

Committee(s)	Dated:
Barbican Centre Board	17 May 2023
Subject: Communications Strategy	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4, 7, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: Claire Spencer ,CEO, Barbican Centre	For Discussion
Report author: James Tringham, Head of Communications, Barbican Centre	

Summary

Considerable progress was made across media relations, internal communications and stakeholder engagement/public affairs during 2022/23. Priorities for 2023/24 include enhancing strategic campaign capability, refreshing our corporate narrative, broadening our approach to digital media, and engaging with Destination City.

Recommendation(s)

The Board is invited to note the report.

Main Report

Background

The Barbican is the City's cultural powerhouse, and a key factor in its attractiveness as a location for international business, and for the visitor economy. Promoting the Barbican's brand, reputation and offer is vital for its own financial sustainability and contributes to the City's wider economic success.

The Barbican's Communications function encompasses media relations, internal communications, and stakeholder engagement/public affairs. Advertising, digital content, printed output, brand and design are the responsibility of the Marketing function.

2022/23 was a year of change and renewal for the Communications team, with a new organisational structure implemented and a significant number of new staff recruited, bringing new ideas and energy. The current Head of Communications started in post in May 2022, following a gap of almost a year.

Summary of 2022/23 communications priorities and outcomes

The main Communications priorities for 2022/23 and outcomes are summarised as follows. Where relevant, further detail is provided in Non-Public Appendices 1- 3.

Structure: To implement a new Communications team structure – to break down silos, enable more integrated working, and address functional gaps. Outcomes include:

- A new Senior Manager post overseeing and integrating media relations for all arts/learning programming – supported by a team of artform specialists.
- A new Senior Manager post overseeing communications for all corporate topics, with additional responsibility for internal comms and stakeholder engagement/public affairs – supported by a small team.
- Appointments at more junior grades to replace leavers and fill functional gaps.
- A significant reduction in the requirement for contractors, freelancers, agencies and people on fixed-term contracts.

Media: To support arts/learning programming and the Barbican brand by driving positive media coverage. Outcomes include:

- Approximately 5000 individual pieces of media coverage, with Advertising Value Equivalent of £19 million. The outlet with most stories was the Times/Sunday Times (including online) followed closely by The Guardian/Observer.
- Strengthened media relations, via a series of press events and one-to-one engagement activity.
- More integrated approach between Comms/Marketing for activity at tactical level (eg. promotion for specific events).

Internal: to develop an effective and functional internal comms capability, improve two-way information flows with staff, address discrepancies between employees and the casual team, and help embed multiple corporate change workstreams. Outcomes include:

- First dedicated Internal Communications Manager (from November 2022).
- New internal comms channels, including weekly Barbican Bulletin e-newsletter, bi-monthly Town Hall meetings, and a range of others to raise transparency and more awareness of activities across the organisation.
- For the first time, ensuring all comms equally accessible to casual team – leading to an increase in engagement.
- Regular stream of content around key corporate topics including new CEO, EDI, Purpose & Values, Renewal, Sustainability Strategy and the Creative Vision.

Stakeholder: to support Barbican leadership and relevant projects (particularly Renewal) with their stakeholder engagement activity. Outcomes include:

- Suite of community consultation activities for Renewal – gathering input for the business case and building community engagement with and support for the project.
- Agreement in principle to appoint a Community Engagement Manager, to lead a more strategic and integrated approach to engaging our neighbourhood stakeholders, including Barbican Residents.
- Briefing for leadership participation at external speaking events.
- Corporate updates, including annual review and regular EDI updates.

Forward communications strategy

During 2023/24 we will use the Barbican-wide Strategic Framework to inform our areas of focus – Communications falls within the ‘excite and engage audiences and communities’ goal. Overarching priorities for the year ahead are as follows:

- Enhancing our strategic campaigns capability, including objective-setting, audience analysis, cross-channel integration and evaluation. This will include going beyond communicating our artistic programme, to build in other parts of our offer (eg food and beverage, business events) and support our fundraising activities.
- Refreshing our core corporate narrative and developing a distinctive, authentic Barbican tone-of-voice that inform communications outputs wherever possible. Building on our Purpose and Values, this narrative will provide a single account of who we are, what we do, why, and how we are changing; supported by case studies demonstrating the impact our arts and learning programmes have.
- Broadening our approach to digital media, including placing greater weight on new formats such as podcasts, deepening our engagement with social media influencers, considering the best digital channels to reach our stakeholders, and building better digital tools to help our staff communicate internally.
- Engaging with the Corporation’s emerging communications strategy for Destination City, to identify areas of collaboration, opportunities for cross-amplification, and other ways in which the Barbican can both support and benefit from this initiative.

Many of these priorities will benefit from closer working with the Marketing function, and this will be considered as part of the Marketing review that is currently underway. We will develop a more systematic approach to measuring and reporting outcomes, including both outputs (such as the reach of and engagement with our communications), and consequent outcomes (such as attendance).

Specific priorities for the areas of media relations, internal communications and stakeholder engagement/public affairs are explained in more detail in annexes 1, 2 and 3.

Corporate strategic implications

- Strategic implications – this approach aligns with the new Barbican Strategic Framework, supports the Destination City strategy by promoting the Barbican

Centre as a key visitor attraction, and supports the profile and reputation of the Corporation more broadly as a sponsor of the arts.

- Resource implications – the approach will be delivered within existing resource allocations, with approval for any emerging additional requirements sought through standard processes.
- Legal implications – none.
- Risk implications – none.
- Equalities implications – enhanced internal communications are an important part of the Barbican EDI & HR Action Plan, and the new Barbican EDI Strategy.
- Climate implications – internal communications is essential to embedding the Barbican Sustainability Strategy across the organisation.
- Security implications – none.

Conclusion

Progress updates will be provided via the CEO Report.

James Tringham

Head of Communications, Barbican

E: james.tringham@gmail.com

T: 07513 702734