1. **Decisions required**

   This report makes the following recommendations to the decision-maker:

   1.1 To agree the Communications Strategy as detailed in Appendix A

   1.2 To agree a new strategy for publicising statutory notices and an amendment to the existing contract

   1.3 To agree that the new contract for statutory notices (due in 2020) can be negotiated on the basis of the new strategy in 1.2

   1.4 To agree a review of Greenwich Info to evaluate and ultimately improve the publication

2. **Links to the Royal Greenwich high level objectives**

   2.1 The communications strategy links to all the Council’s high level objectives as it seeks to promote and reinforce them within the borough. These are:

   - A Healthier Greenwich
   - A Safer Greenwich
   - A Great Place to Grow Up
   - Delivering Homes Through Economic Growth
   - A Cleaner, Greener Greenwich
   - Economic Prosperity for All
   - A Great Place to Be
   - A Strong Vibrant and Well-run Borough
3. **Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

3.1 It is important that Council communications have a strategic direction and a shared understanding of what resources and channels are available for use. This report sets out that vision and also highlights some particular areas of work which require decisions to be made to enable the most effective communications to be delivered.

4. **Introduction and Background**

4.1 The current Royal Greenwich Communications team is new to the Council. Team personnel has changed completely over the last year, with a new structure also being introduced. This strategy seeks to set out in detail how the new team will support the Council to engage and motivate residents, businesses, visitors, partners and stakeholders, so that everyone can reach their full potential in the borough. It provides a framework through which we can drive engagement through printed information, digital communications and face-to-face events taking residents on a journey from no contact with the Council to being part of an ongoing two-way relationship.

5. **The Communications Strategy**

5.1 The proposed communications strategy can be read in full in Appendix A. It details the principles and commitments of the team as well as the channels available to us and how we support the corporate plan.

5.2 The aims and principles for the Council’s communications team, describe the purpose of the communications functions and its working practices:

5.3 Our communications aims

With residents, businesses, visitors, partners and stakeholders in mind:

1. Inform and promote understanding of the Council’s priorities and services.

2. Promote opportunities to engage in shaping the Royal Borough and raise awareness of how to participate in local democracy.

3. Uphold the Council reputation as an expert voice for the borough, maintaining a strong identity and clear brand.
4. Deliver inclusive communications which are accessible to our audiences and representative of our boroughs demographic.

5. Take a digital first approach and encourage channel shift by guiding audiences to digital innovation and alternatives that are attractive to them.

6. Create a consistent positive narrative by promoting Council successes.

7. Deliver strategic communications which support the Council’s vision and corporate plan.

8. Keep our workforce engaged, motivated and informed via a robust internal communications strategy which values our staff and develops them as service advocates.

9. Develop the appropriate protocols and policies to ensure consistent, high-quality communication.

5.4 Our communications principles

1. Residents at the heart of our communications
Communications will be targeted at specific audiences wherever possible and take into account people’s needs and characteristics to ensure they receive the right information in the right format.

2. Two-way conversation
We will encourage comment and feedback to help us shape ideas and services to meet resident’s needs.

3. In good time
We will communicate in good time so that residents have a fair chance to participate, respond or make change.

4. Clear and simple
Our communications will use plain English and be easy to understand. We will offer translation services where appropriate.

5. Appropriate formats
Our communications will recognise the different methods of communication audiences respond to and seek to use appropriate formats. We will also help people to discover alternative formats which may be more useful to them.
6. Transparency
Our communications sign off processes will ensure that information is accurate and factual. We will never seek to mislead.

7. Value for money
Our communications activities will be carried out in the cost effective way – maximising the impact of our spending.

8. In collaboration
Where appropriate we will work with our partners to communicate joint projects.

9. Dynamic communications
We will constantly evaluate our communications activities, using an agile approach to adapt to the preferences of our residents and improve our penetration.

10. High-quality performance
Our communications practices will be governed by protocols and processes that will quality assure everything we do.

5.5 The full communications strategy can be found in Appendix A.

6. Statutory notices

6.1 Councils are legally obliged to publish specific notices in local print media. However, the readership of local newspapers has plummeted over the last decade with around 250 local titles closing in the face of dwindling figures.

6.2 While placing notices in titles such as these is still a legal obligation, it is no longer the most effective way to share proposals and intentions with local residents. By relying on this increasingly archaic method as the main channel of promotion, the Council leaves itself open to accusations of burying the information where it knows the majority of residents will never see it. This certainly isn’t the intention, so we are proposing a new model of publicising notices that will take the onus off local print media and make the information more accessible whilst also ensuring that the Council complies its statutory obligations.

