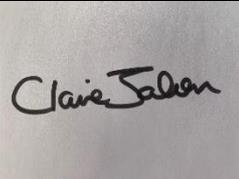
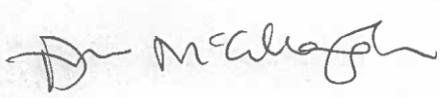


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## Corporate Communications Service Plan

1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022

Head of Service signature	
Date	23/03/2021
Peer Review signature	
Date	02/04/2021
Director signature	
Date	02/04/2021

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## CONTENTS

1.	Introduction .....	3
2.	How does our Service contribute to community planning outcomes and PEOPLE priorities? .....	6
3.	Key activities for 2021/2022 .....	7
4.	Risks .....	13
5.	Resources .....	14
6.	Monitoring and Review .....	14
7.	Conclusions .....	14
8.	Appendices .....	16

## 1. Introduction

Name of Service	Corporate Communications
Included Service Units	Communications and Multi-media
Directorate	Chief Executive's Section
Purpose of Service	<p>The Corporate Communication Service aims to:</p> <p><b><i>'Protect and enhance the Council's reputation by both challenging negative perceptions and promoting Council activities through effective engagement and communication.'</i></b></p> <p>The key functional areas of the Service are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• corporate marketing/communications strategy</li> <li>• brand identity management</li> <li>• PR and media relations</li> <li>• digital marketing including website and social media management</li> <li>• arts and heritage marketing</li> <li>• stakeholder engagement and consultation</li> <li>• employee/internal communication</li> <li>• graphic design and multi-media services</li> <li>• technical event support</li> </ul> <p>The Service comprises nine staff and sits within the Chief Executive's Office.</p> <p>Under the Local Government Act 1972 councils have a statutory duty to share necessary information with stakeholders and under the 2014 Act, with the addition of community planning, to consult and engage in an effective manner.</p>
Key customers/ stakeholders and their needs	<p>Our key customers are other Council Services – who are essentially our clients. The level of support required varies but requests often outstrip available resources and/or channels. In 2021/22 priority customers have been identified as CLT (key corporate initiative); Regeneration; Waste and Recycling; Democratic Services (civic events); and Business/ Community (recovery initiatives).</p> <p>Our key stakeholders include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All employees</li> <li>• Elected Members/politicians</li> <li>• Media/social media influencers</li> <li>• Key comms partners (local and regional)</li> <li>• AND Residents</li> <li>• AND Businesses</li> <li>• AND Arts/Heritage Sector</li> </ul> <p>More detailed analysis is in <b>Appendix 1</b>.</p>
Context, challenges &	<p><b>Context:</b> Corporate Communications was designated a 'critical service' during the COVID-19 pandemic. The volume of work delivered by the communications</p>

## key assumptions

team during the lockdown period, continuing through recovery and in preparation for further waves has been, and continues to be, significant.

The pandemic has increased our reliance on digital communication and increased our audiences on social media channels and websites. The Service must adapt and innovate to grasp the opportunities and overcome the challenges this presents.

The pandemic has significantly increased the amount of partner support activity we deliver. This will have to be carefully managed moving forward as more business-as-usual activity comes on stream, although the Council is very committed to developing both local and regional partnerships.

A full PESTLE analysis is included in **Appendix 2**.

Specific **challenges/areas of focus** include:

1. **Balancing customer demand (internal) against resources.** The breadth of work delivered across the Council is ever increasing. Resources within the communications service have remained the same since 2016. Prioritisation is required – especially with increases in partnership working.
2. **Resourcing an increase in earned media coverage.** With pressure on budgets, there is a requirement for more earned vs paid for media. Earned media requires significant resources for relationship building/creative writing and design. Prioritisation against corporate outcomes is required.
3. **Supporting the digitisation agenda.** Via social media and web development the Service already contributes to the Council's digital presence, however, resident feedback is seeking more online access.
4. **Promoting better communications planning.** Educating all service areas to the benefits of involving communications at the start of projects to enable appropriate resources to be allocated and to better manage reputational risk.
5. **Developing innovative engagement opportunities.** Genuine engagement that will allow key stakeholders to become more involved in shaping how the Council works for the Borough continues to be a priority.
6. **Formalising working relationships between comms and marketing.** A significant challenge is the ongoing tension between a centralised communications function and decentralised marketing functions. There is a need for better integration and more consistent processes.

