

Corporate Communications

Committee name	Corporate, Finance and Property Select Committee
Officer reporting	Emma Gilbertson, Corporate Communications
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

BACKGROUND

Following a request from the Select Committee for information on external communications, this report provides a general summary of the Council's external communications channels and some of the activity delivered during the past year.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Committee notes the content of the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Communications across a range of external channels plays a key part in the effective delivery of services and priorities, and ensures that residents, businesses, our workforce, partners and other stakeholders (including the media) are well informed about the work the Council does and the services it provides.

High quality and timely communications, that is representative of the Council and its brand, is imperative in building a positive reputation that we are putting residents first.

The Council's core external communications channels, are:

- Media relations
- Publications
- Social media
- Other marketing/advertising materials
- Website.

Corporate Communications works in partnership with teams across the Council to deliver external communications.

Some of the key outcomes:

- Informing stakeholders what the Council does and how services can be accessed
- Supporting the Council's strategic priorities
- Developing and promoting opportunities for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to engage with the Council and support decision making
- Celebrating Council successes to raise Hillingdon's profile

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- Maintaining a strong and recognisable brand and identity
- Building trust and enhancing the Council's reputation
- Generating income and delivering savings through transformation.

Media relations

Media relations comprises two elements, reactive and proactive.

Corporate Communications reactively deals with media enquiries from journalists on behalf of the Council. The service assists media outlets with their requests and enquiries, providing them with responses or statements and rebutting any inaccurate statements or coverage.

The service also delivers proactive media relations by sending press releases to the media and 'selling in' stories to outlets that highlight the Council's good work and by setting up interviews and photo opportunities.

The Council sends press releases via a media management system containing a database of journalists, and press release lists are created to target certain audiences (local, national or trade) depending on the release's content.

Press releases are also published in the news section of the Council's website and promoted via social media. Alerts can be set up by residents and other stakeholders to inform them when the Council has published a news story on social media. Press release stories are also often included in Hillingdon People and the Council's general news e-newsletter.

During the past year Corporate Communications has issued more than 70 press releases, and there have been more than 400 instances of positive coverage.

Examples of articles receiving widespread coverage:

- Enhanced COVID-19 testing in Hayes, Ruislip and six targeted areas in 2021
- Primary school offer day, with 99.3 per cent of children in the Borough being offered one of their preferred primary school places
- Prosecution of a man and woman who bred and sold dogs and cats from their home with no licence resulting in a fine of nearly £50,000 and the Council securing the protection of the 23 dogs and 23 cats
- Prosecution of a Heathrow-based 'meet and greet' parking company that earned an estimated £500,000 while falsely claiming to offer its customers secure airport parking
- The new Polish Air Force exhibition at the Battle of Britain Bunker
- The Tashan Daniel Award
- Blue-green algae at Ruislip Lido
- The COVID-19 household support fund
- The Master Brewer legal challenge.

Publications

The Council produces a number of external publications. These include Hillingdon People magazine, which is produced bi-monthly and delivered to all households in the Borough. The magazine covers a vast range of Council services and news, as well as featuring residents' experiences of the services they access and where they have made a positive difference to their lives.



This year, the Council also produced the Hillingdon People Local pamphlets which are produced every two years detailing some of the things that the Council has been doing across the Borough and in each of the Borough's 22 wards during the past two years.

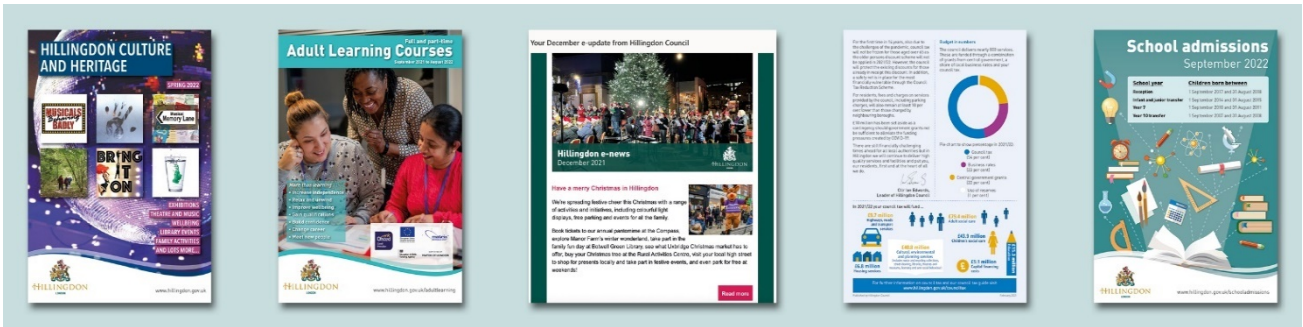


Other publications include:

