

Committee(s): Community and Children's Services Committee	Dated: 17/12/2021
Subject: COVID-19 communications to residents	Public
Report of: Bob Roberts – Director of Communications	For Information
Report author: Yassar Abbas, Communications Team, Town Clerk's Department	

Summary

The Community and Children's Services Committee (DCCS) asked the Executive Director of Communications and External Affairs to provide an update on resident communications regarding COVID-19.

This report details those communications.

In the view of the Communications Team, a high-standard of service was delivered to residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic despite a reduced budget and a substantial number of media officers being seconded to the pan-London Strategic Co-ordination Group.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation is unique in terms of communications in having a wide-range of audiences from residents and students through to businesses, workers and tourists, alongside local, regional, and national governments and regulatory bodies.
2. We aim to treat all audiences equally in support of our Corporate Plan's vision of a vibrant and thriving City, supporting a diverse and sustainable London within a globally-successful UK.
3. During the pandemic our aim was and is to use communications to support the Gold Command Group for Recovery from COVID-19 to work with partners to preserve life and deliver an effective recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes prioritising the Government's key public health messages to audiences, including residents.
4. These messages were delivered and are by the whole organisation but primarily by the Town Clerk's Communications Team who lead on media relations and

officers in the Community and Children's Services Department who work closely with specific resident groups on a day-to-day basis.

5. Communications to residents were and are delivered via a wide range of communication channels, from printed publications through to email, social media feeds and webpages which are listed below.
6. We believe these communications were and are substantial, efficient, and effective.

Communications for residents during the COVID-19 pandemic delivered:

7. By the Communications Team:

- **City Matters COVID-19 wraparound.** The privately-owned City Matters newspaper has a print distribution of 18,000 and an estimated City of London readership of 45,000. The newspaper is posted directly through the door of City residents, including those living in residential estates. It is placed at 20 City tube and mainline stations and delivered to markets, shops, offices, corporates, hotels and cafes throughout the Square Mile. Since the start of the pandemic, the Communications Team has bought 12 four-page COVID-19 "wraparound" publications on the outside of City Matters at a cost of £115,250. Every wraparound has contained vital public health messages for residents on the virus. This includes information and guidance on testing; vaccinations; wearing face coverings; washing hands; social distancing; using the NHS app and ensuring ventilation. Guidance on the support available to residents and signposting to services is also included.
- **News releases:** News releases are issued to local media outlets and are amplified on social media. During the pandemic we have issued 90 releases on COVID-19 and public health matters.
- **City Matters columns:** We have secured five resident-focused authored articles from the Policy Chair in City Matters. These are published both in print and online and relate to public health, guidance and support available to residents during the pandemic.
- **CityA.M. columns:** CityA.M. has a readership of 399,000 including many residents. Although privately owned we have secured regular columns in the newspaper from the Policy Chair and the Lord Mayor. During the pandemic we have published 10 columns on COVID-19 public health measures.
- **Leaflets:** Throughout the pandemic we commissioned eight separate leaflet drops, posted through residents' doors (approximately 7,500 copies) informing them of COVID-19 public health messaging.
- **On-street signage:** At the height of the pandemic, we organised on-street matrix boards and over 200 correx boards across the Square Mile to advise residents of Government restrictions.