**Assumptions:** One of the Council's agreed transformation projects is to achieve better integration between communications and marketing. This will require considering new models of working and possible further centralisation. In the development of this plan, it is assumed that service areas with decentralised marketing functions will continue to budget for and plan marketing activity as usual and that any changes to ways of working will be progressed during the 2021/22 year and reflected in 2022/23 service plans.

Not all communications/marketing budgets are centralised. The assumption has to been made that, where appropriate, individual services have made sufficient

	budget provision for Corporate Communications to deliver their proposed campaigns/activities.
<b>Reflection on previous performance – successes and lessons learned</b>	<p>During the pandemic all communications resources were focused on COVID-19 related work/messaging. Business as usual activities were stopped for most of the period from March to July and were impacted further with restrictions introduced in late December 2020.</p> <p>However, the pandemic related work completed (Summary in <b>Appendix 3</b>) very effectively contributed to core communications objectives such as building Council reputation, growing our social media presence and developing effective partnerships. As such successes in delivering on the overall service vision have been significant over the past year despite the challenges of the pandemic.</p> <p>As a result of this dramatic change of focus it has not been possible to progress some planned activities e.g. developing an employee reward and recognition scheme and such activity will be reprioritised in 2021-22.</p> <p>The pandemic has opened up opportunities for the Communications Service in terms of internal engagement (via the new text alert service) and in terms of external engagement (due to the increase in residents using social media as their preferred platform for communicating with the Council). We will also build on these in 2021-22.</p> <p><i>Our most recent formal feedback from residents (2019) demonstrates good progress is being made against our core purpose - to protect and enhance the Council's reputation.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 94% satisfaction with the Council website (<a href="http://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk">ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk</a>)</li> <li>• 76% satisfied with how the Council keeps residents informed about the services and benefits it provides</li> <li>• 74% found it easy to get information on Council services or initiatives</li> <li>• 69% were satisfied with the level of engagement the Council offers</li> <li>• 66% rated the reputation of the Council as either excellent or good</li> </ul> <p><i>The next resident satisfaction survey will be undertaken in May 2021.</i></p> <p>Reviews were undertaken with some internal clients post the delivery of major projects. Feedback was, in the main, very positive in relation to the breadth of support provided, quality of the work – including innovative solutions offered – and the ability of the team to deliver to tight deadlines. A common theme was that the Communications Service acted as a 'critical friend' providing both support and challenge to operational managers.</p> <p>There is a direct correlation between effective working relations with internal teams and satisfaction levels i.e. where the Communications Service is involved from the beginning with a project, we can provide a more comprehensive and effective service.</p> <p><i>It is intended to continue undertaking reviews with internal customers in 2021/22.</i></p>

## 2. How does our Service contribute to community planning outcomes and PEOPLE priorities?

The Corporate Communications Service can be expected to have a direct impact on the following:

Community Planning Outcome	PEOPLE priority
ALL	Excellence: We will work to be a high performing organisation, innovating and partnering to make a sustainable, positive difference for our Borough.

PEOPLE Objective 2020-24	Service Objective 202/22
<p><b>Growing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing our customer service including supporting online/mobile service offering</li> <li>Improving resident engagement</li> </ul> <p><b>Better:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing our policies, practices and systems on our priorities, customer service, agile working and a culture of continued performance improvement</li> <li>Pursuing digital transformation</li> <li>Adopting recognised models such as Customer Service Excellence and Investors in People</li> <li>Adopting a more commercial approach</li> <li>Investing in talent through continued learning and development</li> </ul> <p><b>Together:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing our service models including opportunities for greater use of partnerships across the Council and beyond</li> <li>Planning our services collaboratively each year, aligned to the Corporate Plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Growing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing excellent communications, marketing and multi-media services in support of our PEOPLE priorities and recovery plans</li> <li>Delivering transparent communication and effective engagement with residents (and other key stakeholders) to support our corporate plan.</li> <li>Enhancing our approach to audience development/marketing of cultural offering in AND</li> </ul> <p><b>Better:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing, in consultation with internal stakeholders, a comms prioritisation process that aligns resources with our PEOPLE priorities</li> <li>Exploring opportunities to deliver more direct marketing in support of our PEOPLE priorities</li> <li>Delivering on Our People Plan promises in support of our IIP accreditation</li> <li>Reviewing the Council's approach to advertising to both identify savings internally and commercial opportunities externally</li> </ul> <p><b>Together:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining a healthy team environment including through regular team meetings, service workshops, planning and Pride in Performance conversations</li> <li>Providing opportunities for non-centralised marketing staff to work together and share best practice</li> <li>Actively contributing to regional communications networks including Belfast Region City Deal/Cabinet Office Communications Network</li> </ul>

