

REPORT TO FORMARTINE AREA COMMITTEE – 28 June 2016

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

1. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Discuss the content of the report and provide comments for consideration by the Policy & Resources Committee in September 2016.**

2. Background

- 2.1 This report details a new Corporate Communications Strategy for Aberdeenshire Council.
- 2.2 The previous Corporate Communications Strategy covered the period up to 2016. A review of achievements, challenges and developments regarding communications has led to the development of a new strategy to be implemented in September 2016 and to run until 2020.

3. Discussion

- 3.1 The proposed Corporate Communications Strategy is attached to this report at **Appendix 1.**
- 3.2 The main areas of influence in development of the strategy are as follows:
 - i) A focus on a digital shift across Aberdeenshire Council and the upskilling of communications officers to communicate in the digital sphere,
 - ii) Full consultation with the communications and team in order to create a strategy which they can champion,
 - iii) It is essential to ensure that the team are taking part in conversations and promote engagement across our communities,
 - iv) The four pillars of the strategy are digital, engagement, conversations and evaluation, and
 - v) It is paramount that the team focus on ensuring that any and all communications are both engaging and can be evaluated.

3.3 Consultation with each of the six Area Committees is taking place, before this is considered by Policy and Resources in September 2016.

3.4 The Head of Finance and the Head of Legal and Governance have been consulted, their comments noted, and these will be reflected in the amended draft version which will go to the Policy and Resources committee in September 2016.

4. Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted for the Corporate Communications Strategy and is attached at **Appendix 2**.

4.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.3 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

Ritchie Johnson
Director of Business Services

Report prepared by Sarah Rochester, Service Manager, Communications and Marketing
May 2016

Communications strategy

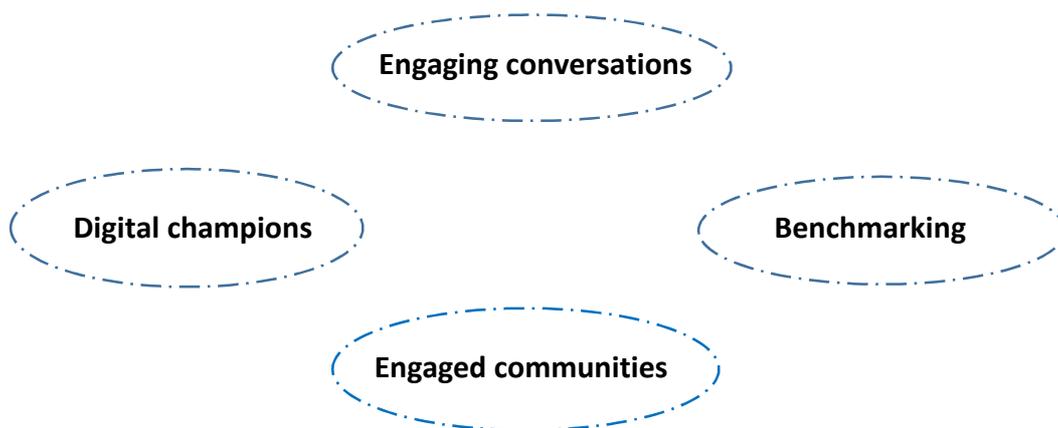
2016

MISSION STATEMENT

Aberdeenshire Council communications team is constantly working to deliver the most engaging, concise and informative communications. We want to build on the dialogue we have achieved to date and maximise our conversations with a variety of audiences on the latest platforms with the latest digital technology.

Conversations not “stuff”

We want to support the delivery of council objectives by delivering on these four headlines:



Engaging conversations

We will embed the team in conversations taking place around Aberdeenshire.

We will switch the focus from SOS communications (“Sending out Stuff”) and grab opportunities to take part in the conversation wherever it is happening. We will also enable others to do the same.

Digital platforms will be essential to allow us to do this. We will make better use of video and audio communications to make sure our message is as accessible as possible.

