

Part A

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** Monday, 4 September 2023

**Report author:** Communications and Engagement Lead

**Title:** Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 We are a council that embraces innovation, seizes opportunities and harnesses our collective energy to achieve more for Watford, our residents and our community. Our Council Plan 2022-26 sets out how, together, we will achieve our vision and ambitions for the town and council.
- 1.2 Our new Communications and Conversations Strategy has been developed to align our voice to our Council Plan, amplifying our messages and enhancing the profile of the council, our services and all that we do to make Watford so special. Like our Council Plan it is outward facing and focused, with a separate internal communications strategy to be developed, building on the work already championed by the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 The Strategy also aligns with other key council strategies and policies, including the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy and will support these as well as areas such as the council's Environmental Strategy, Transforming Travel in Watford, the Town Hall Quarter programme and Rediscovering the River Colne.
- 1.4 Through the strategy and associated delivery plan (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), we are seeking to move our communications and conversations with our community to the next level, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement, innovation and new opportunities.

## 2.0 Risks

### 2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Failure to align the council's outcomes to our communications and conversations	Local residents and community are not kept informed about the council, limiting understanding of council services and opportunities to participate and engage	A strategy that is linked to the Council Plan and the council's ambitions	Treat	3x 2 = 6
A strategy that doesn't support continuous improvement or improvements	Failure to deliver a 'step change' and greater alignment	A clear, SMART Delivery Plan	Treat	3x 2 = 6

## 3.0 Recommendations

Cabinet to

- 3.1 Approve the draft Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and associated Delivery Plan set out in Appendices 1 and 2.
- 3.2 Delegate to the Elected Mayor, as Portfolio Holder, to approve any final amendments / updates before publication in consultation with the Director of Performance and Communications and Engagement Lead.
- 3.3 Note the Strategy and Delivery Plan will be monitored in line with the council's approach to performance management and with regular reports to the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet on progress.

### Further information:

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**4.0 Detailed proposal**

- 4.1 The Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan 2022-24 sets out an ambitious programme for both the town and the council. The plan is focused on seizing opportunities for Watford and ensuring we harness our resources to focus on what is important to the town and our residents. It is designed to be strategic, high level and outward facing, with an emphasis on outcome focused commitments. It describes to the workforce, our community and our partners how we see the council and the town progressing by resetting our strategic themes, commitments and areas of activity.
- 4.2 The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 set out in appendix 1 has been developed to align our voice to the Council Plan, amplifying our messages and enhancing the profile of the council, our services and all that we do to support the town, our residents and make Watford so special. It sets out how we will demonstrate the council's commitment to keep local people informed and engaged, looking to do this in a way that is meaningful through building two-way conversations.
- 4.3 Like the Council Plan, the Communications and Conversations Strategy and Delivery Plan are outward facing. A separate internal communications strategy for staff is to be developed, which will complement the Communications and Conversations Strategy, recognising it is a shared responsibility, and everyone has a part to play in supporting and delivering good communications for the council.
- 4.4 As communications underpins all the council's services and activities, the strategy also aligns with other key council strategies and policies, including the emerging Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy and will also support key Council Plan strategies such as the council's Environmental Strategy, Transforming Travel in Watford and major initiatives including the Town Hall Quarter programme and Rediscovering the River Colne.
- 4.5 **The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 – Overview**
- 4.6 The council has built a strong communications platform on which to develop the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 with high levels of engagement through social media and good reach across the Watford community and beyond. Through the strategy, we have the ambition to take our communications to the next level, learning from others and seek innovation where

it helps deliver our aims and commitments.

- 4.7 Within the strategy, we present four strategic communications themes We will support the delivery of the Council Plan and raise how we deliver communications and conversations by:

**Theme 1** – Promoting what is important to our town and community, as a trusted leader of Watford, through a shared and coordinated programme of activity

**Theme 2** - Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences

**Theme 3** – Amplifying our voice to highlight our achievements and successes within Watford and beyond

**Theme 4** – Building resilience so we can pivot effectively to respond to new opportunities

#### 4.8 **Planning and resource**

- 4.9 We recognise that we need to use our communications resources to achieve maximum impact and outcomes. Through the strategy, we have identified a corporate approach to pivot our planning and resource using the **Champion, Core** and **Classic** model, which allows us to tier our activities and focus our communications activity.

##### **Champion**

High impact with big audience. Ambitious multi-faceted project. Council Plan priority. Long term.

##### **Core**

Low impact with big audience or high impact with limited audience. Contained project or initiative. Medium term

##### **Classic**

Standard service information sharing and updates. Low impact with more limited audience. Short term

#### 4.10 **Delivering the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 – Delivery Plan**

- 4.11 The Delivery Plan at appendix 2 sets out in greater detail how the council will focus on activities that will bring the strategy to life. Whilst the Delivery Plan will be

monitored, there will be the opportunity to flex to continue to align with the Council Plan and the council's priority areas of focus and activity.

## 5.0 **Implications**

### 5.1 **Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and associated Delivery Plan will be delivered within existing budgets.

### 5.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Communications and Conversations Strategy has been developed within the legal context governing local authority communications. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. Communications activity must adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, which provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. This code is statutory guidance and, therefore, councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

5.2.2 The principles of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 means that that all communications activity is:

- o lawful
- o cost effective
- o objective
- o even-handed
- o appropriate
- o aware of equality and diversity
- o issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as before elections

### 5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 An overall equality impact analysis has been undertaken on the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 (Appendix 3).

5.3.2 The equality impact analysis takes into account that under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the Council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
- foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

5.3.3 The EIA will be reviewed and updated during the life of the strategy.

5.3.4 Having had regard to the Council’s obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

#### 5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 sets out how the organisation will inform and engage with the Watford and wider community. A separate internal communications strategy will be developed to complement this outward focused strategy.

#### 5.5 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.5.1 Informing, reassuring and communicating on matters relating to community safety will be part of the council’s partnership work with the police and other community safety partners.

#### 5.6 **Sustainability**

5.6.1 Promoting the council’s commitment to sustainability through the Environmental Strategy - Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency 2023-30, will be a core component of our communications and conversations planning and activity.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1            Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 (Draft)

Appendix 2            Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-26 (Draft)

Appendix 3            Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 Equality Impact Analysis

## **Background papers**

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

- Watford Borough Council – Council Plan 2022-26
- Watford Borough Council – Delivery Plan 2022-24