### 3. Key activities for 2021/2022

<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Corporate Communications</b>			
<b>Community Plan Outcome:</b>	ALL			
<b>Corporate Plan PEOPLE priority(ies):</b>	Excellence: We will work to be a high performing organisation, innovating and partnering to make a sustainable, positive difference for our Borough.			
<b>Council KPI(s):</b>	% Resident satisfaction % Staff reporting ANDBC is a great place to work			
<b>Service Objective:</b>	Protect and enhance the Council's reputation through effective engagement and communication.			
<b>What difference will it make?</b>	More effective use, more understanding and more support for Council services and investments			
<b>Underpinning strategies:</b>	Our People Plan Internal Communication Framework External communications Strategy (in development)			
<b>Business as Usual activities we will deliver in 2021/2022 (actions)</b>		<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>	<b>Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)</b>
• Undertake regular planning meetings with all Council services to ensure communications needs are met/maximised		Ongoing	CCO/MMO	Internal Clients
• Identify opportunities for integrated communication through issue-led rather than service-led campaigns		Ongoing	CCM	Internal Clients
• Work in partnership with key stakeholders to maximise positive PR for key investment projects, namely Queen's Parade and Bangor Waterfront		Ongoing	CCM	External partners
• Maintain a healthy working environment including effective planning, engagement and communication, teamworking, celebrating success etc		Ongoing	CCM	CC Team
• Continue to deliver innovative communications in support of employees working with social distancing restrictions to build engagement, wellbeing and morale.		Ongoing	CCM/CA-I	OD Team
• Support managers to communicate better with their teams by providing relevant training, channels and content		Ongoing	CCM	HOST/SUMs
• Build positive reputation through the effective use of corporate and service-specific social media channels		Ongoing	CCO/CA-D	Internal/ Key comms partners
• Support the effective management of service-specific digital platforms to maintain effective communication to key customer groups		Ongoing	CCM	Mktg staff

• Deliver a robust proactive/reactive media relations service for all directorates in line with agreed corporate priorities	Ongoing	CA-E	Internal Clients
• Strive to promote Arts and Heritage activity while respecting COVID-19 restrictions	Ongoing	AMA	Arts/Heritage
• Continue to support service-specific marketing campaigns	Ongoing	CCO	Mktg Staff
• Maintain corporate contracts for event support that offer consistent quality and costs	Ongoing	MMO/MMT	Contracts users
• Promote guidelines on the use of corporate brand(s) to ensure all services provided are recognisable as being delivered/funded by Council	Ongoing	MMO/GD	SUMs
• Monitor and provide challenge on print requests in line with Council's commitment to environmental sustainability	Ongoing	MMO	SUMs

## Service Development / Improvement

What service development/improvement will we undertake in 2021/2022?	Which of the specified aspects will this improve?	Rationale	Due Date	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver a small sample resident satisfaction survey services + a series of focus groups/panels.</li> </ul>	Service Quality/ Availability	This survey provides a comprehensive insight into resident's overall satisfaction with the Council's performance and the results will help with identifying areas for improvement and service planning in 2022/23	Sept 21	CCM/CCO	CLT/HoS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing, in consultation with internal stakeholders, a comms prioritisation process that aligns resources with our PEOPLE priorities.</li> </ul>	Service Quality/ Efficiency	Marcomms resources and channels are limited. With the formal launch of the Council's new corporate plan in April, it is timely to consider a prioritisation process for marcomms activity so that delivery is better aligned to core priorities.	July 21	CCM	CLT/HoS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing proposals for more innovative and effective methods of consultation and engagement with residents.</li> </ul>	Strategic Effectiveness	Residents/stakeholders are increasingly looking for opportunities to engage and 'have their say' on decisions the Council makes about services and investments. This will make it easier for people to contribute on an ongoing basis.	Dec 21	CCM	CLT/HoS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing the Council's approach to marketing to identify whether a centralised or decentralised approach is more efficient and effective for meeting corporate objectives.</li> </ul>	Efficiency	Communications was reviewed and centralised in 2015; marketing is currently a hybrid model that has not been reviewed during the lifespan of the new Council. Staff and budget allocation for marketing activity to be assessed to determine if a centralised approach can provide more impact and efficiencies.	Mar 22	CCM	Relevant HoS + HR/Finance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing the Council's approach to advertising to both identify savings internally and commercial opportunities externally.</li> </ul>	Efficiency	During the pandemic Council suspended all but essential advertising. Moving forward we want to review advertising spend for efficiencies and to consider opportunities for advertising on Council assets where appropriate.	Mar 22	CCM	HoS

