



Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Corporate Communications Strategy 2009 – 2012

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a focus and framework for the Royal Borough's communication activity and to bring about continually improving standards so that local residents are fully informed about the services the Council provides and its ambitions for the future.

The strategy will drive communications around the over-arching Corporate Plan and, importantly, will pave the way for the development of Council branding and marketing activity.

Closely linked to the Consultation Strategy and the Community Consultation and Engagement Framework, it will help ensure that residents are aware of how they can make their voices heard in the development of policies and services.

Local authorities face many communications challenges in a world where people have increasing control and choice about how they access information. Research by the Local Government Association – The Key Drivers of Resident Satisfaction with Councils (November 2008) – highlights that perceived value for money has the strongest correlation to overall [council] satisfaction and **...the primary driver of 'perceived value for money' – and resident satisfaction with councils – is effective information about council services. Councils whose residents feel well-informed about services are the most popular and vice versa.**

Public perception depends not only on how services are delivered but on how well key messages, achievements and aspirations are communicated to target audiences.

The Corporate Communications Strategy is a key part of the Council's statutory Duty to Involve (Local Government and Involvement in Local Health Act 2007), strengthening democratic accountability, setting a clear direction for the way we communicate our daily business and advancing resident and stakeholder involvement in creating and delivering our ambitions for the future.

Effective and joined-up external communications and overall organisational effectiveness depend on strong internal communications. This strategy also looks at communicating with staff and engaging them in the Council's drive for improving services and putting residents first.

2 Links to consultation and engagement – the strategic loop

The Communications Strategy should develop and enhance the relationship between strategy, performance and consultation – the strategic loop (shown on page 3). This enables continuous development and improvement, based on residents' views and involvement.



Communications reinforces the Council's position as a listening organisation, attuned to the needs and priorities of its residents. Consultation in all its forms, including residents' surveys, focus groups etc, should inform policy and strategy and influence performance. It is also necessary to ensure that residents are aware of the outcomes of consultation and the actions the authority is taking as a result. Consultation is key to informing communications about specific themes or target areas, increasing awareness, encouraging engagement and commitment and potentially changing behaviours.

3. Links to strategies

The Communications Strategy links to a number of other key Council and Community Partnership strategies, including:

- Community Strategy
- Corporate Strategy
- Framework for Community Consultation and Engagement
- Emergency Plan/Emergency Media Plan.

4. What excellent communications looks like – where we want to be

The Communications Strategy builds on the Council's existing press and public relations base with the aim of establishing a strong communications service that has proactive and strategic communications at its core. Ultimately its aim is to develop granular communications – targeting specific issues to specific groups.

This strategy underpins the authority's prime value of putting residents first and plays a key part in the delivery of:

- communications as a key part of every project and/or service development
- targeted two-way communications that are campaign focused but recognise that the Council has good stories to tell outside designated campaigns
- a good reputation and strong, clear Council brand (i.e. one brand, not many), challenging negative perceptions wherever they arise
- enhanced partnerships
- a fully-informed and engaged workforce

- high and rising resident and staff satisfaction
- vital intelligence links (for members and senior managers)
- value for money
- good media relations at both local and national level.

5. How we will get there

The overarching aim of this Communications Strategy is to review and develop current methods of communications, introduce new methods where appropriate and measure impact. This will ensure communications methods meet and enhance the Council's overarching commitment to 'residents first' in everything we do.

This will mean that:

- all residents, partners and organisations involved with the Council in the delivery of services will have a clear, consistent and positive perception of the Council's values, services and achievements
- communications messages will be devised, tailored and targeted at specific audience sectors and play a major part in achieving the above
- communications will support consultation and, in turn, be informed by the views expressed through consultation (the consultation-communication-consultation cycle). This is particularly relevant in relation to NI14, which aims to reduce 'avoidable contact' between the community and local authorities – getting the message right first time
- measurement and evaluation will be an integral part of all communication activity.

