

Item: 4

Policy and Resources Committee: 24 November 2020.

Political Engagement Strategy.

Report by Chief Executive.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider an updated Political Engagement Strategy.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That the Political Engagement Strategy, adopted in October 2018, has been reviewed and revised to take into account changes in national and international political circumstances impacting on the Council since that date.

It is recommended:

2.2.

That the updated Political Engagement Strategy, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, be approved.

3. Background

3.1.

At its meeting held on 25 September 2018, the Policy and Resources Committee noted that, owing to the variety and complexity of ongoing political engagement, a political engagement strategy document had been prepared, with the aim to achieve maximum focus in respect of political engagement to ensure that the Council's key strategic priorities were vigorously promoted and achieved.

3.2.

The political engagement strategy document was a working document which would be continuously monitored and reviewed on an annual basis. The Committee thereafter recommended approval of the Political Engagement Strategy on that basis.

4. Political Engagement Strategy

4.1.

The purpose of the Political Engagement Strategy is the advancement of the Council's strategic priorities through optimisation of its political engagement activity.

4.2.

The aim of the Political Engagement Strategy is to plan, focus and co-ordinate political engagement such that the Council's key strategic priorities are vigorously promoted, and planned outcomes are achieved.

4.3.

The revised document, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, identifies the following key drivers for political engagement:

4.3.1.

The mitigation of identified corporate risks which have the potential to hinder or thwart the Council's ability to progress its strategic priorities.

4.3.2.

The pursuit of local, regional, national and international strategic alliances, typically for the purposes of the generation of economic opportunities for Orkney, the maintenance of cultural and / or historical relationships, and the sharing of best practice.

4.4.

The strategy is not exclusive and acknowledges that new risks and opportunities with the potential to impact significantly on Orkney can arise at short notice. Elected Members may need to pursue urgent political engagement at any time in the interests of Orkney or the Council, whether or not the particular area of concern is identified in the strategy.

5. Corporate Governance

Although this report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, the Political Engagement Strategy has the potential for assisting delivery of Council Plan and Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities.

6. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

7. Legal Aspects

There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

8. Contact Officers

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Political Engagement Strategy.

Appendix 1.

Political Engagement Strategy

Purpose

The advancement of the Council's strategic priorities through optimisation of its political engagement activity.

Aim

To plan, focus and co-ordinate political engagement such that the Council's key strategic priorities are vigorously promoted and planned outcomes are achieved.

The Council's Strategic Priorities

- Connected Communities.
- Caring Communities.
- Thriving Communities.
- Enterprising Communities.
- Quality of Life.

Introduction

The present political environment is fraught with uncertainty. It is imperative that the Council focuses its political engagement in an efficient and proportionate manner having regard to resources available. Brexit, Covid-19 and other external challenges make it important to build resilience and goodwill through external alliances. Unlike most other councils, the majority of our members are independents and there is little recognised political affiliation to guide our engagement policy.

The Council has established a range of Project Boards to promote key strategic priorities, with varying degrees of political input from Elected Members. Council policy is to build on its existing network of stakeholder groups and forums with a view to enhancing local political input, thereby ensuring clear and consistent messaging through lobbying or other means of political engagement.

Scope of this Strategy

Risk mitigation is one of our main drivers for political engagement. The Corporate Risk Register (revised September 2020) identifies risks which may hinder or thwart the Council's ability to achieve its strategic priorities. For some of these risks, as specified below, the agreed mitigating actions include political engagement, typically with relevant Ministers in the Scottish and UK governments.

Strategic alliances are our second key driver of political engagement. These may be local, regional, national or international. Strategic alliances may be pursued for many purposes with the most usual being the generation of economic opportunities for Orkney, cultural/historical relationships, and the sharing of best practice. Engagement may be

directly with national, regional or local governments, universities or other stakeholders, or via forums of strategic interest.

This strategy is not intended to be exclusive. New risks and opportunities with the potential to impact significantly on Orkney can arise at short notice. Elected Members may need to pursue urgent political engagement at any time in the interests of Orkney or the Council, whether or not the particular area of concern is identified in this strategy.

Risk mitigation

A key factor of the strategy is to mitigate risks which might prevent the Council progressing its strategic priorities. This extract from the Council's Corporate Risk Register (as updated October 2020) identifies the key corporate risks and associated vulnerabilities for which political engagement is planned as part of the mitigating actions.

Risk and vulnerability.	Planned political engagement.
<p>CRR 01 – Failure to secure agreement with Scottish Government on appropriate funding arrangements to deliver the Scottish Ferries Plan in relation to ferry and terminal replacement for Orkney.</p> <p>Ferry and Terminal replacement programme currently unfunded with ageing infrastructure.</p> <p>Annual revenue costs are unaffordable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing dialogue with the Scottish Government emphasising the difficulties of a small authority providing the range of public services within reduced budgets across a wide and diverse geographical area. • Continue to seek additional specific funding sources to protect lifeline services in Orkney and its outlying communities to ensure they are not significantly disaffected, i.e. Transport Grant for replacement ferries.
<p>CRR 06 – Inability to sustain and advance economic opportunities.</p> <p>Commercial etc sectors are vulnerable to market forces and changing national and international economic circumstances, Orkney's population is also ageing, leading to a range of challenges and opportunities in managing the impact of this demographic shift in terms of service provision.</p> <p>Current uncertainties associated with the Brexit arrangements for our future workforce.</p> <p>Deliverability of key project and political agendas including the Islands Deal, Port Masterplan, Grid and Digital Connectivity, Shared Prosperity Fund, Ferry Replacement, Arctic Strategy Innovation Freeport concepts.</p> <p>COVID Recovery and Response challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political engagement and lobbying at UK and Scottish Government Levels. • Effective working of Economic Recovery Steering Group.