**SPECIFIED ASPECTS OF IMPROVEMENT**

What will this improve?	Definition
Strategic Effectiveness	<i>is key to <b>linking</b> the community plan, and the ongoing processes that underpin it, with a council's improvement processes. The Department would expect that a council's strategic community planning outcomes and objectives should be central to that council's improvement activity and clearly contribute to the strategic effectiveness aspect.</i>
Service Quality	<i>all relate to service provision by aiming to meet the needs of citizens and ensuring fair ease of access to the most suitable services that meet their needs. Clearly, all of these objectives can be demonstrated individually or collectively. Fairness can also be demonstrated by exercising non-service functions in ways which reduce disadvantage and improve social well-being, for instance by improving citizens' access to information or by addressing inequalities experienced by Section 75 groups.</i>
Service Availability	
Fairness	
Sustainability	<i>When carrying out its functions or providing services, a council may demonstrate improvement when it operates in a way that contributes towards the sustainability of its area, as required under the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 and the associated Northern Ireland Executive Sustainable Development Strategy. on-going efficiency may also be shown if fewer resources are utilised while maintaining provision of substantially similar or better services. Should a council choose to alter the manner by which a service is provided and in so doing it uses fewer resources or more integrated services, it will not only be demonstrating efficiency, but may demonstrate improved sustainability as well</i>
Efficiency	
Innovation	<i>Any changes to service design and delivery methods that are intended to yield improvement under any other aspect, and are reasonably likely to do so. This allows councils to make changes which may not have tangible effects within the same reporting year, but are likely to in subsequent years, and still count them as improvements.</i>

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**Service activities being stopped / changed:**

What service / activities will we be stopping / changing in 2021/2022	Reason for stopping / changing activity	Savings	Impact on Performance	Impact on the Public	Impact on staffing
N/A					

**Performance Measures:**

<b>Performance Measures</b> (should include those for the Business as Usual and Service Improvement actions outlined above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate and Statutory)	<b>Is the measure Statutory, Corporate, Existing or New?</b>	<b>Reporting frequency</b>	<b>2015/16 Actual</b>	<b>2016/17 Actual</b>	<b>2017/18 Actual</b>	<b>2018/19 Actual</b>	<b>2019/20 Actual</b>	<b>2020/21 To date</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
% attendance	C	Quarterly	N/A	93%	94%	99%	94%	100%	95%
Time invested staff development (in days)	E	Bi-annual	N/A	61	63	55	58	20	55
% resident awareness of Council services	E	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	76%	76%	76%	78%
% satisfaction with Council website	E	Annual	N/A	79%	83%	94%	94%	94%	95%
% increase engagement with social media	E	Bi-annual	N/A	7%	7%	9%	9%	7%	10%
% staff receiving briefings	C	Quarterly	N/A	N/A	65%	72%	85%	95%	100%
Pride in Performance Conversations	E	Annual	N/A	100%	100%	89%	100%	-	95%
% services PR Planning	E	Annual	N/A	60%	66%	65%	80%	85%	90%
% multi-media service delivered to times	E	Bi-annual	N/A	N/A	90%	90%	95%	90%	95%
% Resident satisfaction with engagement	E	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	69%	75%	75%	78%
% Resident satisfaction with comms	E	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	76%	80%	80%	82%
% Employee satisfaction with engagement	E	Bi-annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	72%	85%	81%	85%
% Employees consider Council 'Great place to work'	E	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	71%	71%	75%
% Client Satisfaction	E	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	87%	87%	90%
% spend against budget	C	Quarterly	N/A	99%	99%	98%	96%	97.5%	95%
Net cost per head of population	C	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A				
% reduction in adverting spend	N	Annual	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2%

