
THE COUNCIL'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is an update on Social Media and the Council's Communications Process, following the Review Committee meeting on 9 January 2018.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Review Committee discussed the Council's communications and social media usage at a meeting held on 9 January before requesting a further report to cover questions raised. This report addresses the items requested for inclusion by Members, detailing the progress made in the Council's social media usage.

3 KEY DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA

- 3.1 The local resident who had requested the review of the Council's use of social media was invited to meet the Council's Senior Communications Officer to discuss the response in the report and whether he thought there were opportunities for improvement; however, the resident did not take the Council up on this offer.
- 3.2 The Council has now purchased Musterpoint, a social media dashboard, which will enable it to provide a much better service to residents. It is designed to improve communication in that the authority will be able to monitor, respond to, publish and archive social media content in an efficient manner.
- 3.3 This platform will give the Council the necessary tools to extend social media communication to more officers within the authority. It has a facility to assign tasks to different members of staff so that enquiries can be answered promptly and accurately, with an audit trail. The next stage will be for relevant staff to receive training to use the platform to best effect.
- 3.4 The 'Musterpoint' system offers various analytics, including the option to 'tag' messages, which enables the user to evaluate the volume of enquiries on a topic.
- 3.5 The Council considers accessibility issues with all communications and is using a feature on Twitter that enables 'image description' for visually impaired users.
- 3.6 The Council is in the process of drafting a social media policy that governs the use of social media by the Council's employees specifically, with input from Communications and Human Resources.

- 3.7 The Communications team keeps abreast of developments and trends within social media to engage effectively with various audiences. This has led to an increase in the use of video, images, Facebook Live and GIFs where appropriate, to 'spark' engagement. The Council is also seeking to be more interactive with messaging: have a 'human voice' and engage in a dialogue with residents, rather than purely using social media as a medium to broadcast press releases. Examples include issuing messages in the mornings such as 'We are here on Twitter all day, so if you have any questions just tweet us', taking part in conversations, urging people to share their own photographs, for example of Wallasea/Hockley Woods events, using Twitter polls to find out what residents would like to see from the Council on social media, and prompting discussions in the community. In addition, hashtags are used to join in with local and national conversations and increase reach; this is particularly helpful in finding and following tweets about a specific topic or theme and to assess how successful Council campaigns have been.
- 3.8 There is huge potential to engage with Facebook community groups rather than expecting residents to seek out social media pages run by local authorities. In the Rochford District there are currently in the region of 400 groups of varying sizes, which focus on subjects as diverse as buy and sell, lost pets, local history, schools, sports and social, house swap, veganism, Pokemon and even Lego card swaps. These have huge potential to communicate directly with residents in spaces where they are already having conversations, and many will actively engage with the Council and share its content. Community groups are an increasingly popular medium for organisations wishing to engage with different sectors of the public, with Facebook currently trialling the ability for a page to join a group. A communications organisation has recently used Braintree Council as a testing ground to examine the use of Facebook community groups. They found that the most popular topic was 'events' (at 30 per cent) followed by 'for sale' (at 17 per cent.) Overall, the statistics showed 15 per cent of content was local-government related.
- 3.9 The Communications Team will also be trialling the re-tweeting of the Council's most popular tweets, following research that suggests that this can boost reach and engagement. The theory is that the existing likes and retweets act as 'social proof', which makes people want to engage with the message.
- 3.10 The Council now has 9,170 unique subscribers to its 'TellMeMore' digital communications platform, which enables residents to be emailed specifically in relation to subjects that interest them.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It is essential for the Council to take a careful and measured approach to the use of social media as there is potential for reputational, information, regulatory and third party risk associated with the publication of information.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The cost of procuring the Musterpoint software is £1,800 p.a. and will be met from existing IT budgets. The relevant work will be carried out within existing staff resources.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The “TellMeMore” communications platform is GDPR compliant. There are no other legal implications arising out of this report.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the contents of the report.



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Background Papers:-

None.

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