Risk and vulnerability.	Planned political engagement.
<p>CRR 08 – Inadequate access to superfast broadband across Orkney and mobile connectivity.</p> <p>Failure to lobby Governments to address the current digital divide and put in place infrastructure to ensure a step change in speeds.</p> <p>Failure to access mobile coverage.</p> <p>Failure to press the Government to deliver a longer-term plan to ensure that there are the right mechanisms, partnerships and commercial models in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support political lobbying and seek opportunities to progress policy. • Support the Scottish Government in the roll out of R100 infrastructure in Orkney. • Support the development and introduction of alternative commercial models, including 5G infrastructure.
<p>CRR 9 – Lack of sustainability of partnerships and clarity of responsibilities and outcomes.</p> <p>Working in partnership exposes the Council to some degree of reputational risk, depending on the stability of the arrangements and outcomes delivered.</p> <p>Resource constraints may affect the success of the Health and Social Care partnership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will continue to work closely with partners under current frameworks which are monitored closely to ensure they are robust, effective and deliver good governance. • Clear Terms of Reference and Partnership Schemes are critical in reducing risks. • The Council will continue to review existing partnerships and explore new ones as opportunities arise to suit Orkney as a whole. • Commitment from Cabinet Secretary received, which supports joint working.
<p>CRR 12 – Brexit – Implications following a “hard” no deal outcome.</p> <p>Loss of access to the single market, with associated implications around trade delays and reduction in supply.</p> <p>Loss of EU funding for projects and businesses in Orkney.</p> <p>Disruption to current workforce and future restrictions on ability to recruit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council “Island proofs” any Scottish Government response and fully participates in discussions with CoSLA, the Scottish Government and other groups as needed. • Member Officer Working Group to be convened as soon as final terms of the Brexit deal are known. • Urgent discussions within the Community Planning Partnership once the terms of Brexit are known. • Urgent escalation of high / severe risks to the Scottish Government, including the operational difficulties with regards to Environmental Health Certificates. • Urgent escalation of high / severe risks to the Scottish Government.

Strategic alliances

Noted below are the principal areas and forums where the Council is currently focusing its political engagement activity, in pursuit of its strategic priorities.

Local alliances

The Orkney Partnership

As a statutory facilitating partner in The Orkney Partnership, the Council has adopted the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and is committed to support and progress the Partnership's strategic priorities of Living Well, Strong Communities and Vibrant Economy.

Regional alliances

Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI).
Our Islands, Our Future (including the Islands Deal).
Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS).
The Northern Alliance (Education network).

National alliances

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

Scottish Government

Highland and Island Leaders' Group.
Islands Strategic Group.
Arctic and Nordic Unit.
Islands Team.
Crown Estate Scotland.

UK Government

All Party Parliamentary Group for Islands.
Islands Desk.
Oil and Gas Forum.

International alliances

International forums

Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR).
Highlands and Islands European Partnership (HIEP).
Global Island Partnership (GLISPA).
Arctic Council.
Nordic Council.
North Atlantic Forum (NAF).
Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA).

Arctic and Nordic states

Cultivating relationships and alliances with our Arctic and Nordic neighbours will help to develop an alternative international "family" for Orkney, and new opportunities in the blue and green economies, following Brexit. In addition, the Scottish Government's Arctic Policy Framework promotes the development of Arctic – Scotland links and Orkney, a natural

gateway to the Arctic, is well placed to play a vital role in identifying and pursuing opportunities that will benefit our communities as well as others.

International relationships

Relationships and alliances have been cultivated with other countries, e.g. China and Japan. These have provided opportunities to exchange best practice within Education as well as Business and Economy. The Council welcomes dialogue with worldwide representatives where opportunities to promote the local economy and improve services are evident.

Twinning and Friendship

The Council has a longstanding Twinning arrangement with Hordaland and will explore the continuation of this formal agreement with the new County of Vestland which was created in 2020 when the former counties of Hordaland and Sogn og Fjordane merged. In addition, strong friendships with Moena, Italy and Manitoba, Canada remain.

Meeting arrangements

The Chief Executive, in agreement with the Leader, has established and will maintain meeting arrangements which are key to achieving the aim of the Strategy, as follows:

Meeting date.	Participants.
Weekly.	Chairs and the Chief Executive.
Fortnightly.	All Elected Members and the Chief Executive.
Monthly.	Senior Councillors and Senior Management Team.
By arrangement.	All Elected Members, MP, MSP's and the Chief Executive.

The objectives of these meetings are to:

- Provide support for the Political Leader.
- Identify opportunities for political engagement.
- Inform political engagement.
- Advise and help develop the Council's Political strategy.
- Enhance collegiate approach for effective strategic leadership.
- Raise awareness and commitment to key strategic priorities.
- Allow the Political Leader to co-ordinate / lead and where appropriate delegate political activity.
- Allow the Political Leader to report effectively to all members.