

Marketing & Communications Service

SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22

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1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service

Working strategically, as well as across departments and services, the service develops and delivers effective external and internal marketing and communications activity which supports the Council's vision, values and strategic direction.

1.2 Responsibilities

The Marketing and Communications service is responsible for:

- The development, coordination and delivery of external marketing and communications activity, working with different council services and functions to contribute to the achievement of their objectives through positioning, messaging and planned, targeted promotional activity across a range of platforms.
- The development of systems and activities to support effective internal communications, in conjunction with the Organisational Development Department.
- The management of proactive and reactive media relations, including acting as the first point of contact for all media enquiries, advising on appropriate responses, identifying potential issues and monitoring impact.
- The provision of an internal graphic design service which ensures the Council's branding is properly applied.
- The development and content management of digital platforms (web and social media).
- The provision of communications support to elected members, specifically the Chair, Deputy Chair and Committee Chairs.

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders

- Elected Members
- SMT & Heads of Service
- Council staff
- Mid Ulster District Residents
- Media
- Local community groups, traders groups, businesses and visitors.

1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The following table provides a progress summary and the impact made by last year's Service Plan (2020-2021). It also details key successes, a summary of the end of year progress, remaining challenges for the Service and how it made a difference.

2020/21 Performance Overview: Summary

A Year Of Communicating Through COVID

From the beginning of the 2020-21 year through to the early summer of 2020, the marketing and communications service's focus was almost exclusively on managing communications associated with the Coronavirus pandemic, whether relating to its role as a direct service provider or the organisation's position as a civic leader.

Demand on the service was consistently high, with time-pressured response times presenting a challenge in the early crisis weeks and months of the pandemic.

However, when the immediate crisis had passed, the service was able to move to more planned and proactive communications, shining a spotlight on both the essential work being undertaken by the Council and the innovation being demonstrated by the organisation, particularly from those services which were closed.

Leisure's virtual swimming academy and fitness videos, the online programme of performances and educational/creative activities from Culture and Arts, as well as the webinars, online forums and business resilience from Business and Communities were all among the work promoted in the media and via social media during this stage of the pandemic.

Essential services were also showcased, beginning with bin collection crews and the many thank you notes and pictures they received, to encompass all those employees, visible and behind the scenes, who continued to deliver during the lockdown.

Stability also allowed the Council's community support measures, from emergency funding to the distribution of food boxes, to be increasingly profiled.

At the same time, the service continued to identify other appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the Council's civic leadership role, from the Chair's support and endorsement of specific issues to positioning the issues of strategic importance, from the broad impact of the pandemic on the Mid Ulster economy to the specific financial issues faced by the Council.

Recovery from the early summer through to early Autumn saw an omni-channel 'reconnect' campaign developed and delivered, focusing on reconnecting people

and places by telling local stories using local voices both internally and across key sectors externally (notably, retail and tourism).

However, the recovery period was short-lived and by October 2020, the service's focus shifted from support for re-opening to once again managing COVID-19 communications and the impact of further restrictions.

The service has had a strong role in promoting public health messages since the beginning of the pandemic, as well as communicating the impact of the pandemic on the Council's services. From October 2020, there was an increasing shift towards the promotion of a 'culture of compliance' and closer cooperation and sharing of approaches between the local government sector and central government.

One distinct area of work serves to illustrate the positive impact, when a bespoke 'culture of compliance' video campaign on social media with the hashtags #BackToBasics #BackToBusiness was created by the service, using Mid Ulster statistics on infection rates where possible and using authentic Mid Ulster voices.

The 2-week campaign directly reached 83,521 people (representing approximately 57% of the local population) and engaged 12,730 unique users of Facebook. The participation of a local GP, Dr Grainne Shaw, was particularly effective, accounting for almost 30% of the campaign reach. Dr Shaw was viewed as a trusted messenger and qualitative feedback from the practice also indicated that the positive reaction to the post on social media gave practice staff a real boost at an especially difficult time.

Internal Communications

A concentration of effort on enhancing internal communications also took place during the year, as this area of work became even more critical - and just as important as externally-focused communication - in the period under review.

The personalisation approach which had been adopted in the previous year remained to the fore, as did celebrating success, even if viewed and presented through a Covid-19 lens.

