

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the heart of everything we do. Not only is it key to strengthening links with local people, service users, partner organisations and staff, it is crucial to ensuring we deliver our vision and priorities.

We are committed to providing high quality, planned and sustained corporate communications. But good and clear communication is the responsibility of everyone employed by the county council.

We have invested in effective channels to communicate complex, sensitive and statutory information. These include an award-winning mix of corporate publications, promotional campaigns, website and media relations activity. We use them to deliver our messages to local people, our employees, partner organisations and special interest groups.

It's vital, that we talk, listen and respond to local people's needs - shaping services when necessary and our messages so everyone is informed and empowered. We try to take every opportunity for people to tell us what they think. And we change things when we get it wrong.

Good quality internal communications is crucial. We value the contribution made by each of our employees. We're committed to making sure they are well informed so they understand our key priority – to improve life for local people. And we actively seek their ideas and views on how we can improve services and become an even better employer.

Our communication strategy is intended to provide a consistent approach to what we say, how and when we say it. In addition, it helps us to set a clear direction for communications and highlight the importance we place on good communication. At the same time it aims to:

- Protect and enhance the authority's reputation and ensure high quality communications are an integral part of the work of all staff
- Identify communication as a priority activity for the council and ensure it is reflected in service plans throughout the organisation
- Provide a focus and sense of direction for all council communication activity in line with our core values
- Prevent confusion and help ensure the council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity
- Ensure effective two-way communication with all our key stakeholders
- Improve access to and information about the county council's services - including hard to reach groups
- Establish a framework for clear, timely and appropriate communication for all employees.

Communication is not an afterthought at Derbyshire County Council – it plays a vital role in everything we do.

SECTION ONE: THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

KEY PRINCIPLES

- We recognise that good quality communication is essential for the effective delivery of our services
- We are keen to be as transparent, open and accountable as possible
- We will ensure information is shared, accessible and meets equality standards
- All our communication - spoken, written and electronic - will:
 - Be honest, accurate, timely and up-to-date
 - Be clear, using plain English and easily understood
 - Be consistent and suitable for the audience - including hard to reach groups
 - Meet the corporate style and be clearly identified with Derbyshire County Council
- We will monitor and measure our effectiveness in communicating
- We will ensure that our work complies with relevant legal requirements and conforms to the Code of Conduct on local government publicity.

KEY AIMS

- To ensure the fullest take up of services and benefits by local people
- To create a better understanding between the authority and its various audiences
- To deliver key messages about the council and its services making full use of all appropriate channels of communication.
- To provide open access to information about the council and the full range of council services and activities
- To support councillors in their work as elected representatives
- To improve accountability by ensuring accurate, timely and accessible information is easily available to the public - including hard to reach groups
- To monitor public perception and views about current and future services
- To help staff deliver services effectively, efficiently and to the best of their ability

KEY MESSAGES

It is vital to the organisation that we all know why Derbyshire County Council exists and what it is trying to achieve. The Council Plan identifies the council's vision:

"To improve life for local people by delivering high quality services"

To deliver this agenda, the council has a set of 9 identified goals:

- **To listen to local people and deliver high quality, value for money services**
- **To help all children learn, succeed and live happily and healthily**
- **To improve the health of local people and help them live independently**
- **To improve our roads and provide good public transport**
- **To look after Derbyshire and create environmentally friendly communities**
- **To strengthen the local economy and tackle poverty in our communities**
- **To create safer communities and tackle antisocial behaviour**
- **To improve opportunities for leisure, learning and culture**
- **To promote Derbyshire as a great place to live, work and visit**

RESOURCES

Resources will be made available to create effective two-way communication between the authority and all its audiences, so that we can inform and listen to the views of local people, local businesses, partner organisations and agencies and our employees.

KEY RESPONSIBILITY FOR DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

- **Senior management team**

Communication is a priority activity for the council's senior management team (the Chief Executive and chief officers). The team will identify external and internal communication issues and opportunities as an integral part of individual service plans.

The team will communicate key corporate decisions to their divisional and section heads and other staff accurately, clearly and speedily so they can be shared with all employees as appropriate.

- **Public Relations Division**

Day to day management of the authority's communication function is a key responsibility of the Public Relations Division of the Chief Executive's Office. However, all the authority's stakeholders share the responsibility to communicate effectively. The division is responsible for leading on all corporate communication issues and on media relations. In addition, the division can advise services about best practice and provide appropriate support.

- **Divisional managers/Section heads/Team leaders**

Divisional managers, section heads and team leaders all have responsibility for creating awareness of and implementing the communications strategy among their teams. They also have responsibility for establishing two-way channels of communication with all members of their teams. This will ensure employees are aware of key council and service decisions and, importantly, provide opportunities for feedback from employees to the senior management team.

- **All employees**

Each and every council employee has some responsibility for communicating with the public. It is important that our key principles for communication are followed so that accurate, honest, appropriate and timely information flows openly from the organisation at all levels. It is also vital that our employees are kept well informed about the council's key themes, targets and performance.

