

Niagara Region Communications Overview

Report CAO 7-2021

Corporate Services Committee

May 12, 2021

Regional Council Motion – April 22, 2021

1. Provide a report to the Corporate Services Committee for its May 12, 2021, meeting on the potential reorganization of the core communication resources found in all departments of Niagara Region, including Public Health, with a view to creating a unified strategic communications entity; and
2. Determine what memorandums of understanding and/or service level agreements may be necessary to satisfy the needs of provincial funders in regard to any communications positions in Public Health paid for, wholly or partially, by the Ministry of Health.

Frame for Analysis and Report Outline

- Role of communications in the municipal sector and core functions
- Current state – resources across the organization
- Operational needs and obligations
- Proposed guiding principles
- Options for further consideration
- Conditions for success
- Recommendations

Municipal communications support business objectives related to...

- Build public trust
- Engage the community
- Provide information on programs and services
- Public safety during emergencies
- Change behaviours
- Attract business and investments
- Build employee engagement

Core communications functions in municipal government

Public Relations

Includes media relations, digital media, issues management, crisis communications, tracking, monitoring and reporting against KPIs.

Client Advisory

Specialized support dedicated and tailored to specific needs of internal clients/ operating departments. Includes internal communications planning, advice and support.

Creative Services

Includes visual identity and related standards, graphic design, web design, photography and videography. Accountable for effective, consistent and modern visual branding.

Public Engagement

Strategies, guidelines and platforms for coordinated public engagement campaigns. Ensures all feedback is available on a corporate-wide basis.

Current state:

Core communications resources

Strategic Communications and Public Affairs

- 8 permanent positions, 1 temporary position
- Funded through municipal levy

Public Health Communications and Public Engagement

- 8 permanent positions, 2 temporary full-time, 1 temporary part-time
- Majority funded through 70/30 funding contributions from the province

Other Operating Departments

- 2 positions in Public Works, funded through rate budgets for water/wastewater and waste management
- 1 position in Economic Development providing external marketing and promotion for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) strategy

Operating needs and obligations

Public Health

- Medical Officer of Health has duty to speak out on public health concerns (per *Campbell Commission Report* and *Health Protection and Promotion Act*)
- Support requirements within *Ontario Public Health Standards 2018*
- In order to continue to receive 70% provincial funding, positions would need to be 100% dedicated to public health outcomes
- Specialized knowledge of foundational health promotion approaches

Operating needs and obligations

other operating
departments

- Support legislative requirements associated with relevant Acts and Regulations
- Close collaboration with operating departments and specialized knowledge of business requirements
- Support for internal communications
- In order to continue to use rate budgets, Public Works positions would need to be 100% dedicated to water/wastewater and waste management
- Economic Development position dedicated to external investment attraction, close alignment with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) strategy
- Consideration of the development of the new communication master plan

Proposed Guiding Principles

- Strive to be recognized as best in class in public sector communications
- Value for money
- Consistency from the corporation
- Independent voice for Medical Officer of Health
- Timely and dependable information
- Clear, consistent and reliable communication channels with Members of Council
- Enhance collaborative communication with partner organizations
- Comply with funding source requirements

Potential Options

Further analysis
required prior to
selection

1. Central coordination with some decentralized resources
2. Reporting relationship change only
3. Integration of some core communications functions
4. Integration of all core communications resources

Conditions for Success

Under any model

- Further analysis and due diligence – opportunity to link this work with the development of the communication masterplan
- Documented service agreements with internal clients
- Continuity in leadership philosophy
- Minimal service disruption during pandemic third wave and attention to employee morale
- Balance between strategy and tactics

Questions?

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