- Annual adult learning course brochure and a separate easy-to-read booklet on courses for adults with learning disabilities
- Quarterly Hillingdon Culture and Heritage brochure
- Annual school admissions brochure (digital)
- Annual Council tax guide (digital) and printed insert included with the annual bills
- E-newsletters.

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Corporate Communications increased the frequency of the Council’s e-newsletters in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to communicate the key public health messages as they often quickly changed.

In 2021, the Council invested in a new and more efficient e-newsletter system to enable the Council to send targeted e-newsletter campaigns to residents. Corporate Communications delivered a welcome e-newsletter in December 2021, which had a 49 per cent open rate, and then a general news e-newsletter also in December 2021, which had a 44 per cent open rate.

A waste-themed e-newsletter was also produced in December 2021, and it had an 83 per cent open rate and a very high 27 per cent click-through rate.

E-newsletter average engagement rates vary per industry; however, the average email open rate is between 17 and 28 per cent and the click-through rate between 2 and 5 per cent.

More topics will be added later this year for residents to sign up to and automated emails will be developed that link to the Council’s website.

Social media

The Council uses various social media channels to proactively promote Council services and share Council news, and to engage with/share news from others, including partners, emergency services, government departments, businesses and residents. The core social media channels are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Resident queries are handled by the Council’s Contact Centre.

2021/22 statistics

Channel	Followers	Follower increase since 2018/19	Average posts per month/daily	Average reach per month	Average reactions per month
Facebook (London Borough of Hillingdon)	13,021 page followers	88 per cent	120 (including reshares) (3 to 4 daily, including reshares)	200,000	2,300 Likes, comments and shares
Twitter (@Hillingdon)	47,300 followers	4.87 per cent	160 (including retweets) (5 to 6 daily, including retweets)	200,000	200 retweets 350 likes
Instagram (Hillingdon Council)	3,392 followers	227 per cent	42 (1 to 2 daily) *doesn't include stories	25,000	750 Likes, comments and shares

Facebook top 5 (by engagement rate)

- London Assembly Member announcement
- Charville by-election result
- Police appeal (shared by us)
- CCTV video (November 2021)
- Tenancy fraud news story

Twitter top 5

- River Pinn flood alert
- Prosecution of Quality Foods in Hayes for health and safety risks news story
- Tenancy fraud news story
- Yeading Brook flood alert
- Hillingdon Hospital new hospital consultation

Instagram top 5

- Picture celebrating one of our refuse crew who passed their LGV despite their disability
- Picture of flag flying at half-mast in tribute to the Duke of Edinburgh
- Picture of a community litter picking group in Hayes
- Picture of wildflower initiative during 'no mow May'
- Respect our parks graphic posted in summer as restrictions eased

During the past two years, Corporate Communications has been making the Council's social media more engaging through the delivery of additional video content, animation and graphics

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alongside traditional picture/worded posts. The service has also used Instagram stories more to share posts from others where they have mentioned the Council; share picture/video snippets using other tools like stickers/timestamps/tagged locations; share something that is happening live; and to test a post to see what engagement is like before adding to the main grid.

The Council has expanded its use of social media to post Council successes on LinkedIn, which celebrates team/individual achievements in their various fields/industries, displays partnership working with various organisations, and builds on Hillingdon's employee brand. During the pandemic the Council also created an account on Nextdoor to share health messaging further.

As well as posting organically (free posts) the Council uses paid social media for campaigns to reach a wider audience than its own followers and to target localities or demographics. Examples of this include the Council's fostering recruitment campaign, promotion of Hillingdon in Bloom, FIESTA courses and COVID-19 messaging (including targeting areas that were asked to participate in enhanced testing).