- **City Resident e-newsletter (formerly Magazine):** Four editions (as opposed to the regular schedule of two) of City Resident Magazine were distributed to all residents. During the height of the pandemic a bespoke COVID-19 email newsletter was created for residents keeping them up to date with latest news and guidance using key health messages to manage the spread and help residents cope during lockdown. It attracted over 250 subscribers.
- **City of London eShot e-newsletter:** Published monthly to around 20,000 residents and workers, the eShot e-newsletter always carries public health messages.
- **Adverts in City Matters and CityA.M. newspapers and websites:** We commissioned more than 50 adverts on COVID-19 and public health messages.
- **Letter from Lord Mayor and Policy Chair to City residents and workers:** Open letters from the Lord Mayor and the Policy Chair to all City residents and workers have been published in every edition of City Matters newspaper for over a year. These have been aimed at thanking readers for their efforts and providing a wide range of information to help tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and issues associated with lockdown. In addition, during the height of the pandemic these letters were printed and sent to every City residence.
- **City of London Corporation Website:** The corporate website has been extensively used as a communications channel to keep residents updated about COVID-19 since March 2020. There is a link in the website header to COVID-19 information from every page on the site and an information banner to promote key information, such as where to get a booster or details of updated restrictions. Within the COVID-19 section of the site there is a dedicated area for resident information covering a range of advice for different groups, vaccine and testing information, support available and general guidance. The central web team has also worked closely with the Communications Officer in DCCS to ensure that content has been updated promptly and that we are all fully aware of any changes.
- **City of London Corporation Social Media Accounts:** The City of London Corporation uses its corporate feeds on four main social media platforms - Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter – to regularly share and promote public health messages.

These corporate feeds are:

<https://www.facebook.com/CityofLondonCorp>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/city-of-london>

<https://twitter.com/cityoflondon>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CityofLondonvideos/videos>

The total number of followers on these accounts is 102,355.

We amplify these messages by other feeds such as Twitter feeds @citylordmayor which has 24,500 followers or @squarehighways which has 4,715 followers.

Our YouTube channel's COVID-19 videos were viewed over 6,000 times. One explaining the vaccination process was viewed 4,921 times.

We paid Facebook to promote public health messages from the Lord Mayor and Policy Chair on Facebook and Instagram feeds being viewed in the Square Mile. These messages were seen by 480,000 unique users.

8. Department for Community and Children's Services

- **@Home Magazine:** Published twice a year across all City estates, @Home Magazine is an e-publication introduced in 2019 which is also available in print on request. During the pandemic the magazine was published on a monthly basis carrying public health advice
- **@Home COVID-19 e-newsletter:** Published monthly since March 2020, the @Home e-newsletter is sent to residents who are subscribers carrying public health advice.
- **Estate Projects e-newsletters (Golden Lane and Middlesex Street):** Published monthly, these e-newsletters are sent to residents living on the Golden Lane and Middlesex Street estates. They provide updates on major works projects taking place on the estates and carry public health advice.
- **Barbican Estate-wide News Bulletin:** Published digitally on a weekly basis, the Bulletin is sent to Barbican Estate residents who have subscribed. It provides public health advice and information on works, projects and events taking place across the estate, as well as information on health, safety and wellbeing.
- **Barbican Email Broadcasts:** Sent on an ad hoc basis to Barbican residents, Email Broadcasts provide information on emergency works, public health messaging and other urgent matters and events.
- **Items included in external publications:** Public health articles, adverts and notices are placed in Barbican Life Magazine, Healthwatch City of London e-newsletter, and the Aldgate Partnership e-newsletter.
- **City of London Libraries Service:** Public health posters are regularly placed in City of London libraries to promote City events to residents.
- **Housing Social Media Accounts:** A range of housing and estate specific social media accounts are used to share information on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with residents. They include information on service updates, support and advice signposting, as well as opportunities to get involved with projects and events. They also amplify public health advice posted on the main accounts.

- **Healthy City Twitter Account:** Shares public health messaging with everyone in the City. Includes tips on staying healthy and well, and information on local health and wellbeing support services. This account has 883 followers.
- **Other Departments**
 - **Social Media:** Over a hundred social media feeds are used by officers and Members from across the City Corporation and its institutional departments to share information with all stakeholders including residents and are sometimes used to amplify public health messages.
 - **Annual City-wide Residents Meetings:** These meetings offer residents the chance to hear from elected Members and senior officers from the City Corporation and the City of London Police. Residents have an opportunity to ask questions or raise any issues about living in the City. When held in person a series of stalls provide additional information and signposting on a variety of issues including public health messages.

Conclusion

9. The Communications Team believes the City Corporation produces a wide range of communications for residents and we believe these have been delivered to a high-standard of service to residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic despite a reduced budget and a substantial number of media officers being seconded to the pan-London Strategic Co-ordination Group.

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