Indeed, for the first time, marking internal achievements was also done externally, with social media channels highlighting continuity of service, not through a faceless organisation but through the people who were out day and daily delivering. Usergenerated content followed on social media and engagement levels reflected the positive impact of this approach to 'humanise' the organisation.

When appropriate, the same approach continued through to the recovery phase, where staff were front and centre, for example, presenting new arrangements for the re-opening of leisure facilities on video via social media. Again, engagement levels soared and other organisations quickly replicated what was appearing on the Mid Ulster channels.

Staff briefs – short and factual information notes – became an integral means of communicating accurate, pertinent news in tight timeframes. 10 such briefs were issued in the first 4 weeks of the pandemic alone, before monthly staff newsletters (In Focus) were re-introduced in May 2020, and they continued to characterise how internal communications were undertaken across the rest of the year.

The service developed and implemented a specific internal campaign 'Our Covid Comeback', where a specific staff newsletter was produced, together with a 'welcome back' presentation with key corporate messages for those returning to their normal locations for work and a bespoke explainer video to ensure those messages were simply and effectively conveyed.

A Monthly News Roundup video was also introduced towards the end of the year, which highlights the Council's good news stories at the end of each month and is emailed to all Councillors and staff, keeping everyone up to date, as well as being posted on the Council's social media channels.

Internal communications with Elected Members was also critical during the pandemic and the fast dissemination of information, both about council services and wider civic issues, was also undertaken via a system of email briefings for councillors.

Digital Platforms

In a fast-moving environment, the Council's digital platforms were of paramount importance for reflecting changes and updates to services and engaging with customers both with speed and accuracy, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic.

However, as the previous section illustrates, the significance of digital platforms and the Council's digital-first approach came into its own as the service continued to support more 'normal' corporate and service priorities, principally via its social media channels.

The Council's Facebook page in particular proved to be a most effective engagement method. The page now has more than 11,000 followers and, as intended, has out-performed and now replaced the legacy town Facebook pages (Visit Cookstown, Visit Magherafelt and Discover Dungannon) which were unpublished in November 2020. Indeed, in November and December 2020, for example, Facebook posts reached over 700,000 people and engaged almost 67.000 users.

However, the channel has also increasingly begun to function as a customer service desk, where the service's staff are coordinating responses and signposting via in-post comments and private messages.

Our website has been a key source of online coronavirus-related content, which has adapted and changed in line with the restriction-recovery-restriction cycle, highlighting the range of support schemes available for people individually impacted by the pandemic and businesses directly affected. Substantial resources were required to fulfil this function.

However, the service also contended with a significant change in accessibility standards from September 2020 and considerable resources were allocated to ensuring that the Council's website was exceeding compliance standards.

The concentration of effort showed a remarkable result. Based on the Sitemorse index (Q4 2020) which compares the performance of Councils across the UK, Mid Ulster's score rose to 8.1/10, resulting in an upward movement of 146 places to be ranked 27th in the UK and 2nd of the 11 councils here.

In addition, the service has continued to lead the development of service-specific digital platforms, including the OM website and 3 social channels, a new tourism website and content for new town-centre based information kiosks.

Facilities Marketing

Undertaken in a very different landscape, facilities marketing continued nevertheless during the year.

- While the initial opening of OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory in April 2020 had to be postponed, significant work ensued to prepare for a new opening date in October 2020, with the facility's opening campaign plan re-booked and partly delivered until restrictions once again meant OM was unable to open. While disappointing, the service has nonetheless continued to research, develop and deliver content on the OM social media channels to ensure that an interest in astronomy and awareness of the facility is maintained in the period until OM opens.
- Leisure services were one of the most affected services throughout the pandemic with closures in the early and later parts of the year which required intensive communications support. A phased plan was developed and hands on support given to roll out a communications plan that maintained customer engagement across periods of closure which has included a work out at home video series recorded by leisure staff, sourcing relevant articles and content, as well as providing reassurance to customers on the organisation's approach to safe re-opening first time round. The service sourced, scripted and produced a series of Covid secure videos that were implemented to encourage return to facilities. The service has also had a key role in training and supporting new leisure social media editors as they come to grips with a new element of their roles and has implemented evaluation as a key monitoring and learning tool that is now embedded within the service.
- Much of the support given to Parks and Outdoor Recreation has focused on the communication of improvements to the estate including profiling upgrades in Knockmany and Moydamlaght Forests. The service has also worked to develop and deliver the initial stages of a campaign to improve public perception of Railway Park. The lockdown has also resulted in an increase in ASB at Council owned outdoor facilities and support work has been carried out to address these issues as sites such as Windmill Wood and Play areas across the district.

