

Report of the Chief Executive to the meeting of Bradford West Area Committee to be held on 25 February 2021

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Subject:

AN UPDATE ON COVID-19 RELATED COMMUNICATIONS IN BRADFORD DISTRICT

Summary statement:

This report provides an update on COVID-19 communications in Bradford District. It describes the district communications response between March 2020 and January 2021.

The report sets out how the Council-led system-wide communications response to COVID-19 across the Bradford District is being managed, explaining the leadership and co-ordination role of the System Communications Group, communications activities throughout the pandemic so far, and NHS-led planning for vaccinations.

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Portfolio:

Corporate

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Corporate

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

Everyone is affected by COVID-19 and the measures to control the virus but some groups in Bradford are experiencing disproportionate health, social and economic impacts. The pandemic has magnified some of the existing inequalities including health inequalities in society and this has been reflected in disproportionate numbers of residents from BAME communities being impacted by the virus.

Bradford Council has led the communications response to COVID-19 by working with partners, system staff and volunteers on the ground to ensure key messages are spread as widely as possible; targeting communications to specific communities; and by producing communications in a range of formats, languages and channels.

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on COVID-19 communications in Bradford District. It describes the district communications response between March 2020 and January 2021.
- 1.2 The report sets out how the Council-led system-wide communications response to COVID-19 across the Bradford District is being managed, explaining the leadership and co-ordination role of the System Communications Group, communications activities throughout the pandemic so far, and NHS-led planning for vaccinations.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The onset of COVID-19 in February 2020, followed by a swift move into total lockdown in March 2020, required immediate and enhanced communication by the Council and its system partners to inform residents and ensure that people were able to access the services they needed during the crisis. Additional services particularly at neighbourhood and community level were emerging to respond to the crisis and these needed to be communicated to the people of the district. Major central government initiatives such as Track and Trace and business grants also needed a swift and effective communications response.
- 2.2 In the early days of the crisis it was clear that the capacity within the Council communications function needed to be increased to meet demand. It also became clear that communications needed to reach deep into communities and that the usual channels used by the team on their own would not be sufficient to meet this need. New ways of reaching and impacting on residents would become ever more important as the crisis continued.
- 2.3 As messaging moved into the space of behaviour change, this need to think outside of the usual box became even more critical. To meet this developing need a multi-faceted approach was put in place at pace. The elements within the response were:
 - An initial Communications Strategy was produced.
 - The Council Communications team, working on a 7-day 24-hour cover basis, to both send out proactive communications and to respond to the upsurge in media enquiries.
 - A contract given through Communities Bronze to CABAD to deliver communications with and through communities.
 - A contract with the Council for Mosques focusing primarily on communication with South Asian communities using the mosques network.
 - A contract from Public Health to the Race Equality Network and their community anchors to deliver communications and engagement in BAME communities
 - A contract given via Health and Wellbeing Board for additional support from external communications specialists. This contract ended October 2020.
 - A District System Communications Group was established, chaired by the Council and with membership including the Council, NHS, police and fire, faith groups, VCS, Bradford Chamber, Incommunities and Bradford University.
- 2.4 This model enabled the system to step up quickly to meet the sudden

increase in communications requirements. It is worth noting that the last 12 months have seen incredible commitment from individuals to what has been at times a relentless demand for communications and it has resulted in creativity and innovation. In the early months it did however result in a fragmented approach that didn't always maximise the potential for combined working.

- 2.5 In August 2020 the System Communications Group was refreshed, chaired by Jenny Cryer (Assistant Director, Office of the Chief Executive) from Bradford Council. It now provides the coordination that has resulted in a more coherent approach.
- 2.6 The group has communications routes through WhatsApp and by email which have been used to share messaging and to keep all partners informed about key developments. A Sharepoint site, accessible by all, is in development as a shared resource for communications and marketing collateral.
- 2.7 The group works on joined-up and consistent approaches and campaigns, which are mutually amplified across the partners, and identifies current communication gaps that exist and develops bespoke plans to increase engagement and produce communications that resonate with both specific and general audiences. It also reports weekly to Council CMT (Corporate Management Team), Outbreak Control Board and Strategic Co-ordination Group.