Good communications will:

- be clear about key messages to be communicated
- help to deliver member/corporate priorities
- help to fulfil the Council's new statutory Duty to Involve (from 1 April 2009)
- ensure all corporate communications are of a high standard and are effective
- develop a clear brand across the organisation, including publications, livery, presentation slides, email formats, letters and other forms of communication, under one Council logo
- set out the principles that underpin all communications including press, web, email, letter, presentation template, consultation exercises, PR, staff etc
- identify the most effective methods of communicating with residents, partners and stakeholders
- work effectively with partner organisations through the Community Partnership
- work effectively with the media
- co-ordinate communications activity across the Council with accepted strategic communications objectives
- help the organisation develop core values which will resonate with staff and residents alike
- identify an action plan and methods of monitoring performance/effectiveness.

This strategy promotes an approach that will ensure communications is considered an integral part of every service/project and an aid to the Council's policy of transparency and openness. It will build on what is good already and help foster close co-operation with the Community Partnership, the voluntary sector and other organisations (for example through the Older People's Forum, Youth Forum etc) to identify areas where joint communication would be appropriate, effective and productive.

6. Communications principles

- **Residents first**

Putting borough residents and customers at the heart of everything we do.

- **Open and honest**

Giving honest, open and evidence-based messages and be open to debate and questions.

- **Timely and relevant**

Communicating proactively with our audiences with relevant targeted messages – the right message to the right people at the right time.

- **Accessible for all**

Offering an appropriate choice of communications methods to help ensure that no-one in our community is disadvantaged.

- **Feedback**

Facilitating two-way communications and encouraging participation and feedback.

- **Listening**

Proactively seeking opinions, acknowledging them and responding quickly, helpfully, honestly and consistently.

- **Value for money**

Making the best possible use of resources and budgets by working with colleagues and partners to share best practice.

7. Target audiences

It is essential to identify all of the relevant target audiences the Council communicates with to deliver relevant messages in the most appropriate ways so that they have the opportunity to be informed, engaged and feed back their views. Each individual will have different needs and expectations so it is important to use as many channels of communications as appropriate to reach as many people as possible within the target group.

Target audiences will change with each campaign or piece of communications but main audiences will include:

- Residents first (profile segmented where required)
- Elected members
- Partner organisations
- Voluntary/community organisations
- MPs, MEPs and opinion formers
- Local interest groups
- National/regional government and government agencies
- Other local authorities
- Businesses
- Public outside the Royal Borough, including neighbouring local authorities
- Schools
- Council staff
- Media – local, national and technical/professional.

The contact with audiences will change, depending on the key messages and the objectives of the communications being undertaken.

8. Channels of communication

The Council has many established proactive means of communicating with its target audiences, including:

- Around the Royal Borough – distributed to more than 61,000 households four times a year and available in libraries, Council offices, leisure centres, first stop shops and on the Council's website
- Website – a continually developing communications tool, particularly for 'self-service' residents as increasingly people turn to the web as a primary source of information and transactional help; communications will continue to support the quality of content and help promote industry best practice to ensure good use of the site for communicating with residents
- News releases – appropriately targeted to local, national and professional media
- A-Z of services – published annually in July and distributed to households and also via Council offices, libraries, leisure centres and first stop shops
- Borough Guide – published every three years and targeted at new residents, visitors etc
- Leaflets and brochures, prepared as required
- Targeted distribution channels for special campaigns, e.g. geographically directed distribution for area-based initiatives; targeted special interest groups; social demographic segmentation etc

While these will continue to have value, the communications strategy enables the adoption of other modern methods of e-communications and social media sites, such as:

- **You Tube** – video recording/editing equipment and associated staff training opens the door to new opportunities to interact with audiences and new markets
- **Texting** – identifying ways in which SMS texting can be used to reach target audiences, particularly young people
- **Blogs** – researching how blogs – now well established communications methods – can be utilised to enhance Council contact and interaction with its residents
- **Telecasting of Council meetings** – exploring as a potential way of engaging residents in Council work and the democratic process.

All of these channels need to be harnessed in appropriate and co-ordinated ways through a social media policy that will support targeted proactive campaigns to ensure that messages get to the right people, at the right time and in the right ways.

This Communications Strategy proposes the development of a template to be used across the organisation that sets out various elements of a campaign, e.g. channels of communications, target audiences, activity, lead officer/potential achievements/outcomes.

9. Accessible for all

Communications issued by the Royal Borough must, wherever appropriate, be inclusive for all sectors of our community, including 'easy-to-overlook' and potentially socially excluded groups so that they are not disadvantaged or denied a valuable voice in the development of Council policies and services. Proper consideration will be given to communications needs, including making alternative language and formats available on request.