## 4. Risks

Ref:	Risk Description	Gross Risk			Current controls	Residual Risk			Risk Status	Further Action Required	Action Due by	Risk Owner
		I	L	R		I	L	R	Tolerate / Action			
1	Lack of information/ engagement from internal clients, impacts team's ability to deliver service	5	3	15	Planning meetings/ Training/	2	3	6	Tolerate	Development of prioritisation framework	July 21	CJ
2	Lack of coordination of comms/marketing functions leading to missed opportunities/duplication	4	5	20	Informal working relationships/ update meetings	2	2	4	Tolerate	Review of comms/mktg arrangements cross Council	March 22	CJ
3	Communication environment operates 24/7; Council does not. Difficult for comms staff to get information out of hours – resulting in reputational damage	5	4	20	Agree protocols for identifying and responding to identified critical issues out of hours	3	4	12	Tolerate	Continue to monitor and identify lines to take in advance	Ongoing	CJ
4	Failure to manage media relationships effectively leading to reputational damage	5	2	10	Proactive media relations management at a local and regional level	5	1	5	Tolerate	Continue to monitor	Ongoing	CJ
5	Elected member communications conflicting with corporate communications leading to reputational damage and confused messaging	3	4	12	Members extranet	3	3	9	Tolerate	Continue to monitor	Ongoing	CJ
6	Insufficient resource to meet client demands at times leading to missed opportunities for proactive PR.	5	2	10	Planning meetings/prioritisation	3	1	3	Tolerate	Continue to monitor	Ongoing	CJ

## 5. Resources

<b>Are all actions resourced within the current (2021/22) budget plan? Yes <input type="checkbox"/></b> <i>Please see assumptions above. Not all marcomms budgets are centralised. It has to be assumed that individual service areas have budgeted for activities they want to undertake.</i>	
<b>Will additional resources be required?</b>	<b>Potentially see Section B</b>
<b>Section A:</b> Delivery against the core objectives outlined can be achieved with existing financial (revenue budget) and staff resources.	
<b>Section B:</b> It should be noted that large scale investment projects such as Queen's Parade and Bangor Waterfront require significant and growing resource (comms/ engagement/ stakeholder management/ consultation). Additional support may be required beyond that available internally to deliver on some elements of the communications. This may be via short-term contacts for staff or the use of external agencies.	
<b>Staff:</b> Current staffing: 8.69 FTEs No changes through budget process Additional resources may be considered for delivery on key capital projects.	
<b>Financial:</b> Budget for Corporate Communication for 2021/22 is £485,000.	
<b>If the required additional resources are NOT available, please state:</b>	
What is the likely impact on performance? Unable to deliver on the communications requirement of two major capital schemes resulting in lack of public buy-in and risk to funding/ investment.	
What is the likely impact on the public? Unable to deliver on the communications requirement of two major capital schemes resulting in lack of public buy-in and risk to funding/ investment.	
What is the likely impact on staffing? Existing staff resource does not have capacity to deliver to the demands of these capital schemes.	

## 6. Monitoring and Review

In adherence with corporate requirements, including quarterly reporting to Committee. Performance will also be discussed at manager meetings and team briefings.

## 7. Conclusions

The Communication Service in Ards and North Down is a busy and productive team, providing support to all service areas.

As an essential service during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the team delivered a hugely significant body of work in support of staff, residents, members and partners under very challenging conditions. Efforts will be made to build on the successes achieved during this period.

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This plan provides focus for the service during the 2021/22 financial year.

Many activities can be considered 'business as usual' but they are critical to delivering on the Service's core objective of enhancing and protecting the Council's reputation. The team will endeavour to bring an innovation and creative approach to the delivery against all these objectives.

A critical success factor in 2021/22 will be prioritisation of communications messaging and resources in line with the new Corporate Plan. Getting this right will secure benefits for the Service, the wider Council and key stakeholders.

The plan recognises the importance of building on, and enhancing, existing good working relations with all service units to ensure effective information sharing both across the organisation and to external stakeholders.