2.8 **Current focus**

- 2.8.1 The main areas of focus for the system communications group as the national lockdown announced in early January 2021 continues are:
 - Vaccination comms. Supporting and amplifying messages from the NHS, support via community engagement, and reviewing all channels to promote the messages effectively.
 - Continued Stay at Home and hands, face, space messaging for national lockdown.
 - Mental health and wellbeing support.
 - Business support.
 - Support for unemployed and those in financial hardship.
 - Planning for an end to national lockdown and what restrictions regime may be imposed after that.

2.9 **Vaccination communications**

- 2.9.1 System partners are supporting the NHS leads on roll-out of vaccinations to priority groups. This includes amplifying positive messages on the vaccines through social media and networks and providing a narrative and messages to staff to counter myths that are emerging about the vaccine. Content from the latest Facebook Live event is being used to promote vaccine take-up.
- 2.9.2 The vaccine is being offered to the following groups (who are more at risk of coronavirus) in the following order:
 - people who live in care homes and care home workers
 - people aged 80 and over

- health and social care workers in England
- all those 75 years and over
- all those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

2.9.3 The vaccine will then be offered to people in the following order:

- all those 65 years of age and over
- adults aged 18 to 65 years in an at-risk group*
- all those 60 years of age and over
- all those 55 years of age and over
- all those 50 years of age and over

2.9.4 The Bradford District COVID-19 vaccination programme has given a large number of residents their first dose of 2 doses. This includes a significant proportion of the first four cohorts.

2.9.5 The vaccine is safe. It has been thoroughly tested. As with any medicine, there are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

2.9.6 Most people will be invited for their vaccination in the form of a letter either from their GP or the national booking system; this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number. Over 70s are currently being asked to book proactively through the national booking system. The Jacobs Well mass vaccination centre opened on 1 February for appointment-only patients in priority groups.

3. Communication channels campaigns and approaches

The system communications network has been responsible for a wide range of campaigns and initiatives throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

3.2 **Stay Connected newsletters** (sign up at www.bradford.gov.uk/stayconnected)

3.2.1 The Council was ahead of the game in setting up a dedicated COVID-19 topic in our Stay Connected newsletter system on 13 March. Our first COVID-19 update was sent to all the subscribers of our other topics, encouraging them to sign up for the new topic. It was an instant success with 14,000 subscribers to the topic in 3 weeks. In that period we issued 53 bulletins which had an average engagement rate of 94% and a total of 34,400 link clicks, more than twice as many as all our social media combined.

3.2.2 We now have over 35,500 subscribers to our public COVID-19 email bulletins, and still increasing steadily. We also have a specific 'Coronavirus support for businesses' topic which has grown to over 9,000 subscribers. Engagement rates for both have remained high and anecdotal feedback from residents indicates that our bulletins are useful, well-written, relevant and timely.

3.3 **iVan and iWalkers**

- 3.3.1 We got in quickly before the first national lockdown in March 2020 to hire the iVan on a regular basis to support a range of campaigns. It has featured relevant, up-to-date messages, images and audio in different languages and particularly targeted hard-to-reach communities in priority hotspots to support the extensive engagement work in these wards where local intelligence highlighted compliance to lockdown guidance was low.
- 3.3.2 Over the last 12 months messages covered hand washing, face coverings, how to spot symptoms, social distancing, self isolation, testing, vaccination, mental health, domestic violence, #StillHereToHelp, how coronavirus is spread, along with community leader messages.
- 3.3.2 Films about Ramadan and Eid, which were developed in partnership with the Council for Mosques, were also used. Residents really appreciated the messages and many filmed and shared it on social media. 12 community languages were used.
- 3.3.3 The iVan and iWalkers have been used to highlight the local, Tier 3 and national restrictions and engage with those residents who were still out and about promoting messages about lockdown, staying at home and where you can get a fast test.