- **Elected members**

The county council's politically elected representatives are a vital channel of communication between the authority and local communities throughout Derbyshire. Elected every four years, they set the council's policies and spending priorities and are accountable for them. They hold regular surgeries in their council ward to provide local people with the opportunity to raise issues of concern. As well as being informed about events and services in their local ward, members also need to be kept up-to-date with major corporate projects/events/issues which could affect council tax payers.

MEDIA CONTACT POLICY

All media enquiries - made to officers in their professional capacity - should be referred immediately to the council's press and public relations officers. The only exception is when the answer to a question is contained in factual published information which would normally be available to the press and public.

The decision to issue a comment, press release, statement, or grant an interview will be taken by press and public relations officers after consulting the relevant chief officer (or other officer with delegated authority) and Cabinet member.

Officers of the authority should not agree to speak as a representative of the council at public meetings without the approval of the appropriate chief officer. The exception to this rule applies to officers who, as members of professional bodies, are asked to speak at meetings or conferences on technical issues associated with their profession.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Strategic Aim: To create a better understanding between the authority and the people it serves.

Key Principles:

- We will ensure open, honest and clear channels of external communication are the common standard throughout the council
- We will reflect the “human face” of the county council and we will:
 - Explain the reasons for the council's actions
 - Admit and apologise for any mistakes by the council
 - Respond to constructive criticism.
- We recognise the value of the media as partners in communicating information to the public and will be proactive in our dealings with them. We will:
 - Never lie
 - Never knowingly mislead.
- We will comply with the law and codes of practice surrounding local government publicity.
- We can not promote the views or policies of individual political parties.

Key Objectives:

- To increase awareness of and uptake of county council services
- To improve accountability by ensuring accurate, timely and accessible information is easily available to the public - including hard to reach groups
- To actively promote Derbyshire County Council as an "excellent" authority and provider of high quality local services
- To secure wide coverage of council decisions and activities in the local, national and specialist media
- To ensure Derbyshire County Council has a strong and coherent identity
- To create a better understanding of the county council's policies, services and achievements
- To identify and develop new and creative communication opportunities
- To ensure Derbyshire contributes to the national local government agenda and secures greater influence at local, regional and national levels.

Key measures

To ensure we are delivering good quality, efficient and effective communications, we monitor and question everything we do by:

- Including feedback opportunities in all corporate campaigns and publications
- Regular media monitoring and analysis of coverage and enquiries
- Commissioning independent media analysis
- Carrying out annual client satisfaction surveys with key stakeholders
- Tracking public opinion through MORI surveys, the Derbyshire Citizen Panel and the Youth Forum
- Holding regular employee attitude surveys

Corporate external communication tools

- **Derbyshire Insight** - is a key channel of communication between the county council and the people it serves. It is written and produced by staff in the public relations division and is circulated on a quarterly basis to the Derbyshire's 280,000 households. The full colour

tabloid newspaper balances news and features about the authority with useful contact numbers and advice.

- **www.derbyshire.gov.uk** - is the county council's corporate website and is an important channel of communication with local people. The site now has more than 3,000 pages and is constantly being expanded. An external contractor maintains, hosts and updates the site on a daily basis and monitors public usage. The public relations team:
 - Manages the website contract
 - Manages and edits the website content
 - Draws up and implements the website development programme
 - Ensures responses are made to all website email communications from the public.Service departments are responsible for ensuring the content of their pages is up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive.
- **Call Derbyshire** - Derbyshire County Council's contact centre opened on 2 January 2001. Initially, the call centre provided the public with 'A - Z' type service information and a direct response to straightforward enquiries from Derbyshire people. The service currently manages a portfolio of 35 events and a massive expansion and development programme is underway to:
 - Provide a readily identifiable 'one stop' point of contact for the public
 - Provide a customer-focused approach and improved quality of service
 - Improve the speed of response to calls
 - Extend the hours of access to the council's services
 - Provide a uniform local rate charge to people telephoning the call centre
 - Develop with other councils a joined up contact point for all enquiries
- **Governor Newsletter** - Derbyshire school governors have a key role in the running of the county's 425 schools. The authority is keen to offer good quality advice, news and information to help them in their task. The 12-page full colour newsletter is posted to the home addresses of more than 5,000 school governors each term. The content ranges from corporate news stories and individual school successes to analysis of recent publications and a quick guide to new legislation affecting their role.
- **b_line Magazine** - is a 32-page magazine for b_line student travel and discount card holders. 60,000 copies are distributed through the county's secondary schools to approximately 90% of Derbyshire's young people aged between 11 and 18 years of age. The publication - produced by the Public Relations Division - includes news and information about relevant council services, competitions, the latest businesses to join the b_line discount scheme and the celebrities supporting the scheme.
- **Derbyshire Gold magazine and website** - free 36-page magazine for all Gold Card holders – some 220,000 older people and disabled people. Magazine published twice yearly and 65,000 made available through libraries.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Strategic aim: To improve and maintain strong two-way communication throughout Derbyshire County Council that encourages team work, trust and loyalty.