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Customers/Stakeholders and their needs

Customers	Needs
Our key customers are <b>Council Services</b> – who are essentially our clients.	Require corporate communication support of service activity/ campaigns. Volume of support required varies. Key areas of activity in 2021-22 will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>CLT/Chief Executive:</b> Promoting corporate initiatives. Outworking of the 2020-24 Corporate Plan. Explaining the benefits of the Transformation Programme. Support for Belfast Region City Deal and Queen’s Parade.</li> <li>▪ <b>Regeneration:</b> Comms and engagement for the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment.</li> <li>▪ <b>Waste and Recycling:</b> Ongoing borough-wide behaviour change campaign to help reach regional recycling targets.</li> <li>▪ <b>Democratic Services:</b> Year-long programme of support to the Mayor, two Freedom of the Boroughs.</li> <li>▪ <b>Community/ Business:</b> initiatives to assist with recovery from COVID-19.</li> </ul>
<b>All employees</b>	Require timely and relevant information that enables them to do their jobs effectively. Also engagement opportunities so they can contribute improvement ideas and remain connected to wider organisation. This is particularly important during the current ongoing period of remote working/ socially distanced working.
<b>Elected Members/politicians</b>	Require access to timely and relevant information that enables them to engage with constituents/partners and to explain Council decisions.
<b>Media/social media influencers</b>	Require answers to queries and insights into Council decisions. A steady flow of stories tailored to their interest.
<b>Key comms partners</b>	The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the number of regional partners seeking to use Council communications channels to share public messaging. As Council seeks more partnership working opportunities at a local and regional level, the need for better communications networks is heightened.
<b>AND Residents</b>	Access to service information and opportunities for engagement
<b>AND Businesses</b>	Access to information on grants/support/advice; especially around recovery from COVID-19.
<b>AND Arts/Heritage Sector</b>	Access to information on grants/support/advice/events; especially around recovery from COVID-19.

## Appendix 2: PESTLE Analysis

<p><b>Political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yet to achieve fully integrated or 'one Borough' identity politically or corporately</li> <li>• Increased negativity towards local politics</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of the service/service pressures making difficult to manage work requests</li> <li>• NI Public Sector Comms Forum helping to establish new standards and procedures</li> <li>• More regional/ partnership working providing additional profile opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiency –trying to do more with less resources</li> <li>• Failure across internal services to plan/budget for communications element of their service plans</li> <li>• Perception (incorrect) that digital/social media is a 'no cost'</li> <li>• View that resources spent on comms/marketing better spent on front-line services, especially coming out of COVID pandemic</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in audience on all Council social media and web platforms</li> <li>• Increasing expectation of 24/7 and multi-media based comms; in particular around customer care issues</li> <li>• Increasing need for more flexibility in work patterns to be able to respond</li> <li>• Increasingly older local population but necessity to engage with youth – extremes of the comms channels</li> <li>• Desire for more openness and transparency in Council activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Technological</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic has accelerated remote working, which is helpful in meeting increasing expectation of 24/7 communications</li> <li>• Needs to be used to support new ways of consulting</li> <li>• Need to engage more effectively with digital influencers</li> <li>• No coordinated approach across Council</li> </ul>
<p><b>Legal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of conduct</li> <li>• Increasing ethical standards around transparency and openness</li> <li>• Emergency planning – logging procedures (scrutiny)</li> <li>• Copyright</li> <li>• Increasing need for stronger governance around on-line communications</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silo thinking continues cross Council limiting shared learning, duplicating effort/mixed messages to customers</li> <li>• Tension between corporate communications and decentralised marketing functions</li> <li>• Pressure on service from demands of internal customers</li> </ul>

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### Appendix 3: COVID-19 Impact on Service Delivery and Performance

Corporate Communications was designated a 'critical service' at the Emergency Council meeting on 20 March 2020, which marked the start of the COVID-19 lockdown period. The team then stopped all 'business as normal' activity and prioritised delivery against the pre-agreed objectives from the Council's Business Continuity Plan. There are:

1. Providing information and reassurance to employees and responding to questions
2. Providing information to residents and responding to queries
3. Providing updates to Elected Members
4. Working with, and supporting, key partners
- 5.

The role of good communication in any emergency situation cannot be underestimated. It works to inform and reassure, helps to connect people and provides an opportunity for dialogue on key issues. With the limitations on people's opportunities for social interaction during this emergency, digital communication became even more critical than usual.

The volume of work delivery by the communication team during, in particular, the first lockdown period, but continuing through recovery and in preparation for further waves has been, and continues to be, significant. Much of this has been delivered to very tight deadlines, in circumstances where not all the information needed is available, without access to our full range of communication channels and with competing pressures from various audiences.

Key highlights of the activity delivered under each of the agreed objectives are listed below. This covers the period from 20 March to 31 August 2020.

