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**Communications & External Relations**

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**Reason for the Report**

1. To brief the Committee on the Council's Communications and External Relations service; to examine the challenges of delivering the service; and whether arrangements in place ensure all Council services are supported to communicate effectively and develop positive external relations.

**Background**

2. This Committee has within its Terms of Reference oversight of arrangements for the delivery of the Council's Communications and External Relations service.
3. In September 2022, the Chairs of the Council's five Scrutiny Committees invited the Head of Communications and External Affairs to explain the support the corporate communications service could make available to Scrutiny Committees. Chairs were particularly interested in raising the profile of Scrutiny and increasing its media and social media presence.
4. Following the discussion and clarification that the level of resources currently available to the service would present a challenge in offering a comprehensive support service to Scrutiny, Scrutiny Chairs agreed that the Head of Communications be invited to present the position to the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

**Cardiff's Communications & External Relations Service**

5. The Communications and External Relations service is a corporate support service based in County Hall reporting to the Head of Performance and Partnerships, consisting of two distinct teams – Communications & Media, and Graphic Design. The department

offers essential communications, media and design support, advice to all areas of the organisation and collaborates closely with the Council's partners and stakeholders. The service has experience of producing city-wide communications campaigns and managing the media.

6. The service also manages and delivers content to staff and members via internal staff corporate communication channels, including the Staff Intranet, the Working for Cardiff app, and regular news updates to members.
7. The Communications, Media and Graphic Design team offer a bespoke, proactive communications service designed to meet the project brief of internal clients. From city-wide campaigns to smaller more targeted campaigns the team help deliver campaigns that reach across multiple platforms including, television, radio, outdoor advertising, online, print, and social media to meet requirements and budget.
8. The service supports the Council's digital-first objective with a strong focus on using social media to post updates about services, events, and news about the council as well as promoting campaigns.
9. The Council's Twitter accounts [@cardiffcouncil](#) and [@cyngorcaerdydd](#) have over 105,000 followers combined. Our Facebook pages [@cardiff.council1](#) and [@cyngorcaerdygdd](#) have over 52,000 followers. The council's Instagram accounts [@Cardiff\\_Council](#) and [@Cyngor\\_Caerdydd](#) – have over 13,000 followers. The team also uses YouTube and other social media channels for different campaigns.
10. The services' media relations work focuses on promoting the council and the work it does alongside protecting its reputation. The team is responsible for dealing with and handling responses to all media enquiries and setting up media events, press conferences and media launches. It works especially closely with those outlets which are most used by local people including local print and online media, commercial radio stations and regional broadcasters.

11. The dedicated design team delivers high-quality branding and creative campaign concepts for services across the council. The team provides a full service from initial concept through to final design, layout, and provision of print-ready and web-ready artwork. The team has developed a set of council brand guidelines and is the effective custodian of the council's brand, ensuring it does not become diluted. It also co-ordinates all print and design activities across the council. The Design Team will advise on the best way of using the council's brand, devise eye-catching campaigns and work to help drive down printing costs.
  
12. In 2021/22 the Communications, Media and Graphic Design team dealt with 894 media enquiries; wrote and sent out 284 bi-lingual press releases; created 2,600 individual Facebook posts; 5,400 tweets; 569 Instagram posts; and worked on 417 projects including 31 campaigns. The service also provides a daily media monitoring and briefing service to members and senior managers.

### **Directorate Performance Planning**

13. The Performance and Partnership Directorate Delivery Plan 2022/23 states that news about the council's initiatives and services reaches the public in a wide variety of ways. The Communications & Media Team play a key part in making sure correct, up to date and relevant council information is made available to the people of Cardiff and to council staff. This is done using a range of communication channels to make information accessible and interesting to different audiences.
  
14. The Plan indicates that, as part of the digital-first approach, the Council's audience and engagement figures across all its social media channels continue to grow year on year.
  
15. The Plan also draws attention to the challenges faced by the Communications & Media service. There are some risks around having enough staff to manage the demands being placed on the service as more and more campaigns come on stream. Managing social media and developing strategies to counter disinformation on social media channels has also added to the teams' workload. Like most council departments the

service has seen staff and budget reduced over the years and it was recently restructured to focus on key priorities.

16. The Communications and External Relations priorities for 2022/23 are stated in the Directorate Delivery Plan as:

- To help develop branding, communications and promotion of the new administration's Stronger, Fairer, Greener agenda which will see multiple, citywide campaigns launched covering everything from changes to waste and recycling collections, to the opening of new schools; Child Friendly Cardiff initiatives to raising awareness of Into Work services, Fostering, Social Worker recruitment, and much more.
- Continuing to grow our audience numbers and engagement across social media, creating and delivering useful and meaningful content about the administration's work and sharing more positive messaging about the work our staff do through the Working for Cardiff Working for You campaign.
- Managing the media

17. Scrutiny chairs have highlighted the low (47.3%) satisfaction rate with Council services amongst Cardiff's citizens, as cited in the Annual Wellbeing Report 2021-22. This illustrates the importance of getting services right and communicating changes to services, so residents understand why changes are being made. Cardiff is a listening Council that wants to engage and communicate with people. The Communications role can help support this and demonstrate that citizens are heard. Scrutiny plays a key role in public engagement and participation and, as such, Chairs consider its work is worthy of Communications support.

### **Scope of the Scrutiny**

18. Members may wish to test the resilience of current arrangements to manage the Council's Communications and External Relations service, given its vital role in managing the Council's reputation. Is there an appropriate level of resourcing for the size, prominence, and nature of services that the Council delivers to Cardiff citizens? Is the service able to work both proactively and reactively simultaneously? Is the service

clear about its priorities? Is the service able to assist the Council in strengthening the visibility of its governance arrangements and the work of its scrutiny function? Does Scrutiny benefit from access to established corporate communication channels? How can the service assist Scrutiny to deliver expectations on the public engagement agenda?

### **Way Forward**

19. The Leader, Councillor Huw Thomas; Head of Policy & Partnerships, Gareth Newell; and Head of Communications & External Relations, Tim Gordon will attend committee to present the service position and to answer Members' questions.

### **Legal Implications**

20. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

### **Financial Implications**

21. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with

recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

22. To consider arrangements for delivery of Cardiff Council's Communications and External Relations service, and agree whether any comments, concerns or observations should be relayed to the Cabinet.

**DAVINA FIORE**

Director of Governance and Legal Services

9 November 2022