

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTATION

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The attached communications strategy and action plan outlines the future direction and design of the council's communication team. It is supported by the associated team plan, media protocol, and an out of hours media cover rota. The draft media protocol outlines the proposed process to be followed by all council employees in relation to dealing with the media and is designed to provide guidance and clarity to council employees and to help protect the council's reputation. It must be noted that the Council's social media strategy is extremely relevant to the communications strategy and associated documentation and it is imperative that the communications and web teams work together to ensure that the council's approach to social media is clear, robust and fit for purpose.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to

- 2.1 Agree the communications strategy/action plan (Appendix 1), and media protocol (Appendix 3);
- 2.2 Note the team structure and team plan (Appendix 2)
- 2.3 Agree that members of the communications team participating in the out of hours rota qualify for inclusion in the standby payments system operated by other services.
- 2.4 Agree to introduce a business case application process for the setting up of social media accounts to be managed between council services and overseen by the communications team.

3.0 DETAIL

3.1 Communications strategy and action plan

The communications strategy and action plan sets the future direction of the council's communications service in light of the changing face of local government, the on-going developing communications channels and the current challenges faced by Argyll and Bute Council. It is supported by the

communications action plan, which provides the tactics required to put the strategy into action.

3.2 Communications team structure and team plan

The communications team structure reflects the recent changes to the communications team following recent recruitment activity and the team plan incorporates elements of the communications action plan specific to the communications team, combined with the required team and service development actions.

3.3 Media protocol

The media protocol outlines how the council deals with the media and clarifies the role of the communications team, council services and Elected Members when dealing with the media on the council's behalf. It is essential that a consistent approach is taken and therefore a formal protocol is required in order to ensure consistency, fairness and protection of the council and its employees.

3.4 Out of hours media cover

3.4.1 The council needs to ensure that media cover is provided consistently and continuously in case of emergency incidents in order to ensure that suitably trained employees are available to deal with the media. The out of hours media cover rota provides a four weekly programme of cover to be shared between the communications manager and the three communications officers. In order for the system to function effectively, the team requires a laptop with VPN access and access to a SMART phone so that tasks can be completed on the move. It is recommended that the out of hours rota is discussed with HR and an appropriate allowance agreed for participating employees in line with arrangements currently in place for other Council Services.

3.4.2 The objective in the medium to long term is to move towards establishing a Communications Team that provides a 7 day service.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The communications strategy should not be viewed and considered in isolation but along with other relevant documentation as attached to this report. In addition, an effective social media policy is extremely relevant to the smooth delivery of the communications service. The relevance of social media in modern society and community life should be considered in the way the council communicates with its customers, responds to feedback and engages with stakeholders. The reach of such channels should also be seriously considered in comparison with traditional media channels when the council assesses its approach to media accreditation.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy – the media protocol links to the employee code of conduct

- 5.2 Financial – centralisation of budgets and introduction of out of hours allowance
- 5.3 Legal – NA
- 5.4 HR – terms and conditions of out of hours media cover participants to be considered
- 5.5 Equalities – NA
- 5.6 Risk – NA
- 5.7 Customer – the strategy and associated documents are intended to produce a Communications Team that is more responsive to the needs of our customers

6.0 APPENDICES

- Appendix one – communications strategy and action plan
- Appendix two – communications team structure and team plan
- Appendix three – media protocol

Douglas Hendry
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