMING

- 7.1 The popularity of the District as a venue for TV and Film Makers continues to grow, with the team supporting a number of productions including Series 2 of Liar, Location, Location, Location and Sky / HBO with The Third Day filmed on Osea Island. We have also assisted with several smaller TV productions and adverts.
- 7.2 We have developed a 'Screen Tourism' area on our website and have collated the productions we have assisted, and these can be seen on [Visit Maldon District Website](#).
- 7.3 In September 2020, we became an official Creative England partner and we continue to work closely with them in promoting filming locations.

- 7.4 In June 2021, Creative England featured our Local Authority as a case study following the National Creative England Summit due to our well-known and proactive film friendly approach.
- 7.5 During March 2020, the team assisted a large-scale production filmed in and around the District. This was for a six-part series based on the book, the Essex Serpent, due to be broadcast in 2022.
- 7.6 A recent enquiry in August 2021, could see us working with a major American production company who are currently looking at locations in the District.

8. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

8.1 The introduction of the 'One Team' brand has been instrumental in bringing the staff together and has emanated in the weekly 'One Team' bulletin which is sent to all staff and Members. The clear message that we are all One Team has triggered a high level of engagement from our staff.



8.2 The One Team bulletin has been vital during coronavirus and the periods of lockdown which saw staff working remotely. Health and wellbeing information, coronavirus updates and advice for working at home have all been regularly communicated ensuring that staff welfare and productivity were supported.

8.3 The bulletin is used as a key tool to communicate management information and updates such as introducing new members of staff, starters and leavers, job vacancies and latest news allowing all staff to access that information in a timely way. It is also a key channel to communicate staff surveys and to gather feedback on topics such as remote working.

8.4 Data is regularly collected on how many people read One Team, and this remains high. It is shared with 212 members of staff and 31 Members. Data for the first quarter of 2021 is provided below.

One Team Views 1 April – 30 June 2021	
Highest Unique Page Views	285 (8 April 2021 edition)
Lowest Unique Page Views	152 (29 June 2021 edition) *
Average Unique Page Views in the Quarter	211
*Increased to 241 in the following quarter	

8.5 Video has also been used as a key communication tool to connect and communicate with staff. Eighteen staff update videos have been circulated between March 2020 and September 2021. These featured either CLT or members of ELT and averaged 125 views per video.

8.6 The Communications, Marketing and Engagement Team have played a key role in the roll out of our new core values. The team have communicated the importance of the values and encouraged team discussions on the values across MDC on a bi-monthly basis. The results of those have been collated and provided to CLT, HR Specialists and One Team Champions. Work is currently underway to progress any improvements suggested in the feedback.

8.7 Awareness Days Calendar

8.7.1 The team has developed a calendar of awareness days and weeks that will be supported across the year, so that they can be properly planned for and activity

coordinated. The days/weeks selected align with our corporate priorities or have a particularly high national profile.

- 8.7.2 Between January and September 2021, 19 awareness activities have been supported by the Council.

27 January	Holocaust Memorial Day
4 February	Time to Talk Day
8 –14 February	Apprenticeship Week
19 March	Comic Relief
31 March	International Trans Day of Visibility
April	Stress Awareness Month
29 April	On Your Feet Britain
30 April	Commemorating Captain Tom
10–16 May	Mental Health Awareness Week
12/13 May	Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan)
17–23 May	Dementia Awareness Week
22-31 May	English Tourism Week
June	Pride Month
14–20 June	Men’s Health Week
17 June	Clean Air Day
21–27 June	Armed Forces Week
5 July	NHS, Social Care and Key Workers Day
9 September	Emergency Services Day
10 September	World Suicide Prevention Day

9. CAMPAIGNS

- 9.1 Since the lockdown ended, we have started to support both national and local campaigns and awareness days that align to our Corporate Plan as well as activities in our Thematic Strategies.
- 9.2 Throughout the pandemic period, we have supported national campaigns on a range of topics from COVID-19 safety advice to local elections, regional activities such as the Click it Local and #StaySafeEssex schemes operating in Essex, and local initiatives within the Maldon District including the Keep it Local in conjunction with the Maldon District Sense of Place Board.
- 9.3 Additional communications activities were identified, where possible and in line with Government Guidelines. This included the promotion of local shopping at Christmas, and a safe return to traditional tourism activities during the relaxation of Government Restrictions over the first half of 2021.
- 9.4 Since summer 2021, we have been regularly promoting local tourism venues, activities, events, and experiences including the Maldon Splash Park and Beach Huts.
- 9.5 We have also supported the Heritage Open Days and English Tourism Week national campaigns and will continue to support applicable tourism related campaigns throughout the remainder of the year.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Despite the challenges we have faced since this strategy was approved, we have successfully adapted and changed to the needs of the service. We will continue to update and reflect new insights, decisions, opportunities and challenges.
- 10.2 Our core focus will continue to underpin the work of the Thematic strategies, Commercial strategy, the Council's Corporate Plan and the emerging 'Our Home, Our Future' Climate Action Strategy and the review of the Local Development Plan.
- 10.3 Our communications, marketing and engagement will continue to be outcome led and drive channel shift when appropriate, continuing to embed our digital approach with partners and customers.

11. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 11.1 This strategic approach to Marketing and Communications supports the work detailed in our overarching Corporate Plan and our thematic strategies.

12. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – It is important to ensure that our internal and external stakeholders have the right perception of the Council and that we communicate in one voice, as one organisation and at the right time.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – We are delivering accessibility and equality training to visitor attraction volunteers. Our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion will be part of the emerging community engagement approach.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – The Communications and Marketing Strategy will help the Council reduce the risk by communicating in an effective and timely manner.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – We utilise our existing budget wisely and will seek opportunities for external funding and income generation when possible
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – This strategy is delivered by our existing Communications, Marketing and Engagement Team.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – There will be positive outcomes for the environment though the messaging we deliver as part of the Council's strategies.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – This strategy will help to strengthen communities by communicating, celebrating, educating with our community.

Background Papers: None.

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