#### Providing information and reassurance to employees and responding to questions

20 weekly edition of the staff newsletter 'NEWS AND INFO' (now being produced fortnightly) sharing safety and wellbeing messaging, staff stories, etc.
10 CE Updates on key decisions e.g. budgets/ furlough, etc.
Coronavirus updates – 6 info briefs for line managers and 8 all staff briefs.
Coronavirus email set up as a vehicle for staff to send queries or concerns about the pandemic to and get a quick/individual response.
Introduction of a text alert service – a facility whereby messages can be pushed out to all staff who have shared their mobile phone number with the Council.
Created an online 'Employee Portal' for furloughed staff to help them to keep connected to the organisation while not actively working.
Organised weekly (now fortnightly) COVID HOST meetings and 3 COVID SUM Forums.

**A staff survey undertaken in August demonstrated the success of this communication with 78% of respondents rating the Council's communications during the pandemic as 'good' or 'very good'.**

#### Providing information to residents and responding to queries

Given the circumstances of the pandemic and the directive to 'stay at home' digital communication saw a huge surge throughout lockdown.

### Social Media

Between 20 March and the end of July, the Communications Service:

Generated <b>620 posts across the three main corporate social media channels</b> – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
This is an average of 36 posts per week, approx. <b>5 posts per day</b> , with ongoing monitoring of public comments and engagement on these, as appropriate (under normal circumstances we post 3 times per day)
Primary messaging concerned Council service provision
Also proactively support external agencies in communication of public health and safety information e.g. PHA, PSNI etc.
Ran substantial online campaigns, including celebrating VE Day and the NHS' birthday.
Managed a significant increase in direct messaging (Facebook) - approximately 550 customer service messages received and processed. Saw a <b>25% increase in the number of people using this contact medium.</b>

Responses to this public information service provided were very positive and resulted in a **11%** increase in followers on Council channels over the 4-month period. Engagement levels also increased dramatically; at their peak levels were **400%** higher than usual.

### Website

A special COVID-19 section was creating on the .gov website providing full details of how key Council services were working and sharing regional safety messages. During the lockdown period this was being updated 2-3 times per day as information changed very regularly.

Between 20 March and the end of July, this section had over 78,000 views; with the top performing pages as outlined below:

Main COVID-19 Update page	<b>53,459</b>
Directory of Services	<b>13,764</b>
Covid Community Engagement	<b>3,553</b>
Waste – COVID Specific	<b>2,793</b>

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## Media relations

Media enquiries slowed in the initial lockdown period as media outlets focused on health stories; however the focus returned to local councils after a couple of weeks around issues including waste management, burials services and closures of parks/open spaces.

The closure of the Spectator and Chronicle group of newspapers for several weeks also had an impact locally.

Between 20 March and the end of July, the Communications Service:

Responded to <b>70</b> media enquiries
Issued <b>20</b> press releases
Recorded <b>6</b> radio interview
Facilitated <b>media attendance</b> at virtual Council and Committee meetings

Feedback on the Service's performance was requested from key partner journalist and is summarised below.

<b>Belfast Live</b>	The team is very good, very personable and very prompt. Light years ahead of some others in terms of transparency and speed of response.
<b>Bangor FM</b>	While we haven't done as much as we ordinarily would have – obviously because a lot of events were cancelled - what we did was very useful. The interviews that were facilitated were on a range of very relevant COVID topics.
<b>Spectator/Chronicle</b>	We have no complaints at all...and reporters will complain very quickly if there's something to complain about.

## Providing updates to Elected Members

Between 20 March and the end of August, **65** email briefs were issued to Elected Members, which provided dashboard statistics, updates on Council services, key public messaging and links to relevant partners' COVID information.

At a time when many were cut off from their usual sources of information these briefs provided a useful and succinct overview of activity across the Council and impacts on the wider Borough.

## Working with, and supporting, key partners

Via effective use of social media, the Council very actively supported the work of a number of key partners by sharing and promoting their messaging.

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These included:

- **NI Direct**
- **PHA**
- **South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust**
- **PSNI**
- **Community groups that received COVID-19 funding**

Further work was done directly with the Executive Information Service and SEHSCT on youth messaging and the NHS birthday thank you campaign respectively. Feedback from both was very positive and is helping to build strong relationships that will be very helpful moving forward and particularly if further waves occur.

<b>Comms Team, SEHSCT</b>	We wanted to thank you for all your work on the NHS Birthday campaign in AND. We got some great feedback from staff and senior management. It's very much appreciated.
<b>EIS</b>	Many thanks to the team for the very positive and timely responses on our queries and requests.