SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Draft 1
September 2004

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FOREWORD

If we are to improve the quality of life for the people of Sedgefield Borough we must provide a broad range of relevant and excellent services to all our stakeholders and high standards should become the norm. Communication with and between employees is essential if we are to achieve this aim.

I believe we have a culture at Sedgefield where we are constantly striving to improve and provide better services to the people of the Borough. Strategies, plans, policies and performance indicators are in abundance and all have their role to play. They lay the foundations on which our quality services are built, but they need to be understood by our employees, in ways that are meaningful and with which employees feel comfortable.

As such, communication is an essential part of good management that helps achieve effective delivery of services. This strategy will help us through a planned programme of change over the coming years and will contribute significantly to our aim of service excellence.

Norman Vaulks, Chief Executive

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The Council believes that communicating effectively with employees and involving them through comment and feedback is essential to achieving its ambitions, strengthen performance and secure long-term success. This strategy is internally focused and underpins the aims of the Corporate Plan and therefore, by its nature will need to be regularly reviewed and refined as the Council's corporate planning framework develops.

In addition to this strategy the Council is also developing:

- ❑ A strategy for communicating with elected members (prepared by Democratic Services)
- ❑ A strategy for consulting with employees (prepared by Human Resources)
- ❑ An external marketing/PR strategy (prepared by Democratic Services)
- ❑ An external consultation strategy (prepared by Strategy and Regeneration)

The Information and Consultation Directive comes into force in April 2005 and gives employees a right to be:

- ❑ informed about the Council's economic situation
- ❑ informed and consulted about employment prospects
- ❑ informed and consulted about decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or contractual relations, including redundancies and transfers.

Additionally, the Information and Consultation Directive will give employees in the UK new rights to information and consultation. Currently, employee rights are limited to consultation about collective redundancies, transfers of undertakings ("TUPE"), and health and safety related matters. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) will consult widely about implementation in the UK and when the final text is adopted the Council will amend this strategy as required.

This strategy makes moves towards ensuring the 'informing' aspects of the Directive are met. The 'consultation' aspects of the Directive will be covered by a separate strategy for employee consultation (both union and non-union).

2.   CURRENT SITUATION

In 2003 the Council underwent four corporate external assessments – the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) Fit for Purpose Assessment, the SOLACE Peer Challenge, Investors in People (IiP) and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Communication was identified as an area in need of improvement in all assessments (Appendix 1) and actions have been included in the relevant emerging action/improvement plans to address this.

The annual employee satisfaction survey is a further important source of information The findings of this survey relevant to communication (Appendix 2) have also been reflected in this strategy.

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In summary, the positive aspects of internal communication are:

- communication between employees and line managers is generally considered to be effective
- section meetings are held on a regular basis and staff are encouraged to contribute views
- communications within teams are effective
- staff are generally clear about their role and how this impacts on the business plan
- departmental newsletters are effective

The main criticisms of staff are that:

- not everyone receives important information at the same time
- staff are not kept up to date with changes as they happen
- successes are not celebrated or praised
- achievements are not recognised
- communication with front-line staff requires improvement, particularly with on-site workers
- more could be done to harness enthusiasm

3.   AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

Effective internal communication is critical to improved performance management and successful change management. To ensure the strengths identified by the IiP reassessment and the satisfaction survey are built upon, and the areas for improvement recommended by SOLACE, I&DeA and CPA are addressed, the following aims of this strategy are to:

- Ensure a commitment to two-way communication with all staff, particularly those at the 'front line'
- Develop and maintain a culture of effective communication

To achieve this the Council will:

- Communicate with staff in a planned and consistent manner in accordance with the Communication Guidelines at Appendix 3 and the corporate Communication Framework at Appendices 4 and 5.
- Produce information that is relevant, easily understood and timely
- Monitor effectiveness of communication, identify and share best practice and therefore continuously improve communication channels/techniques.

4.   CORPORATE COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

To ensure a consistent corporate approach to communication with employees, it is important that all departments of the Council operate to an agreed corporate communication framework. This should be programmed into the activities of each department. The following framework has been developed by building on the positive aspects of internal communication and will ensure an effective and consistent framework for two-way communication is in place:

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4.1   DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK (SEE APPENDIX 4)

These are the channels that are used to inform, explain, prompt action, provide a sense of direction and monitor performance. They are particularly important in a time of change. Over 80% of staff consider communication arrangements with their line manager to be effective. The following framework builds on existing good practice with a particular view to improving procedures for communicating with front-line staff.