10. Media relations

The media plays a strong role in shaping people's perceptions of the Council. The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) reports that the majority of people get most of their information about councils from the media, particularly local press – so informed reporting is vital.

This Communications Strategy recognises the significant influence that the media has on the perceptions of our residents and customers and seeks to:

- build on the existing good relations between the Royal Borough and the local media
- forge new relations with the national media to continue to gain wider recognition of the Council's innovation and success
- liaise with professional media so that Council initiatives and achievements are promoted to other professionals and the Royal Borough is recognised as a local authority leader.

All media activity employed by the Royal Borough should:

- adhere to the National Code of Local Government Publicity, currently under review.
- Comply with the Council's own agreed Media Protocol.

11. Branding/reputation

Successful organisations have a single external identity.

The Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign underlines the importance of consistent branding across services to raise awareness and satisfaction within the community about the many different services provided by their local authority.

Clear, singular branding must be adopted wherever possible across the organisation so that the public understands the Council is not just associated with 'bad news' such as bills and parking tickets.

The Council brand should be perceived as a 'purveyor' of quality goods and services that local people respect and use on a regular basis.

Council buildings open to the public should present a uniform appearance so that they are easily recognisable – an approach in keeping with major successful business organisations wishing to:

- present an organised and efficient public face
- inspire confidence
- attract customers.

Preliminary work on the guidance for the Council's corporate image and identity logo is already underway so that outward facing communications will be co-ordinated and uniform.

12. Role of elected members

Members have a significant role in the development of effective Council communications through their detailed working knowledge of their wards and residents.

Through regular meetings, surgeries and casework councillors are in a unique position to further Council communications and channel valuable local feedback about services for their continued improvement and development. This information can also inform communications practice, helping to identify issues, target audiences and appropriate channels of contact.

13. Alignment with internal communications

Gaining the enthusiastic participation of the Royal Borough's employees is crucial to the future health of our organisation. Creating a culture of robust two-way communications is key to forging good employer-employee relations. It is also important to use internal communications as a way of recognising and rewarding teams and individual employees for their commitment and hard work.

Most importantly, internal communications can reinforce the culture of the Council and the elements that make it a good organisation to work for – essential for recruitment and retention of staff

This strategy will build on existing good practice and drive forward new ways of engaging with staff to ensure they are educated and informed about – and involved in – everything the organisation does. This could play a significant part in encouraging staff to be natural ambassadors for the Council, promoting services, articulating key messages and spreading the perception of the Council as a great place to work and an organisation that really does put residents first. An enthusiastic and motivated workforce is one of the best 'advertisements' for the Council.

Internal communications priorities include:

- Establishing/building on existing open and accessible channels of communication, e.g. face-to-face, team briefings, cascade from CMT, Talking Point, Chatback
- Using the staff survey and other attitude surveys to inform internal communications
- Informing and engaging staff so that they feel valued, supported and included
- fostering an improvement in morale
- Securing commitment to Council objectives
- Stimulating contribution
- Encouraging positive involvement
- Motivating staff to influence the delivery of better services for customers and to be effective and enthusiastic ambassadors for the Council.

Every member of staff has the potential to bring about good interaction/communication with residents and customers and this strategy advocates:

1. Establishing communication 'champions' in each directorate/service
2. Setting up a cross-organisation communications group to meet regularly and help drive forward the communications agenda, measure success and help identify areas for improvement
3. Identifying potential need for facilitative communication techniques for managers to enhance the communication-feedback-communication cycle.

14. Measuring the impact of communications activity

Relevant feedback mechanisms will be used to judge the success of campaigns and the progress of the overall strategy, i.e. the annual residents' survey.

15. Resources

Renewed focus on both external and internal communications excellence as a key strategic element of the Council's developing success story will mean increasing – and different – demands on the Communications Team.

The team has already moved away from its press office roots to embrace wider communications functions and staff are keen to develop their remit across the organisation. Training, development and functional issues for the team will be explored to ensure the effective implementation and delivery of the Communications Strategy.

16. Action plan

The Communications Strategy will be a flexible working document, refreshed on an annual basis but capable of incorporating new elements at any stage and being amended in light of new information gained from consultations in the future.