Service Communications And Support

Like all activity during 2020-21, work by the service to provide communications' support across departments and services was undertaken within the limitations of the pandemic.

However, while different to the norm, virtual approaches to delivery were successful, notably in the examples below.

Enterprise Week 2020

The delivery of Enterprise Week during a pandemic radically altered both the traditional method of staging the events and the focus of activity. Events moved from face-to-face delivery and interaction in a physical location to a virtual environment and the marketing and communications service delivered a supporting plan.

The plan continued the Council's 'digital first' approach, with a greater emphasis on video, while also using traditional media (press and radio) to support core messaging.

- Social media support for the week via Facebook achieved a reach of 98,795 with engagement of 4,802 and video views of over 22,000. Impressions on Twitter reached more than 47,000 with engagement of just over 1,200.
- The designated www.midulstercouncil.org/enterpriseweek webpage received 1,834 page views and ranked in the top 20 of our webpage views during this time, with business grants and business recovery webpages taking the top spots during this period.
- 11 pieces of editorial were carried in local press, with a Mean Advertising Value Equivalent of £36.5K.

Christmas 2020

Christmas 2020 was always going to look radically different, particularly in relation to Christmas Light Switch On events, which took place in 2020 with no public gatherings in place. This change needed to be communicated to residents, while managing expectations and discouraging any non-organised gathering of people in contravention of the regulations in place.

Particular highlights were the switch-on video which premiered on Facebook and was warmly received by online audiences, the 12 Gifts of Christmas competition which showcased local retail and achieved substantial reach and engagement over a sustained 12-day period in December.

The service also developed the #WeLoveLocal concept to support shop local and shop safe messages, delivering a comprehensive and strategic communications plan for a radically different looking Christmas.

Recycling

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that came as a result, the service continued to support the waste and recycling service. This included the

effective communication, both in the press and across the Council's social media channels, of recycling centre closures, the subsequent re opening and conditions that were in place- including commissioning and promoting a bespoke video to illustrate these conditions on social media to ensure residents felt safe, reassured and comfortable returning to the centres. During the recycling centre closures, various campaigns were run across the Council's social media channels to help residents better cope, and make the adequate changes to help deal, with the closures, including Reduce Your Waste and Grow From Home campaigns.

The service continued to communicate the excellent work of bin collection crews who continued to deliver this key service uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. The service also continued to highlight the Council consistently achieving the highest household recycling rate for every quarter and year-end, praising and thanking residents for being Recycling Heroes even during an incredibly difficult time

In September 2020 the service launched the Together We Recycle campaign which involved commissioning three bespoke videos- a Thank You video where the Chair and staff from Environmental Services, including bin collections crews and staff at recycling centres, thanked residents for their efforts throughout lockdown. The video was brilliantly received by residents with 23,000 views and a reach of 32,554. Bespoke blue and brown bin recycling videos were also recorded which illustrated the items which can be recycled in both bins. The campaign was rolled out in the local press and across the Council's social media channels. The campaign was versatile and adapted to fit various themes, including: Together We Recycle, Together We Recycle at Halloween, Together We Recycle at Christmas, Together We Recycle in the Blue Bin and Together We Recycle in the Brown bin.

In January 2021 the service launched the next strand in the Together We Recycle campaign, the Bin smART recycling competition. The Bin smART campaign ran both in the press and across the Council's social media channels. The aim of the campaign was to get primary school aged children and their parents to take part in the competition by being Bin smART and creating something new in the form of a sculpture from the recyclable waste in their blue bins. The campaign was a roaring success, in part because school closures at the time meant parents were looking for a more creative home-schooling task and because 10 Fire HD tablets could be won.

The original target for the campaign was to receive 50 competition entries and we ended up receiving over 10 times that amount with over 500 entries recorded. We received incredibly positive feedback and interaction on our social media channels.

The 12 campaign posts added to the Council's Facebook page resulted in a total Reach of 101,802- reaching almost 10 times the number of followers of the page (11,099).