4.1.1 **Departmental Performance Meetings** – will be held on a monthly basis between the Director and Heads of Service. The agenda will be determined by the Director. These meetings will be a vehicle for communicating decisions made at a political and management team level and to monitor the performance of the department in relation to Key, Best Value and Local Performance Indicators.

4.1.2 **Manager Briefing Sheet** – will be prepared for Team Leaders/Section Heads by the Head of Service, following the monthly departmental performance meeting. The briefing sheet will be in a corporate standard format and should contain easy to understand summaries of the issues discussed at the departmental performance meeting.   The issues noted on the manager briefing sheet will be explained at Service Performance Meetings but should be written in a format that can be understood without a need for explanation.

4.1.3 **Service Performance Meetings** – will take place on a monthly basis between the Head of Service and the team leaders/section heads for which he/she is responsible. The Manager briefing sheet will be discussed at this meeting to ensure decisions made at Management Team and at political meetings continue to be communicated downwards. In addition, this meeting will be a regular venue for discussing specific service performance.

4.1.4 **Staff Briefing Sheet** – will be prepared for employees by the team leaders/section head, following the monthly service performance meeting. The briefing sheet will be in a corporate standard format and should contain easy to understand and relevant summaries of the issues discussed at the Service Performance Meetings. The staff briefing sheet may be explained at team meetings but should be written in a format that can be understood without a need for explanation.

4.1.5 **Team Meetings** – the communication framework does not specify the frequency or format of team meetings as it is recognised that this is dependent on the nature of the service, size of the team, geographic spread of the team etc. It is the responsibility of team leaders/section heads/supervisors to ensure that the employees for which they are responsible are adequately informed and updated and the way in which they do this must be appropriate to their particular team. Team meetings may be appropriate, however, could be supplemented by other communication methods as set out at Para 4.2.

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4.2   DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION – OTHER TOOLS

There are occasions when it may not be practical to delay communicating information until a programmed meeting can take place, or where it is necessary to supplement normal channels with other methods. On these occasions effective downward communication tools need to be carefully selected and will depend on the nature of the service and the specific requirements of the team. Suggestions include:

Internal newsletters (Grapevine magazine, departmental newsletters, 'one-off' newsletters)
Intranet and emails
Electronic forums

The advantages and disadvantages of communication methods are discussed at Appendix 6.

4.3   UPWARD COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK (SEE APPENDIX 5)

As well as ensuring that effective downward communication channels are in place, it is also important to ensure corporate mechanisms exist for listening to employees' views and suggestions (upwards communications). The following framework has been developed:

4.3.1 **Stage 1** – An employee should normally raise a suggestion, idea or issue informally (either verbally or in writing) with his/her team leader. Alternatively, they may also raise the issue via the following channel(s):

❑   with the departmental Staff Focus Group representative
❑   with the departmental IiP Group representative

These officers may then take appropriate action to deal with the issue. If further debate/discussion is required or if approval at a higher level is needed, the matter will be referred to Stage 2

4.3.2 **Stage 2** - Service Performance Meeting/Staff Focus Group meeting/IiP Group meeting or Joint Shop Stewards meeting)

Emerging issues that cannot be resolved by a team leader will normally be referred to the monthly service performance meeting and discussed with the Head of Service.

Alternatively, if a member of staff has raised the issue via one of the alternative channels outlined at Para 4.3.1 above, it will be discussed at the relevant meeting.

The staff focus group is a new group consisting of a 'diagonal slice' of employees from across the Council. One third of the membership of the group will be refreshed annually. The group is informal in nature and meets as and when required. The HR Section will use this group as a sounding board to inform the development of policy. Items can be placed on the agenda by the

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HR Section, managers, or employees. The staff focus group will also operate a discussion forum on the intranet.

Issues that cannot be approved at this stage may be referred to Stage 3.

Stage 3 -. Emerging issues will only be referred to Stage 3 if they cannot be resolved or if they require approval by a Director. In this case the Director may speak to the individual directly or will discuss the issue at the monthly departmental performance meeting. Occasionally, where an issue is urgent a special meeting may need to be convened. If the issue has corporate implications the Director may also choose to raise it at Management Team or Political levels.

4.3.4   Employee Development Interviews

Where an employee wishes to raise a suggestion/issue relating to their job they also have an opportunity to do this in confidence via the annual/six monthly employee development interview. The interviewer will then determine the most appropriate route to take deal with the issue.