3.4 **Use of video**

- 3.4.1 Early on in the pandemic, working with the Public Health team, we launched a series of short information films – COVID-19 Big questions, Big answers – to help people protect themselves and their loved ones. The importance of hand washing and maintaining a 2m social distance were just some of the topics covered in these short films. Dr Sufyan Dogra, Health Promotion Researcher at Bradford Royal Infirmary, gave information in both Urdu and Punjabi whilst Bradford GP Dr Katherine Hickman talked about the importance of respiratory hygiene. Lots of other subjects including alcohol use, shielding, attending hospital, looking after your mental health, cancer, and more, featured other local community and health experts from across the district.
- 3.4.2 An anti-rumour campaign was developed in partnership with Asian Sunday to respond to pervasive rumours on social media about children who tested positive being taken into care. The campaign had video content in English and community languages targeting both parents and young people and included rap by a young artist Faisal Motin from Bradford, and videos made by a senior safeguarding lead and the Deputy Leader of the Council. This was supported by John Wright and his team and resulted in the fake news being taken down and an apology made.
- 3.4.3 We produced a series of ‘stay at home’ videos from Bradford-linked celebrities, including Alhambra pantomime legend Billy Pearce and World Cup-winning cricketer Adil Rashid.

3.5 **Information for takeaways**

- 3.5.1 Up-to-date information and posters that takeaways needed to operate their business to keep staff and customers as safe as possible were developed, designed and sent electronically with an offer for us to send posters if they didn't

have access to a printer. 37 businesses contacted us requesting posters and were extremely grateful for the information and support provided.

3.6 **Behind the Mask campaign**

3.6.1 Behind the Mask was a joint CABAD and Council campaign, designed to drive behaviour change through stark messages using real Bradford District people with their personal stories of the impact of COVID. It was a social media, billboard and bus advertising campaign which ran for a several weeks.

3.6.2 The campaign has attracted plaudits from communications teams around the country for its creativity and impact and several councils, including Leeds and Salford, have subsequently contacted the team to ask permission to replicate the campaign. The team behind it also presented to the Cabinet Office.

3.7 **No Child Cold campaign**

3.7.1 'No Child Cold' is urging people to give the cost of a coffee and sandwich to help keep the district's children warm this winter. Businesses, community and faith groups, and individuals, are being urged to pledge donations to help families struggling financially and back the pledge that no child will be cold in the district due to lockdown. For £21, someone can cover the additional heating costs for a family to keep children warm while they learn remotely.

3.8 Other specific communications activities undertaken by system partners, under Council leadership, between February 2020 and February 2021 include:

- Leading the communications and crisis management response to emerging Incident Management Team demands, including Akbars, Nafees, Farmers' Boy, Toller Lane Mosque.
- Providing 'lines to take' to key personnel on sensitive/complex national, regional and local media issues.
- Publicising the help and support available for residents, centralised through Council Contact (01274 431000), the ongoing help available from GPs, urgent care and blue light services, including the NHS-led #StillHereToHelp campaign.
- A district-wide communications push focusing on educating people about home testing and how it can help to reduce case numbers in high-risk areas. The home testing teams have delivered around 2,000 tests a week on the doorstep.
- A big push on test, trace, isolate and support – encouraging people to isolate when contacted and informing them of the payments and other support they may be eligible for. Isolation communications have continued with translations being done and designed into booklet form to be delivered through engagement and contact tracing staff. A series of films were produced in partnership with Asian Sunday on what a household is, what self isolation means and other topics. Information for businesses to send to their employees re self isolating have been developed along with a thank you card for contact tracers to leave with people who are following self isolation guidelines.
- Working with DHSC on a 'targeted community testing' programme using lateral flow tests and promotion of the testing centres at Airedale Shopping Centre, Keighley

and St George's Hall, the new pop-up centres in community centres and faith settings, and employers who have asked to be part of the programme.