The campaign received positive local press coverage both pre and post the competition with a MAVE (Mean Advertising Value Equivalent) of almost £40,000 (£39,530.13)

In March 2021, the service also supported the Big Spring Clean initiative, and the role the Council plays, to encourage local communities to get involved in, or organise, a Big Spring Clean in their areas to help keep our district clean and litterfree. A dedicated social media campaign ran (and continues to run) across the Council's social media channels profiling and thanking all the communities taking part in Big Spring Cleans.

Corporate Communications

Corporate communications remain a key element of service delivery and the first section of this overview 'communicating through Covid' serves to illustrate this role.

Two other issues are worthy of note:

- The service allocated significant resources to creating comprehensive and integrated plans to strategically position and profile the Council's capital investment programme, with the development in particular of an overarching communications plan to support the £5.2M leisure and outdoor recreation projects. This has helped to ensure that the 'big picture' is to the fore and that while, for example, there may be 3 separate projects at Davagh Forest, they are all contributing the creation of a critical mass of tourism product in the Sperrins. Work continued also to support other capital investment schemes, notably the village renewal programme.
- Media relations continued to be an extremely busy element of the service's core work and in 2020-2021 the service responded to 367 media enquiries, on a par with the volume received in the previous 2 years. This aspect of the service is also highly rated by journalists for speed and quality of responses.

2020/21 Performance Overview Of Specific Objectives	End of Year Progress Status: Completed/Commenced/Other
To develop and deliver annual Marketing and Communications post- COVID action plans for key service areas.	Completed where possible during the short recovery period with plans developed and delivered for Leisure, Parks, Economic Development, Tourism and Events.
To support Environmental Services to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill through the development and delivery of recycling campaign for 2020-2021.	Various campaigns, most notably the Together We Recycle and Bin SmART campaigns delivered successfully
To support the opening of the new OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory by revising and re-developing the associated marketing and communications plans.	Completed (despite the official opening once again being postponed at a very late stage, the service has continued to ensure the profile of OM has been

	maintained despite the facility's not being able yet to open).

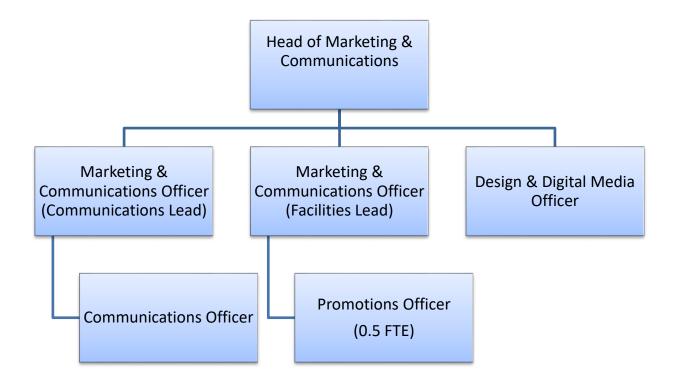
2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

2.1 Budget 2021/22

Service Budget Headings	£
Salaries	234,739
Printing	35,000
Advertising	21,000
Promotional Materials	22,000
Licences	3,200
Fees	5,000
Miscellaneous (postage, mileage, training)	5,949
Gross Budget	326,888
Income	0
Net Budget for 2021-22	326,888

2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



Staffing	No. of Staff
Head of Service	1
Managers	2
Officers	2.5
Remaining Team	0
Total	5.5

2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	To develop and deliver annual Marketing and Communications plans for key service areas.					
Link to Community Plan Theme:	Align to Corporate Plan Theme					
CMP 3.3 Education & Skills - We are more entrepreneurial, innovative & creative	Service Delivery: 2.3 We will enhance our financial performance & strength, identifying opportunities to increase income & reduce deficits, as well as to leverage external funding					
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How will we know? (Measures)		
Planned, timely meetings with relevant service areas: Leisure, Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Capital Projects, Recycling and Economic Development (specifically town centres).	On-going	UM, KK & MMcN	We will have cohesive, integrated marketing and communications recovery plans, including as required those supporting	No of meetings held.		
Marketing and communications plans developed and agreed.	In line with recovery dates	UM, KK & MMcN	pandemic recovery, which are aligned to corporate narratives and which make	No of plans developed and agreed.		
Plans implemented.	Aa per agreed plan timelines.	UM, KK & MMcN	a demonstrable contribution to the achievement of corporate	Adherence to implementation timescales.		
Plan monitoring, evaluation and review.	Plan end implementation dates	UM, KK & MMcN	and other service objectives and priorities.	Evaluation reports completed.		