4.4   UPWARD COMMUNICATION – OTHER TOOLS

The above framework provides a mechanism for employees of the Council to raise issues/suggestions and ideas. There are occasions when it may not be practical to use this framework, or where it is necessary to supplement normal channels with other methods. On these occasions effective upward communication tools could include:

Ad-hoc team meetings
Intranet and emails
Electronic forums
'Walking the job'
Employee Satisfaction Surveys

The most appropriate communication method to use will depend on the information/issue which requires communicating. The advantages and disadvantages of some of the numerous methods of communication are discussed at Appendix 6.

4.5   SIDEWAYS COMMUNICATION

Sideways Communication is a term used to describe communication between members of a team/section and/or communication between teams within a Section/Department. The Council's move towards e-government and the increasing availability of technology (CRM) will facilitate improvements in this form of communication.

Customers should receive a consistent standard of service regardless of which department or officer they are dealing with. Customers do not understand the departmental structure of the Council, nor should they be expected to. Once a customer has explained their problem/situation to a member of staff, good

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communication should ensure the matter is passed on speedily and accurately. Effective sideways communication channels should ensure issues can be dealt with in the event of a member of staff being on holiday or absent from work and is the responsibility of employees and managers at all levels. The effectiveness of this form of communication will be measured using customer satisfaction surveys.

5.   **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Managers should be aware that one method of communication is not always appropriate and should choose the method that best suits the specific requirements of the staff within their team.

Special consideration should be given to the following categories of staff:

Shift workers
Part-Time workers
Trainees and Modern Apprentices (young workers)
On-Site workers
Mobile workers
Employees with special needs
Employees from ethnic origin

The advantages and disadvantages of the various communication methods that could be deployed with these staff are discussed at Appendix 6.

6.   **INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES – RESPONSIBILITIES**
       (See Appendix 7 for a Quick Reference Guide to communication
       duties and responsibilities)

6.1   Key duties and responsibilities of the Chief Executive:

- ❑ Ensure that there is an internal communication strategy for communicating with employees
- ❑ Allocate responsibility for the strategy and provide adequate resources and support for its delivery
- ❑ Determine when matters are of such high importance that they justify personal communication either in written form or via 'open forums'.
- ❑ Ensure other members of Management Team have the information they need to be able to inform the staff in their department
- ❑ 'Walk the job' from time to time, to keep in touch with the level of staff motivation, concerns and related work problems
- ❑ Ensure achievements are identified and develop a formal mechanism for recognising achievements of individuals and teams

6.2   Key duties and responsibilities of Directors

- ❑ Ensure that the agreed corporate communication framework for 2-way communication is operating effectively within the department.

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❑ Ensure that lateral communication channels are in place and are operating effectively.
❑ Ensure Heads of Service have responsibility for communication and possess the skills required to communicate effectively.
❑ Determine when matters are of such high importance that they justify personal communication to Heads of Service and/or staff within the department either in written form or via open forums.
❑ 'Walk the job' from time to time, to keep in touch with the level of staff motivation, concerns and related work problems
❑ Hold monthly departmental performance meetings to ensure Heads of Service have the information they need to be able to inform their staff
❑ Operate an 'open door' policy to ensure they keep in touch with the level of staff motivation, concerns and related work problems
❑ Formally identify and recognise achievement and nominate teams/individuals for achievement awards

6.3   Key duties and responsibilities of Heads of Service:

❑ Attend monthly departmental performance meetings
❑ Arrange and chair monthly service performance meetings with team leaders/section heads
❑ Prepare a manager briefing sheet (Standard corporate format) for circulation to team leaders/section heads
❑ Listen to emerging staff concerns via upwards communication channels
❑ Liaise with HR about issues – Heads of Service are likely to be the first person that team leaders will approach for an answer
❑ Take responsibility for keeping staff informed and updated, find answers and ensure team leaders/section heads have the necessary information to answer enquiries they may receive from their staff.
❑ Ensure effective and appropriate lateral communications systems are in place between teams and individuals
❑ Formally recognise and praise achievement

6.4   Key duties and responsibilities of team leaders (generic term used to describe Section Heads, Supervisors etc.)

❑ Attend monthly service performance meeting
❑ Call team meetings as and when required
❑ Prepare a staff briefing sheet (Standard corporate format) for circulation to staff
❑ Listen and respond to emerging staff concerns
❑ Talk to staff about key management decisions
❑ Be clear and consistent about information given to staff.
❑ Take responsibility for keeping staff informed and updated, and regularly disseminate information
❑ Find answers for staff and ensure they have the necessary information to answer enquiries they may receive from the public.
❑ Ensure lateral communications systems are operating effectively between teams and individuals
❑ Recognise and praise achievement as a matter of course