One of the most important tools to help us develop engaging conversations will be by working with our own staff. As such we will ensure that everyone is engaged with council

priorities through communications directly through their service line. We will engage our staff in a number of ways, including face-to-face communications, empowering managers and directors to deliver their own messages with confidence and authority.

Digital champions

We will ensure our team are front and centre of the digital revolution, be that in content development or new channel identification, in line with where our audiences actually are. This will align us much better with the council's digital strategy and make sure we are working in partnership.

We will make video and imagery a focus for staff and community engagement, as well as audio.

It is important to maintain a programme of digital workshops for the communications team and the wider council to ensure we remain at the forefront of new developments

A closer partnership will be forged with the Digital Aberdeenshire Group to promote digital developments for staff and communities alike.

Our web presence will be developed to create a platform on which we can better engage with the media.

Benchmarking

We will develop new tools for evaluating the contribution our team make to the wider council. This will be at an initial project level through the development of key measurables attached to each job, but it will result in an annual 'Communications report' which will outline our successes and communicate them fully.

Benchmarking our work externally on an annual basis will be essential to our measuring our success.

We will continue to develop and grow the reputation tracker to ensure we have real understanding of the wider council's reputation within the community and to track how our most popular communications channels compliment that reputation.

We will adopt a platform on which we can better record our social media successes, with tangible outputs which can be communicated.

We will monitor trends to track our digital presence against industry best-practice.

Engaged communities

Every project we work on will be undertaken against the backdrop of equality.

We will maximise and invest in the number of channels at our disposal on which to start a conversation to prevent our message being isolated in a single channel.

Our team will support projects which seek to help communities to be part of our direction-setting through our survey programme and our empowerment opportunities.

We will develop e-learning and face-to-face communications workshops, open across the organisation, to engage teams in effective internal communications.

We will support elected members by sharing important messages and have a dialogue on ward specific messages into which we can contribute.

Direction of travel

- We will upskill the council to help everyone deliver effective communications.
- We will embrace new technology and make it work for us.
- We will engage in conversations not “SOS”.

Supporting information

Our strategy is supported by a number of guidance documents. These provide information on processes and best practice.

The most important supporting document is our '*Communications handbook*'. This is a guide to what we do, how we do it, how we will empower services. It also includes regularly updated details about the content of our annual team plan.

Other supporting information includes:

- Media protocol
- Social media policy
- Self Service communications toolkit
- Digital style guide (advice on writing for the corporate website and Arcadia)
- Royal Ministerial protocol
- Consultation and engagement strategies and tools
- Crisis communications plan
- Invitation protocol
- Internal communications guide and toolkit
- Support to councillors and committees protocol

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity ("activity" is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).	
Service	Business Services
Section	Corporate Communications
Title of the activity etc.	Communications Strategy
Aims of the activity	<p>This EIA relates to the drafting and development of a new Communications Strategy for Aberdeenshire Council. The existing strategy is approaching its end and it is essential to maintain continuity of direction.</p> <p>A new strategy needs to be created every four years to take account of advances in communications technology and ensuring that communications continue to meet the needs of our residents and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The new strategy will help the Corporate Communications Team to continue to ensure people feel informed and engaged in the work of Aberdeenshire Council.</p> <p>We will do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with services to communicate key messages about service delivery • Working with senior management to promote the strategic direction of the council • Ensuring communications help protect the reputation of Aberdeenshire Council • Engaging with communities on issues that affect them
Author(s) & Title(s)	Sarah Rochester - Service Manager, Communications and Marketing

Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.	
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	The Employee Survey 2014. .
Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.	<p>Working group with all members of communications team.</p> <p>Consultation with senior management through service leadership team meetings.</p> <p>Consultation with area committees from May through until August 2016</p> <p>Consultation and request for approval from Policy and Resources Committee (September 2016)</p>
External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils).	<p>There is not an identified need to engage publicly on this strategy. This strategy supports the work of service as they communicate key messages externally. Where there are communications regarding sensitive matters (e.g. funding reductions, changes in service delivery) the service involved would be expected to consider consultation as part of its own EIA.</p>

External data (census, available statistics).	<p>Customer satisfaction levels are monitored as part of a monthly reputation tracker, including the level of satisfaction with the delivery of council services.</p> <p>The Corporate Communications Team continually monitors media approaches and publications, and interactions via social media.</p>
Other (general information as appropriate).	<p>Services retain responsibility for developing a strategic approach to specific projects. Communications plans will be developed by the communications team to support this and will be assessed along with service strategies.</p>

Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.

Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?	<p>This is a strategic document that looks at the overall approach to communications. Any gaps would be identified by services when project strategies and communications plans are developed in partnership.</p>
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Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.

What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.	Measures:	Timescale:
	N/A (see above)	

Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger			Yes	
Age – Older	Yes	Yes		
Disability	Yes			
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)			Yes	
Religion or Belief			Yes	
Gender – male/female			Yes	
Pregnancy and maternity			Yes	

Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/ Gay/Bisexual)			Yes	
Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)			Yes	
Marriage and Civil Partnership			Yes	

Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.	The communications team leads a dedicated communications plan to support a strategy relating to health and well-being services for older people. This involves campaigns and promotion relating to services for older people.	Much of the content of this strategy relies upon digital communications, a medium in which not many of the older generation are engaged, or as engaged as the younger generations.
	Better use of audio clips online will make much of our news content more accessible to those in our community with visual impairments.	

Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?	
If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?	

Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?		
	Mitigating Steps	Timescale
These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.	The strategy has been written to ensure that no one single form of communication is used to relay a message. This ensures that those less digitally engaged should continue to have access to information through channels which they choose to consume.	

Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?	
These should be included in the action plan.	These will be identified as part of the development of project-based communications plans.

Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?
This strategy will support the communications team in the development of project-based communications plans designed to increase awareness and opportunities among affected groups. This should, once implemented, ensure that communications are as inclusive as possible across all groups.

Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place?	
These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).	The overall strategy will not change, but equality considerations will be considered as part of the development of project-based communications plans with services. This strategy can be amended in the event of major changes to equalities legislation.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?	
Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1 No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	The Communications Strategy is an over-arching document to guide how the council communicates with all of its audiences. As this remit is so broad, it is more appropriate to consider any negative or positive impacts as and when the communications team develops communications plans for individual, services-led projects.
	2 Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	The strategy has been written to ensure that no one single form of communication is used to relay a message. This ensures that those less digitally engaged should continue to have access to information through channels which they choose to consume.
	3 The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen

* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

The mitigating steps are enough to ensure that no inequality is reflected in our day-to-day work.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.

Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Business Services, Customer Communication and Improvement, Corporate Communications.	
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Corporate Communications Strategy	
	3) Authors: I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: Sarah Rochester Position: Communications Manager Date: 31.3 2016 Signature:	Name: Lynne Gravener Position: Consultation and Engagement Officer Date: 31.3.2016 Signature:
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Head of Customer Communication and Improvement Kate Bond Date: 31/03/2016	
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: Ritchie Johnston Position: Director of Business Services Date:	Name: Position: Date:
	6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee.	Date:	
7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: eia@abdnshire	Date:		
(Equalities team to complete) Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO			Date:

Action Plan						
Action	Start	Complete	Lead Officer	Expected Outcome	Resource Implications	
Consultation with Head of Customer Communication and Improvement	April 2016	April 2016	Sarah Rochester	Approval of draft EIA document	None	
Communications strategy and supporting report to be considered by senior management team	April 2016	June 2016	Sarah Rochester	Support given for strategy consultation with area committees	None	
Strategy consultation to be undertaken with area committees	June 2016	August 2016	Sarah Rochester	Area committees to provide feedback on draft strategy for consideration before presentation to Policy and Resources Committee	Timetable of attendance at area committees will be followed	
Strategy consultation to be undertaken with Policy and Resources Committee	September 2016	September 2016	Sarah Rochester	Approval for new communications strategy, subject to any requests for amendments	None	
Implementation of strategy	September 2016	ongoing	Sarah Rochester	Team will follow team plan for new strategy	None	