6.3 A new area will be created on the website where notices will be published. This will be our main area for holding the information. In an increasingly
digital world, this will be a much more convenient way for residents to access notices or to browse current information.

6.4 Traffic will be driven to the site in the following ways:

- Regular social media posts that actively signpost followers to the website – with the option to highlight specific notices as appropriate. Our social media followings are among the top performing for local authorities in London and in particular Facebook followers have risen by around 50% in the last year.
- The meetings and consultations page in Greenwich Info will signpost to the new statutory notice site.
- Notices printed in The Weekender (which currently holds the Council contract for statutory notices) will include the website address to raise awareness of the new pages.

6.5 Printing notices in a local publication will continue to be a statutory requirement which must be fulfilled by the Council. However, this method will serve to tick the required box rather than be our main channel of communication. Local newspaper readership cannot be relied upon to adequately publicise statutory information and digital methods will greatly increase our transparency. By taking matters into our own hands we will demonstrate that the Council is proactive in sharing important information and is not hiding behind an out-dated requirement to allow possibly controversial issues to slip beneath the radar.

6.6 The added benefit of this new strategy is that should the obligation to print notices in a local publication ever be stopped, the Council would be able to react to this immediately, saving hundreds of thousands of pounds.

6.7 The current contract for the advertising of statutory notices by the Council is held by The Weekender – a weekly independent newspaper covering a large part, but not all, of Royal Greenwich. The initial three year period of the contract ends in April 2020. Whilst the Council has the option of an additional two years, it is proposed not to invoke this option but instead retender with a new specification which reduces the need for copies to be distributed in every post code sector. This should deliver a significant saving for the Council over future years, whilst increasing the transparency of our statutory notices due to our enhanced promotion of them through digital channels.

6.8 The publishing group behind The Weekender has also entered into negotiations with us over the current contractual terms. Those negotiations
have resulted in proposed revised terms which would see weekly savings reflecting a smaller print run. The Council would also receive a second page of free advertorial as part of the deal which would see the newspaper’s circulation fall from 42,000 to 16,500.

6.9 Should our proposed digital strategy for publicising notices be implemented at the same time, this would not cause any real problems for the Council – and the reduced circulation would still meet our legal obligations (which as described above do not necessarily match our duty to properly inform residents).

6.10 The amended contract would also allow us to evaluate how meeting the minimum statutory requirements as part of a much more robust communications strategy works for residents. This could lead to significant cost savings when tendering for a new contract for 2020.

7. **Greenwich Info Review**

7.1 Greenwich Info was introduced in August 2016 as a replacement for Greenwich Time. It is produced in line with an agreement with the government that states the publication must only carry information about the Council.

7.2 It is delivered door-to-door to every home in the borough and is also available at Council buildings to collect.

7.3 The benefits of a printed publication are not just for those residents who do not use digital platforms. Printed information through the door is the only way to proactively share information by physically putting it in front of someone. Visitors to our website come to look for specific information, our social media channels are high performing, but still represent a specific audience – what both have in common is they require people to seek out the Council. Printed publications are an essential part of a good communications mix.

7.4 Additionally, as has been documented in other reports, a regular publication is by far the most cost effective means to produce printed information – combining the cost of numerous leaflets and leaflet drops.

7.5 However, the subject of Greenwich Info is regularly brought up at Council meetings with those opposed to the publication claiming the cost of production does not match the benefit it provides. Currently our evidence
that this is not the case could be considered to be anecdotal – as could that of those opposed to it.

7.6 Additionally, since first being published Greenwich Info has not been reviewed or evaluated with input from residents.

7.7 In light of this we are proposing to review Greenwich Info with two purposes in mind:

- To evaluate the current publication to understand how it is received by residents and what they gain from it
- To use this information to improve the publication as necessary and to ensure that its cost is outweighed by its value

8. **Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Sign-off</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>The report raises no legal issues</td>
<td>Azuka Onuorah Head of Legal Services 2nd September 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance and other resources including procurement implications</td>
<td>The Communications Strategy is considered as business as usual and is within existing budgets based on the costs being fully recoverable. Subject to agreement amendments to the statutory notice contract and strategy has the potential to create reductions in costs.</td>
<td>Jason Perrott, Deputy Accountancy and Business Change Manager 02/09/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equalities</td>
<td>Equality is embedded throughout the strategy – with reference in particular to targeting specific audiences through different channels and formats to improve accessibility</td>
<td>Sarah Abley Head of Communications and Digital 29 August 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. **Report Appendices**

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

- Appendix A: Communications Strategy

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