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6.5   Key tasks of HR Section

- ❑ Take the lead in setting up communication arrangements and establish corporate mechanisms for communication channels
- ❑ Ensure that the potential implications of the EU Information and Consultation Directive are taken into account
- ❑ Regularly update staff lists, departures and new appointments
- ❑ Produce a corporate reference guide to internal communication with staff
- ❑ Include training on communication skills in management training and development programmes
- ❑ Monitor the Communication Strategy and report progress to the portfolio holder for Welfare and Communications and to Management Team in accordance with the monitoring arrangements set out at Para 10
- ❑ Ensure important matters are incorporated into the Grapevine newsletter
- ❑ Arrange 'lunch with the leader' sessions for recognising achievement and co-ordinate nominations from Directors

7.   RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

7.1   Both the I&DeA Fit for Purpose Assessment and the IiP reassessment identified that the Council needs to consider ways of ensuring staff at all levels feel valued, and that, in particular the Chief Executive Officer and Directors should consider their involvement in praising achievement.

7.2   This strategy sets out the responsibilities/key tasks of the Chief Executive and Directors outlined at Para 6.1 and 6.2 in relation to recognising achievement, and, to ensure this responsibility is not overlooked, a formal vehicle for praising achievement is to be introduced.

7.3   The Council will hold a regular event to recognise achievement. Detailed criteria and guidelines for the event will be developed by the corporate IiP group. The purpose of the event will be to recognise qualifications attained, projects achieved, major successes, increased performance levels, exemplary attendance levels etc. Nominations for the achievement awards will be accepted from Directors, and staff/teams at all levels will be eligible to apply, providing they comply with the relevant nomination criteria and complete the appropriate documentation. Appropriate arrangements will be made to 'judge' the nominations to ensure the decision is fair and equitable. Results will be published in the Grapevine newsletter.

7.4   The Council will hold an annual event to recognise long service and appropriate 'gifts' will be presented to employees to commemorate service milestones.

8.   BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS/CAPACITY

8.1   The Performance Management Development Programme for Heads of Service and nominated Team Leaders will provide a number of Senior Managers with the training they need to operate the corporate communication

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framework and to deliver the key tasks set out at Section 6 and the actions set out in the action plan at Section 10 of this strategy.

8.2   Regular Senior Manager workshops were held during CPA preparations and were so successful that they will now continue to be used as a further mechanism for sharing best practice amongst managers in relation to several issues, including internal communication techniques and tools.

8.3   The Human Resources Section will produce a quick reference guide to internal communications for managers and staff. This will form the basis of any internal training courses and will be issued at corporate induction sessions.

8.4   Communication is the responsibility of everyone, therefore it is important that all members of staff are aware of the communication channels available to them, particularly upward communication channels. It will be the responsibility of Heads of Service, via their team leaders/Section Heads to convey this information to all staff.

8.5   As the staff and IiP focus groups will represent staff and will be responsible for communicating decisions and actions back to staff in their departments, this group will receive specific training appropriate to their identified needs.

8.6   Communication training needs for staff will be identified via employee development interviews, in accordance with the Performance Management Framework.

9.   <u>MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS STRATEGY</u>

9.1   The Human Resources Section is responsible for implementing this strategy This will be achieved through the action plan set out at Section 10. This Action Plan will form part of the HR Strategy and will be monitored in accordance with the HR Strategy monitoring arrangements.

9.2   Adherence to the strategy and the corporate communication framework will also be monitored by the departmental and corporate IiP groups.

9.3   The success of the strategy will be judged by the difference it has made to employee perception. This will be tested by the annual employee satisfaction survey.

9.4   Politically, the effectiveness of this strategy will be monitored by the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications via the Performance Improvement Group and Scrutiny Committee 1.

10.   <u>THE WAY FORWARD</u>

Outlined below is an Action Plan detailing the action required to make improvements within the context of the two strategic aims of this strategy:

Aim 1 - "Ensure a commitment to two-way communication with staff"
Aim 2 - "Develop and Maintain a culture of effective communications"