- Council communications managers took part in a lessons learned call with colleagues from Liverpool Council and gained useful insights into what worked and what didn't in their mass testing pilot programme.
- Working with DHSC, PHE and LGA on the development of case studies around testing, community engagement and vaccine hesitancy.
- A letter from Cllr Hinchcliffe and Kersten England was delivered to all 226,000 households in the district with a COVID leaflet on national restrictions and available support. This was also provided as a video message with translation.
- The Council communications team has also delivered campaigns in relation to Different Diwali, Halloween at home, Bonfire Night and Remembrance Sunday/Armistice Day, alongside service closure communications and targeted work with social care on care home visiting arrangements.
- Two Facebook Live events with Cllr Hinchcliffe, the Director of Public Health and other key figures were held in November and January, with another scheduled for early March.
- Targeted communications to wards with high rates of infection, including targeted Facebook messaging and doorstep engagement.
- A CABAD/Council booklet on COVID support has been printed for doorstep use with an electronic version also circulated.
- A Christmas campaign was developed, combining clarification of the one-day restrictions, and reinforcement of the continuing public health messages, with fun festive social media messaging.
- A new weekly engagement meeting has been setup to bring together intelligence from CABAD, CCG and the COVID Ambassadors which is used to agree key doorstep messages.
- A Message of the Day is circulated to all communications colleagues and system leaders through WhatsApp so they can amplify it through their channels.
- The Council, Race Equality Network and Council for Mosques have worked together to provide translations with the BAME communities.
- A selection of Bradford District Zoom backgrounds were developed for Ramadan and Eid as part of campaign to encourage people to 'fast at home'.
- A Systems Communications Group working group has been coordinating a social media campaign promoting mental wellbeing using #KeepHope and #GoodDaysBadDays. Representatives from Living Well, CABAD, Healthy Minds Bradford and the Council are continuing to develop the campaign. Promotions have included #20MinMovement (a new Living Well campaign) and Time to Talk Day on 4 February. They have been tasked with looking at a piece of work around suicide prevention.
- A bespoke campaign has been launched targeting the increase in domestic violence as a result of COVID.
- Worked in partnership with social housing provider Incommunities to target residents of its 23,000 rented homes in Bradford
- 100,000 people weekly reach for Council social media posts.
- The system's face covering campaign – Make and Donate – was seen by over 24,000 people. This prompted, amongst others, groups of refugees, asylum seekers and EU migrants who were being taught by Bradford College on a bespoke training course to take part.

- Critical thinking and anti-rumour workshops and toolkits launched to enable community champions and ward councillors to debunk fake news and conspiracy theories.
- Resilience Walk Volunteers, Ward Officers and Wardens and redeployed staff volunteers have worked closely with local community, faith and voluntary groups to authenticate and instantly share key messages; debunk 'fake news' and myths; and act as early-warning system to community concerns for early action. For example, at St Johns at Great Horton, there was a large Slovakian community who do not (on the whole) access social media; Bradford Council, NHS or other information websites; or listen to/read the news. Trusted wardens and volunteers shared translated leaflets and engaged with key influencers in the communities, and an interpreter attended the food banks with health colleagues (social prescribing and health support).
- Consistent internal communications messaging has been co-ordinated across partner staff groups.
- COVID-related pages on the Council website have now had more than 4 million page views, and the main COVID page now has almost 2 million views, since 5 March 2020.
- A film was developed and published which featured Bradford West Area Committee Chair Cllr Mohammed Amran sharing his very personal journey with COVID-19 – it was very powerful. It has been picked up and shared by lots of different media.

3.8 CABAD booklet & Well Bradford magazine from Council for Mosques

CABAD have produced a hard copy and electronic booklet with source of COVID support. This has been used in doorstep engagement and through websites. Council for Mosques have produced a hard copy magazine with support information.

3.9 Use of social media channels

We have made extensive use of channels, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and are starting to use TikTok. The Council has both produced material for social media and also amplified the material produced by partners. This has included materials produced by REN and the NHS targeting BAME audiences.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

Council communications activity has been resourced through Marketing & Communications Service base budget and time-limited Government funding to support test and trace. Temporary posts created to bolster the corporate team may be unsustainable once the test and trace funding expires.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Risks are managed within the governance of the district response and there are no direct risk management and governance issues within the context of this report.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There are no legal issues

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no sustainability implications within the context of this report.

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

There are no greenhouse gas emissions within the context of this report.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are no community safety implications within the context of this report.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no human rights implications apparent within the context of this report.

7.5 TRADE UNION

There are no trade union implications apparent within the context of the report.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Infection rates vary by ward and the support provided to engagement activity and communications approaches are reviewed on a regular basis and adapted accordingly.

**7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

There are no Area Committee Action Plan implications apparent.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

There are no corporate parenting implications apparent.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

There are no issues apparent.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

Bradford West Area Committee is asked to consider the system communications response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Area Committee may determine to make any recommendations for change.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Bradford West Area Committee notes the contents of the report and the communications work that is taking place across district to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. APPENDICES

None

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None