Policy Development and Review Committee	
Meeting Date	16 September 2015
Report Title	Draft Communications Strategy 2015/16
Cabinet Member	Councillor Andrew Bowles, Leader
SMT Lead	Abdool Kara, Chief Executive
Head of Service	Emma Wiggins, Head of Economy and Communities
Lead Officer	Sara Toal, Communications Manager
Recommendations	1. To provide feedback, direction and input to the draft Council Communications Strategy for 2015/16

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

1.1 The Council has developed a draft Communications Strategy for 2015/16 (Appendix I) which sets out our approach and priorities for effective communications. The Council wants a clear and consistent voice and identity so that residents are more informed about and satisfied with our services.

2 Background

2.1 The Communications Strategy has been devised in order to set direction for the Council's communications throughout the year, to support and publicise the services and key programmes being delivered by the Council, and to enable more effective forward planning of resources and communication channel management.

2.2 The strategy sets out the Council's vision for communications to meet the needs of the community and identifies where those needs lie. This has been informed by the findings of the Local Area Perception Survey 2014 which includes how informed residents feel, how satisfied they are with channels they use to contact the Council, and how well the Council listens to their views and enables them to get involved in local decision-making.

2.3 The strategy sets out the approach we will take to communicating with our audiences, the channels we will use, and the priority campaigns and activities which will be our focus in order to support the corporate priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2015 – 18.

2.4 The strategy outlines our ambitions for improving digital communications channels including our website, social media and the introduction of a new direct email communications channel for residents. Any improvements to digital channels will need to coincide with the implementation of a new Content

Management System (CMS) for the website, and in line with the progression of the Channel Shift programme and Digital Access Strategy.

2.5   The strategy has been developed with consideration of the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18, Service Area plans, a review of the key indicators in the Local Area Perception Survey (LAPS) 2014, the commitments made in the Communications Service Plan and outstanding recommendations in the Service Review Action Plan 2014 -16.

3   Proposals

3.1   This reports invites the Committee to consider whether the draft Communications Strategy achieves our aims of ensuring that people know what their Council is doing and making sure the Council is listening and letting people have their say.

3.2   Feedback from the Committee is specifically sought on the following areas:

- Are the communications channels (page 6 of Appendix I) the rights ones? Any others that could be used?

- Are the priorities for delivery for the year (page 11-12 of Appendix II) the right ones? Any additional activities or campaigns that you wish to be considered?

- Are there any unintended negative consequences to groups with protected characteristics from implementing this strategy?

- Any other general comments?

4   Alternative Options

4.1   Not to have a Communications Strategy for the year and instead, deliver communications in reaction to events and on an ad-hoc basis as and when needs arise. This is not recommended as without an agreed strategy that interested parties have had the opportunity to contribute to, there will be no agreement as to where the focus of communications activity should be, limited direction to how approach and manage proactive activity, or how communications resources will be aligned to support the Council's priorities.

5   Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1   The draft Communications Strategy has been circulated for 8 week consultation with interested parties. It was discussed at Informal Cabinet on 27 July and presented here as the Policy Development Review Committee 16th September. Additionally, it is proposed that feedback be requested from Head of Service, staff and selected partners as part of the consultation process, with a view to incorporating their feedback and finalising the Communications Strategy in September.

6   Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Communications Service addresses all Corporate Plan priorities. The Communications Strategy has the corporate priorities as its focus. The Strategy is flexible enough to allow for any changes to priorities that may take place throughout the year and allows contingency in resource to address reactive communications requirements as they arise.
Financial, Resource and Property	The Communications Service resource and budget has been agreed as part of the Communications Service plan 2015-16. Most communications activity is funded by Service Area budgets or where external funds have been secured through partner organisations to deliver a campaign. The Communications Service has a budget of £13,750 to contribute to priority campaign delivery across the Council. A budget of £15,500 is allocated for Inside Swale print production and £22,000 for the magazine postage and distribution annually. The draft strategy highlights our intention to continue to strive to achieve greater value for money. As such we will continue to look for revenue generating opportunities (e.g Inside Swale advertising) and undertake the planned procurement for the magazine to ensure the most cost-effective approach to production and distribution.
Legal and Statutory	The Council (both officers and Members) has to comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity which emphasises the requirement for Councils to be politically neutral in their communications at all times and particularly during any pre election period.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Sustainability	The Communications Strategy recognises the need to look at new and innovative ways to communicate, change people's behaviour, and channel shifting to create more effective and efficient communications for the Council.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The strategy sets direction for the Communications Service whose role is to ensure the council's reputation is enhanced, and satisfaction and trust in the council is improved. The Communications Strategy 2015-16 will ensure these outcomes are achieved.
Equality and	A CIA will be undertaken during consultation to support the final

| Diversity | Communications Strategy in September. |

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: draft Communications Strategy 2015/16.

8 Background Papers

8.1 None.