Action	Why	Who	When	Measure of Success	Cost
Agree and implement corporate framework for communicating with staff	To ensure a consistent and inclusive corporate approach	HR Section	Oct 2004	Levels of application of framework. Audited by IiP groups	None
Formally launch Staff Focus Group	To provide a representative mechanism for upward communication.	HR Section	March 2005	Evidence of meetings of staff focus group	None
Introduce GEM scheme and long service awards	To provide a formal mechanism for recognising achievement	HR Section	Oct 2004	Satisfaction with arrangements tested by employee survey	TBD
Identify communication training needs for managers	To identify manager training requirements prior to PMDP	Section Heads and Heads of Service	Mar 2005	Evidence in corporate training plan	None
Produce an internal communication reference guide for managers and employees.	To build communication skills and provide guidance	HR Section	Oct 2004	Levels of awareness of framework. Tested by employee survey	Printing costs. Approx £1000
Set up "staff forum" on intranet	To ensure two-way communication is accessible to all.	HR Section IT Section	Dec 2004	Intranet usage. Levels of satisfaction	TBD
Ensure communications issues are addressed in business plans	To put communications "on the agenda"	All Business Plan Owners	July 2005	Evidence in business plans	None
Ensure the intranet is a useful communication tool and is widely available to all staff	To improve accessibility for all staff, including those with direct public contact.	IT Section	Dec 2004	Intranet usage. Levels of satisfaction	None

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Action	Why	Who	When	Measure of Success	Cost
Ensure training in relation to communication skills is addressed in EDP's. (framework, methods, techniques)	To identify corporate staff training requirements	All Managers and Supervisors	Dec 2004	Evidence in departmental and corporate training plans	None
Arrange appropriate training	To improve communication skills	Human Resources Section	Mar 2005	Satisfaction with training. Post evaluation.	TBD
Undertake annual survey to assess effectiveness of communications	To check the effectiveness of communications	PWS Ltd External Facilitator	Mar 2005	Survey Results	Approx £2000

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APPENDIX 1

EXTRACTS FROM EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS 2003

I&DeA Fit For Purpose Report – May 2003

- "We suggest you review the approaches to bolster communication with front line staff and ensure they feel more valued. You may also want to do more to celebrate successes."

- "Managers were very well informed of the developments elsewhere in the authority but, despite the improvements produced through the IIP process, felt that communication with front line staff could improve. This should include messages that show staff are valued at all levels. Some managers felt that front line staff were not sufficiently equipped to enable them to be 'ambassadors for the authority' within the community which could be a wasted opportunity for promoting the authority and developing services ("front line staff feel proud of their service but not (always) of the council")."

SOLACE Peer Challenge – June 2003

- "More could be done to harness the enthusiasm of employees through improved and more consistent communication and engagement. Communications are reported by employees to be "top down" but improving. "

Investors In People – October 2003

- **"**Staff did feel they received appropriate and constructive feedback on a regular basis. Examples included EDP process, team meetings and one to one feedback. It was at a team level that staff believed their contribution was most recognised and 'thank you's' were the norm between Line Manager and their staff."

- "Team meetings are scheduled to ensure all staff have the opportunity to attend regardless of their status or shift pattern."

- "The Council needs to ensure that at the most senior level the Chief Executive and his Directors have planned communications with employees that allow them to advise staff on future aims and objectives and give praise on past achievements."

- "An example of good practice worth sharing are departmental newsletters which have helped staff to understand the changes that are impacting within their area."

- "Areas that may be worth following through would be: Communication Strategy – in particular Chief Executive and Director's involvement in communicating future aims and objectives and praising achievements."

Comprehensive Performance Assessment – November 2004

- "Communication within the organisation has limited penetration; office staff are better informed than those in remote locations. As a result front line staff are not fully engaged."

- "There have been problems with on-site communication."

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APPENDIX 2

RESULTS OF ANNUAL EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY 2002

The most recent survey was undertaken in October 2002. The results of the survey which related to employee communicaton are as follows:

Passing down information

	Agree/Strongly Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
Everyone receives important information at the same time.	30.7%	46.1%
I am kept up to date with changes as they happen.	38.3%	33.9%
The future direction of the organisation is clearly communicated	38.1%	29.7%
There is effective communication between my line manager and myself.	81.8%	8.4%
I understand the functions of the Council and how it is managed.	61.8%	9.6%
I could explain to someone who does not work here what the organisation is trying to achieve.	58.6%	11.2%

Forum for staff views

	Agree/Strongly Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
I am encouraged to feed back comments I get from customers.	52.4%	14.1%
I am encouraged to make suggestions about improving performance.	59.1%	16.2%
We have regular section meetings and I am encouraged to contribute my views.	71.2%	14.8%

Staff's understanding of how they contribute

	Agree/Strongly Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
I am clear about how my job relates to the Council and how well it is managed.	64.7%	11.2%
I have been made aware as to how my role impacts on the Business Plan.	55.6%	15.2%
I have been told how I can help the organisation succeed.	33.2%	24.7%

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APPENDIX 3

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF

Listed below are some key issues that should be addressed when communicating information:

ACCESSIBILITY

- Reduce barriers to accessing information through training and improved understanding
- Be innovative in developing different ways of communicating, including using new technology where appropriate
- Consider the audience when selecting the appropriate methods to maximise understanding
- Arrange meeting at times to maximise participation. This may involve meeting outside normal working hours.
- Written communication should be in Plain English

APPROPRIATE

- Where possible produce summaries rather than lengthy documents
- Avoid using unnecessary jargon
- Tailor communication method to the situation – sometimes speaking to someone is more effective than writing
- Be consistent and ensure the same message is transmitted
- Be sensitive to local issues
- Ensure communication material is unambiguous

RESPONSIVE

- Ensure communications are two-way
- Listen to feedback and interpret it impartially

TIMELY

- Ensure information is communicated in a timely manner
- Co-ordinate communication to avoid unnecessary duplication and information overload
- Give appropriate notice of meetings and avoid times when regular meetings may be scheduled
- Issue documentation in advance to allow the receiver to digest and understand
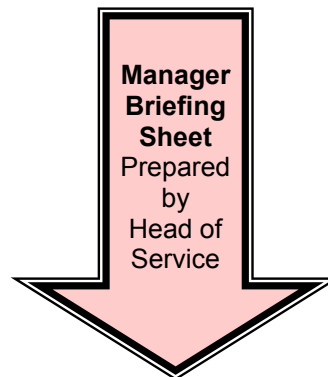
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FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF

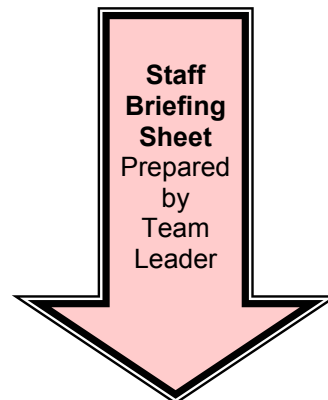**DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION**

Management Team/Political Meetings

Agenda
Prepared
by
Director

Departmental Performance Meeting
(between Directors and Heads of Service)   *Monthly*

**Manager
Briefing
Sheet**
Prepared
by
Head of
Service

Service Performance Meeting   *Monthly – following*
(between Heads of Service and Team Leaders)   *departmental*
                                                                    performance
                                                                    meeting

**Staff
Briefing
Sheet**
Prepared
by
Team
Leader

Ad-hoc Team Meetings   *As and When*
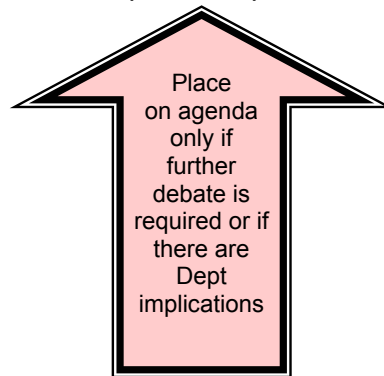And/or other forms of communication

FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF

UPWARD COMMUNICATION

Departmental Performance Meeting

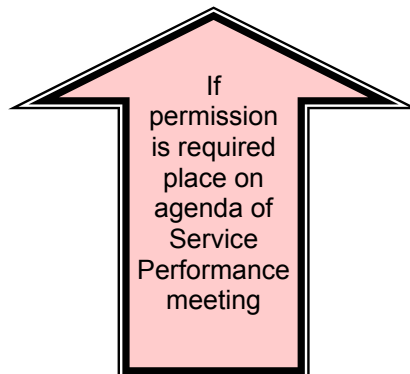(Matter debated with Director. Corporate implications referred to Management Team)

Place on agenda only if further debate is required or if there are Dept implications

Staff Focus Group   **Service Performance Meeting**   **Joint Consultative**

(Matter discussed with Heads of Service)

If permission is required place on agenda of Service Performance meeting

Team Leader – Resolve issue, implement suggestion, give explanation
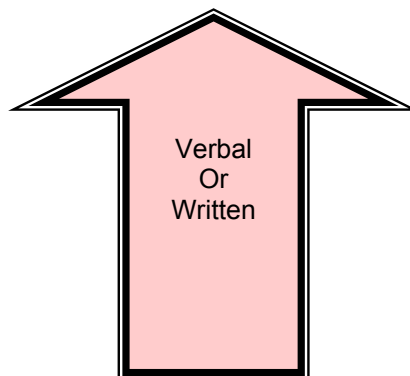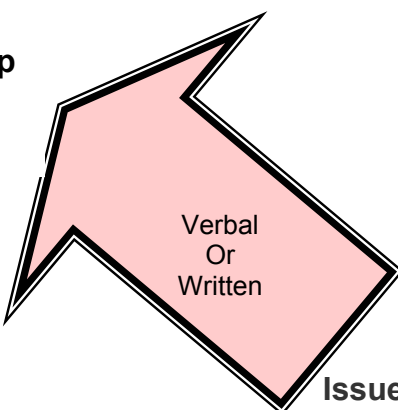
Staff Focus Group Via Rep