Other marketing/advertising materials

Corporate Communications liaises with services across the Council to plan, develop and advise on communications strategies and implement coordinated communications campaigns or multi-channel communications for events or smaller projects.

The Council's campaigns predominantly raise awareness; change or challenge behaviour; and market events or services.

Campaigns plans are based on the following:

- Setting clear and measurable objectives
- Undertaking research and gaining insight to target specific audiences and benchmark current position to measure outcomes
- Forming a strategy and a clear plan of how objectives will be carried out on various channels to ensure a consistent message and design, value for money and effectiveness.
- Implementation
- Evaluation.

While communications channels are continuing to shift focus towards digital, Corporate Communications continues to produce printed materials to ensure that everyone has access to the Council's communications.

Some 2021 communications campaigns, projects and events:

- COVID-19 (various phases including enhanced testing, vaccination communications, high street support and keeping safe this winter)
- Fostering recruitment
- Environmental initiatives

- Waste and recycling (segregated food waste collections, recycling roadshows, and improved textile collections with TRAIID)
- Community Awards
- Hillingdon in Bloom
- Key Amnesty
- Heart month
- Heritage and Battle of Britain Bunker events/exhibitions.

Channels include:

- Publications, including Hillingdon People, brochures and e-newsletters
- Proactive media relations
- Social media content
- Website content
- Posters, leaflets, guides
- Signage
- Exhibitions and displays
- Engagement activities such as consultation materials, competitions, learning resources, trails
- Outdoor advertising, including JC Decaux, vinyl and lamppost banners.

Examples



Website

In 2019, the Council started to develop a new-look website to improve design, navigation, functionality and content, with the aim of increasing digital transactions. To date, Corporate Communications has reviewed more than 4,000 web pages with services and reduced the overall content by more than 2,500 pages. The remaining 300 pages are currently being reviewed.

In March 2020, the Council created a 'Coronavirus' section on the website. By September 2020 the sub-section had been viewed more than 265,000 times with the section homepage receiving 104,520 unique visitors. To date, this section, which has been updated throughout the pandemic to provide key health messaging and service updates, has been viewed more than 375,000 times, with 227,454 unique views.

In 2021, the Council launched a new My Account that allows residents to report issues, make requests, and apply and book some services. My Account also allows residents to view and check the status of reports and requests.

In terms of external communications, the website provides details of Council services and initiatives and allows residents to transact with the council. Additionally, news and events are promoted. Corporate Communications uses other channels, such as social media, publications, posters, leaflets, media relations to signpost residents and other stakeholders to the Council's website to transact or find out more information about services and initiatives.

My Account

Edit your details

[Edit your details](#) →

Name: We don't know your name yet

Email: web@hillington.gov.uk

Address: High Street, Uxbridge, Uxbridge, Hillingdon, UB8 1UW

Phone number: Please provide your telephone number

Please make sure your details are up to date.

Recent activity

You haven't made any requests

Your most recent requests will be displayed here so that you can keep track of the progress on them.

HillingdonFirst card

[Apply for a card](#) →[Add an existing card](#) →[Replace lost card](#) →

Log out

[Log out](#) >

Change Password

[Change Password](#) >

Street Champions

[You are a registered Street Champion](#) >

Report issues and concerns online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

[View a full list of what you can report](#) >

Council Tax Account

Our council tax account system requires a separate username and password, you can access it by clicking below.

[Council Tax Account](#) >

Direct video external communications

In terms of external video communication to residents, the Council has a YouTube channel: *Hillingdon London*, which is managed primarily by Democratic Services for the broadcast of live Council, Cabinet and committee meetings. Since broadcasting started in 2016, this medium has significantly opened-up local democracy to the public. It supports the communication of decisions and local issues in a fundamental and accountable way, i.e. directly from elected Councillors. The latest analytics show that during the year of 2021, over 50,000 people tuned in to watch council meetings, live or on demand after the broadcast.

The Committee will recall a previous Policy Overview Committee review in 2019 which extended such broadcasting to the overview and scrutiny function of the Council. The YouTube channel is also used to host videos from other service areas, such as the Hillingdon Music Hub, for them to share and communicate in variety of ways.

Implications on related Council policies

A role of the Select Committees is to monitor council services area and their performance within their remit / make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

None at this stage.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.