Key Principles:

- We will ensure all employees are informed of issues or changes that might affect them
- We will consult employees through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practices and procedures
- We will listen to ideas and opportunities raised by employees at all levels of the organisation
- We will support managers and help raise communication skills across the county council
- We will celebrate and encourage the sharing of good practice

Key Objectives

- To improve employee understanding and commitment to the council's vision and key themes
- To improve and create effective and systematic channels of internal communication
- To raise the level of communication skills across the authority
- To involve employees in the improvement of their own and other council services
- To develop more opportunities for staff feedback
- To recognise, appreciate and embrace the contribution staff can make in shaping council policies and in delivering high quality services
- To create an environment of trust, honesty and openness at and between all levels of the organisation

Key measures

- Regular employee attitude surveys - all staff, divisional and team surveys
- Employee panel and focus groups
- Monitoring quality of communication and understanding through liP and IDRs
- Usage of Dnet
- Workforce readership survey
- Employee suggestion scheme
- Levels of absenteeism, staff turnover, vacancies and response to recruitment advertising

Corporate internal communication tools

- **Workforce**

Derbyshire County Council's "Workforce" newspaper has been published on a monthly basis since 1989. It is the council's key internal communication tool and is written by the authority's public relations team. It has a print run of 18,500 and is distributed to all council offices, establishments and schools. The eight-page tabloid newspaper covers issues ranging from the Council Plan and service and management priorities to individual employee successes and competitions.

- **DNet**

Currently accessible to around 6,500 council employees. It includes large amounts of information, reports, key publications, news, telephone directories and many other features. It

can provide a fast, cost effective way of reaching employees at their desks but is limited to those who have use of the council's computer network.

- **Clean Talk**

Produced termly for the council's 1800 cleaning and caretaking staff. A four-page newsletter, It includes technical information and best practise to help them in their jobs. It is also used to report training success and training that is available.

- **Home Front**

A quarterly four-page newsletter circulated to 5,000 homes helps and staff working in the council's homes for older people

- **Change for Children**

Regular newsletter designed to explain changes in the Children Act. Ten thousand copies produced primarily for county council and partner agency staff working with children.

- **Service Development Diary**

Circulated to all council members and chief officers providing listings of council events, projects and scheme. It includes dates, times and locations as well as budgets and contacts for further information.

- **Other**

- **Pay slip inserts/messages**
- **Email**
- **Notice boards**

CONSULTATION

Strategic aim: To create and develop opportunities to effectively engage the public, our partners and staff to inform and direct the way we deliver services in our communities

Key principles:

- We will consult internally and externally where appropriate
- We will identify and tailor consultation exercises so that all relevant groups/individuals including "hard to reach groups" can take part
- We will communicate the purpose and scope of each consultation exercise and the reasons for it
- We will only consult on those issues or activities over which the council is responsible for delivering
- We will use plain English, avoid jargon and offer alternative formats such as braille, large print, tape and minority languages when needed
- We will, wherever possible, give sufficient time to respond to our consultation exercises
- We will give clear, accurate and prompt feedback when the overall results of the consultation are known and the actions or decisions taken
- We will consult in partnership with other local organisations where appropriate
- We will use the results of all consultation exercises to inform political and managerial decision making and policy review.

Key Objectives:

- To monitor the council's progress against its vision and key themes

- To identify issues that are important to local people, partners and staff
- To target individuals and key groups of service users to establish satisfaction levels
- To direct changes to services and to service delivery
- To prioritise county council activity and make the best use of resources
- To encourage participation and dialogue between the county council and its stakeholders.
- To secure benchmarking information to measure performance against other local authorities

Key measures

- The number and types of consultations carried out
- Response levels to individual consultation exercises
- Policy changes resulting from consultation exercises
- Performance comparisons with other local authorities

Corporate consultation tools

- **The Derbyshire Citizens' Panel** - is made up of 3,000 Derbyshire residents who broadly represent the make-up of the adult population of the county. It's a joint venture between the county council, the police and each of the district councils. Up to six surveys are sent to panel members each year covering a range of issues and proposals. Examples include: crime and safety, quality of life, cultural strategy and nursing home provision.
- **MORI tracking survey** - carried out on behalf of the authority every three years. Using a representative quota sample, MORI researchers ask residents a series of questions about the council, its services and the county as a place to live. The results measure satisfaction levels and priorities for current and future service provision.
- **Employee Attitude Survey** - is held every two years with a questionnaire for all county council employees. The aim is to monitor satisfaction levels and identify priority areas for action. Questions cover the council as an employer, job satisfaction, training and development, management style, communication and customer service. The questionnaire are confidential and are independently analysed.
- **b_line** - student travel and discount card has access to 54,000 young people aged between 11 and 18 years through the b_line web pages, b_line magazine and b_line email and text alerts. So far young people have been consulted on issues as broad as the six term year, Freerider scheme, library and countryside service usage and services for young people.
- **Other consultation opportunities**
 - **Youth Forum**
 - **Older People's Forum**

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