IiP Group Via Rep

Verbal Or Written

Verbal Or Written

Verbal Or Written
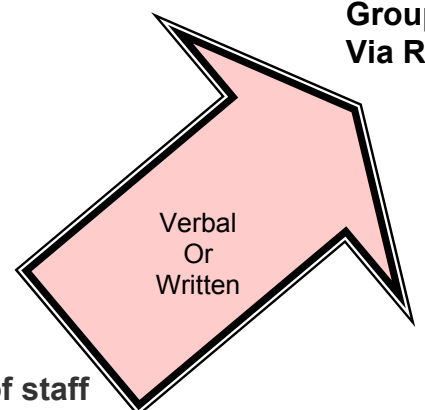
Issue/suggestion identified by member of staff

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APPENDIX 6

<u>COMMUNICATION METHODS – ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES</u>

Open forums – could be organised to communicate important issues or announce major changes to employees. Open forums will normally be chaired by the Chief Executive Officer, Director or by a Head of Service. The advantages of open meetings are that: employees are given a sense that decision-makers value them sufficiently to take time to talk to them directly and respond to their questions or feedback; and decision-makers gain first-hand access to employees who will probably express not only their own concerns but also issues raised by service users.

The disadvantages of open meetings are that some people are reluctant to ask questions in large-scale open meetings; questions are often specific to a job or group of staff; planning and organisational effort are required, and large numbers of employees are taken 'off-the-job' simultaneously.

Ad-hoc Team Meetings - In periods of rapid change, separate and more frequent team briefings may be necessary. Meetings should allow for the views of staff to be fed back into the process.   Care must be taken to ensure part-time workers, shift-workers or employees who operate flexible working are not excluded from team meetings. Care should also be taken to prevent service disruption and offices/services must not close to allow team meetings to take place. Where meetings have to be arranged outside normal working hours (front-line services), appropriate arrangements will be made to reimburse staff (time off in lieu, flexi-time etc.)

Employees generally prefer to receive information face to face from their immediate manager. Advantages of team briefings are that they allow more opportunities for two-way communication than large-scale open meetings; information can be tailored to meet the needs (and concerns of) particular teams; most people will feel more less constrained about asking questions; regular meetings give people confidence that they will hear the full story, and where a structure for team briefing exists, special 'fast messages' can be relayed to all staff.

The disadvantages of team briefings are that their success depends on the manager being able and willing to communicate messages in a brief and interesting way. This requires particular skills, which may need developing. Team briefing can also become talking shops or opportunities for propagating negative views if not managed properly.

Internal newsletters (Grapevine magazine, departmental newsletters, 'one-off' newsletters)

Grapevine is produced on a quarterly basis by the Human Resources Section in partnership with the Press and PR Officer. Grapevine has a defined purpose, style and editorial policy and special issues will be produced for major issues as they are announced. Departmental newsletters have been successful in the past as have 'one-off' newsletters for dealing with specific topics.

The benefits of a newsletter are that larger numbers of employees can be reached more quickly than organising face-to-face meetings; it is easier to reach part-timers and shift workers through newsletters than through meetings, and all employees will receive the same message.

The disadvantages of newsletters is that managers cannot guarantee that messages will be read or understood and individual questions can't be answered as effectively. In addition, care should be taken to ensure the printed document can be accessed by individuals who may have special requirements such as large print, different languages or formats.

Intranet and emails

Intranet messages and/or emails will be produced for major decisions as they are announced. The benefits of the intranet and emails are that larger numbers of employees can be reached more quickly than organising face-to-face meetings; it is easier to reach part-timers and shift workers (particularly if home e-mail addresses are available) and all employees will receive the same message. This communication method is particularly appropriate/appealing to younger workers. E-communication channels also allow for detailed information, such as figures, diagrams, maps etc. to be disseminated more cost effectively.

The disadvantages of the intranet and emails is that managers cannot guarantee that messages will be read or understood, and some staff may not have access to the technology or possess the skills required to gain access. Where an issue requires explanation or discussion this method should not be used as an easy way out of speaking to staff.