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?): Link to Community Plan Theme:	To support the opening of the new OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory by re-vising and re-developing the associated marketing and communication plans. Align to Corporate Plan Theme				
CMP 1.1 Economic Growth - We prosper in a stronger & more competitive economy	Economy: 3.6 We will work to deliver tourism investment and employment concentrating on Mid Ulster's three identified tourism strands				
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How will we know? (Measures)	
Revision of existing plans to deliver the official opening of OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory as pandemic restrictions allow.	June 2021	UM	We will have successfully positioned the new facility and associated outdoor	Opening plan drafted, agreed and delivered.	
Development and implementation and delivery of a marketing & communications plan to support OM in year 1 of its operation.	End Dec 2021	UM	recreation and tourism offerings as a flagship visitor attractions in the Sperrins.	Plan developed, implemented and evaluated.	

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How will we Know? (Measures)
The service has now mainstreamed evaluation of activity as part of its overall approach to the delivery of planned, evidence-based marketing and communications. In 2021-22 the service will build on this foundation by introducing a formal evaluation framework which moves beyond measuring outputs to assessing outcomes. This framework will assess performance of campaign work for client services while a dashboard of core corporate metrics will be used to report the effectiveness of the service itself.		KK & KR	The service will have introduced a meaningful evaluative framework based on industry best practice and which demonstrates impact in terms of outcomes.	Evaluation framework, including corporate metrics dashboard, developed and in use.

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How will we know? (Measures)
In 2020-21 the service developed an integrated communications plan which for the first time focused exclusively on positioning the Council's complete	Plan end implementation date.	UM	The Council's ambitious and significant capital investment programme	Plan for 2021-22 developed.
capital investment programme in leisure and outdoor recreation strategically. In 2021-22, the service will build on this strategic profiling and develop an overarching corporate communications plan to support the delivery of the capital programme for the year ahead.			will be strategically positioned and profiled accordingly to build awareness of the level and impact of the programme among internal and external audiences.	Delivery against plan objectives.

Performance Measures: Should include any measures as outlined in work above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate, Performance Improvement Plan, Statutory, Corporate Health Indicators etc.	Is the Measure, Statutory, Corporate, Existing, or New?	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2020/21 Target/Standard
% of workforce satisfied with current job	Corporate	60.95%	65.34%	65.34%	80%
% of workforce who take pride in working for Mid Ulster District Council	Corporate	79.48%	84.07%	84.07%	80%
% of workforce who understand council's priorities and how they contribute to them	Corporate	69.91%	78.13%	78.13%	80%

3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

3.1 EQUALITY DUTY

The council and by consequence our Service is committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

The Service will be mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service.

3.3 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22.

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
MC01	Misuse or inconsistent use of the Council's branding	6	Existing brand guidelines have been reviewed and refreshed. Branding continues to be consistently applied and the service remains vigilant with regard to maintenance of standards.
MC02	Impact on output of small team through members of staff leaving the service or as a result of sickness absence.	6	Monitoring of sickness absence and application of attendance policy continues. Staff team remains stable and there are no anticipated staffing issues.
MC03	Inadequate management and planning of media relations issues.	8	Media relations service continues to be delivered and media monitored. The service continues to work pro-actively with departments on a project by project or issue by issue basis to pre-empt and/or manage potentially difficult media issues.
MC04	Budget pressure leading to reduced communications activity.	4	Monitoring of existing marketing & communications budget is on-going.
MC05	Ineffective internal communications leading to misinformed, demotivated staff.	6	Internal communications have been prioritised in the last year and continue to benefit from enhanced activity.
MC06	Delay or difficulty in converging legacy web and social media sites.	4	Recommendations from a comprehensive social media evaluation continue to be implemented, with 4 further legacy Facebook accounts unpublished.

Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	Extreme Risk (immediate action required)
10 - 15	High Risk (urgent action required)
7 - 9	Moderate Risk (action required)
1-6	Low Risk (keep under review)