

BRIEFING NOTE		
Report title	Communications & Mayor's office update	
Key decision	No	Item No. 4
Contributor	Director of Strategy & Communications	
Class	Open	24 September 2019

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This briefing note provides an update on the changes to the structure of - and the costs associated with - the Mayor's office over the past two years and a strategic view of the proposed changes to the Council's communications functions.

2. Communications

Background

- 2.1. The purpose of the communications team is to inform, engage and influence a range of external and internal audiences in support of the council's vision, key priorities and policies as set out in the Corporate Strategy.
- 2.2. The team responds to thousands of website updates, 400 media enquiries, 80 news release and produces 50 e-newsletter and four editions of Lewisham Life each year.
- 2.3. The service manages a number of the council's key communication channels including Lewisham Life - currently published four times a year - the corporate website www.lewisham.gov.uk, the Intranet, a range of email updates, social media accounts and digital channels.
- 2.4. The team also manages the council's reputation and provides a media relations service 365-days per year.
- 2.5. Since 2010 the Council has agreed a number of savings to the communications budget amounting to £816,000 in total. This represents a reduction in budget for communications of more than 50%.
- 2.6. A succession of team restructures have significantly reduced the size of the communications team, reduced senior management in the team and downgraded roles. The most recent restructure of the unit, in 2015, left a team of twelve staff, significantly smaller than a number of comparable inner London boroughs.
- 2.7. The team is supplemented from time to time with staff funded by other service or corporate budgets to support specific, time limited projects such as the landlord licensing consultation, emissions based parking consultation, the local democracy review and preparing for Brexit. At the time of writing there are an additional 4.8 full

time equivalent (FTE) staff.

- 2.8. Stakeholders report that the team is not able to meet demand or quality expectations and is not agile enough to respond to the challenges of communications in the digital age. In February 2019 Council agreed additional funding of £200k for communications to assist the service to improve and take communications to the next level.

Approach

- 2.9. Since February the priority has been to put a strong leadership team in place, specifically by filling the key vacancies of the Senior Communications Manager and Marketing Manager.
- 2.10. The team has been taking on board the feedback and priorities of the Mayor, councillors and senior officers and also the recommendations of the Local Democracy Review.
- 2.11. There have been some successes including some excellent national and regional media coverage, key consultation campaigns delivering thousands of responses, improved promotion of select committee calls for evidence and a more focused approach to social media postings. However, further sustained improvement is required.
- 2.12. To this end a new communications strategy is in development to set a clear direction for the Council's communications service. It will set out to sustain and accelerate improvement in the service and support key council's priorities, such as delivering new council homes, improving air quality, tackling the climate emergency and becoming a borough of sanctuary.
- 2.13. Key emerging themes for the strategy are
- making the best use of resources with a campaigns-based marketing system,
 - maximising the effectiveness of our digital channels and establishing a stronger social media presence
 - developing meaningful engagement between the Council and its diverse communities
- 2.14. Critically, the communications team must restructure in order to have highly skilled staff in appropriate jobs to fulfil the demands of a 21st digitally-savvy audience.
- 2.15. However, the increased budget is still significantly lower than in 2010 and the team will remain significantly smaller than many other boroughs. The additional resource will need to be targeted towards the highest priority areas and to significantly improve the quality of communications strategic decisions will be required to set campaign priorities, for instance focusing on fewer, higher quality campaigns.

- 2.16. The restructure is expected to be fully implemented before the end of the financial year and there will be an ongoing focus on service improvement.

3. Mayor's Office

- 3.1. The Council employs a small team of officers in the Mayor & Cabinet Office to provide organisational and executive support to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Members and Councillors to enable them to fulfil their leadership roles within the Council, across the community, and regionally and nationally in organisations like the LGA and London Councils.
- 3.2. Shortly after the local election in May 2018, two additional Cabinet executive officer posts were added to the Mayor & Cabinet Office to meet the needs of the incoming administration. This has increased costs by circa £100k pa.
- 3.3. This change reflect the fact that the team's responsibilities have changed and workload has increased significantly as the Mayor and Cabinet take an increasingly active role in decision-making.
- 3.4. At the Council AGM in May 2018, the Mayor set out in his Scheme of Delegation that, though by law he may take decisions alone should he wish to do so, his intention that generally Mayoral decisions which are reserved to members should be taken by the Mayor and Cabinet acting collectively. Council agreed to new Executive Procedure Rules in accordance with this decision. The Mayor also set new expectations that Cabinet Members should devote two days per week to their executive duties. The Mayor & Cabinet Office team ensure that all 11 Cabinet Members are fully briefed before they are asked to make decisions.
- 3.5. The new administration set new expectations that the Council would strive to be open and transparent in the decisions it makes. The Mayor & Cabinet Office team support councillors to ensure that decisions are well-communicated and understood by residents.
- 3.6. The incoming Mayor made commitments that the new administration would lead a "campaigning council". The Mayor & Cabinet Office team help to ensure that Lewisham's voice is heard by residents and decision-makers as the Council campaigns on a variety of issues including Brexit, refugees, clean air and social housing.
- 3.7. The adoption of a new Corporate Strategy, and a new Council-wide focus on delivering the commitments made in the Corporate Strategy has added new responsibilities to the Mayor & Cabinet Office, who have designated responsibility to fulfil commitments around campaigning and influencing regional and national government.
- 3.8. A new generation of councillors has created more expectations that social media is a key tool to communicate with residents. The Mayor & Cabinet Office team support this work, ensuring the councillors are visible to residents, accountable for decisions they make and respond to resident queries efficiently and effectively.

3.9. The Mayor has a significant community engagement programme, to ensure he is visible to residents in Lewisham. A key part of this activity is the introduction of Mayor's Question Time events where residents can ask questions directly to the Mayor and councillors. The Mayor & Cabinet Office team support this work by organising public engagement events.