An electronic staff discussion forum will be a permanent feature of the Intranet to allow a two-way discussion with staff. This will be maintained by the HR Section. On occasions it may be necessary to set up a specific discussion forum with staff. This can be arranged by speaking to the HR Section.

Information in pay packets

As every member of staff receives a 'pay packet' on a regular basis, this remains to be a valid, efficient and effective method of communicating information to staff. This method is only useful for downward communication and then only where a letter or leaflet can give sufficient explanation.

'Walking the job'

This involves managers leaving their desks and talking to their employees. The advantages of 'walking the job' are that it gives employees the opportunity to speak on a one-to-one basis with managers and put their concerns directly. It can also make employees feel valued and important when top management take the opportunity to meet with them.

The disadvantages of 'walking the job' are that it is time consuming (typically taking 2-3 hours); questions and concerns that staff may raise may not be easily answered and employees may be reluctant to raise their concerns in a face-to-face situation.

Trade union/employee representatives - the improvement of internal communication to achieve effective service delivery depends on a partnership approach to consultation, involving staff and managers – refer to the internal Consultation Strategy.

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Formal and informal communication channels with trade unions are an important part of an effective communication strategy. Joint Consultative Groups (JCG's) provide a monthly formal meeting for discussing strategic/policy matters with all Trade Unions. Monthly Shop Steward meetings provide a formal vehicle for discussing operational problems/issues with Trade Unions representing former manual and craft workers.

For major decisions, special meetings with trade unions/employee representatives should be organised as early as possible. This will help to ensure that employees have a chance to put forward their views when changes are being planned and before decisions have to be taken.

The advantages of meeting trade union/employee representatives are that they develop trust between employers and employee representatives.

The disadvantages of meeting trade union/employee representatives are that there is a danger of consulting only the representatives, rather than all staff and the process needs to be well managed to prevent it leading to delays in decision-making.

Annual Employee Satisfaction Survey

The annual survey is administered by the HR Section in partnership with a suitable external independent agency. The survey results have many uses, including assessing the level of understanding of issues amongst staff, satisfaction with HR policies and management practices, and preferred methods of communication. The format of the survey is not fixed and managers may insert additional questions by contacting the HR Section.

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COMMUNICATION DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – A QUICK GUIDE

Position within organisation	Major Issues eg. Restructure, Local Gov Review, Outsourcing Decisions	Monthly Updates eg. Management Team decisions, political decisions, specific departmental matters such as performance indicators.	Day to Day Issues eg. Operation of specific policies such as no smoking, flexitime, door entry etc.
Chief Executive Officer	Special forums open to all staff. E-mail or letter to all staff.	Highlight to Management Team those issues that need to be cascaded throughout the organisation	Ad-hoc meetings with Directors and Heads of Service, Office 'walk-about – inc to remote sites.'
Directors	Special meeting with Heads of Service	Monthly **departmental performance meeting** with Heads of Service. Ensure agenda also includes emerging issues from staff (see upward communication framework)	Ad-hoc e-mails and meetings with Heads of Service, team leaders or staff. Office 'walk-about.'
Heads of Service	Special meeting with Team Leaders and staff, supplemented by written information – memo, e-mail, newsletter	Prepare **manager briefing sheet** (see standard template) for Team Leaders noting relevant issues arising from Monthly Departmental Performance meeting. Issue and explain at monthly **service performance meeting**. Prepare agenda taking into consideration any emerging issues from team leaders and staff (see upward communication framework).	Ad-hoc e-mails and meetings with team leaders or staff. Office 'walk-about.'
Team Leaders (inc Section Heads, Supervisors)	Be well informed in order to address any questions raised by staff	Immediately following monthly service performance meeting, disseminate appropriate info to staff using **staff briefing sheet**(see standard template). This can be circulated electronically or by hand and should be supplemented by team meetings if necessary.	E-mail or speak to appropriate staff. Ensure appropriate arrangements are made for lateral communication ie. within the Section – to ensure consistency of service.
Staff	Attend team meetings as required. Understand the issue and raise questions/issues with Team Leader	Attend team meetings as required. Understand the issue and raise questions/issues with Team Leader	Attend team meetings as required. Understand the issue and raise questions/issues with Team Leader
Human Resources Section	Incorporate into Grapevine newsletter (unless specific issue is urgent and requires a special grapevine, intranet entry or memo/letter.	Incorporate issue into Grapevine where appropriate. Monitor above process to ensure meetings are taking place, and briefing sheets are being prepared.	Address emerging issues in HR policies – refer to staff focus group and JCG where appropriate.

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