



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

# *Getting our Message Across*

## Corporate Communications Strategy 2007/2010



**July 2007**

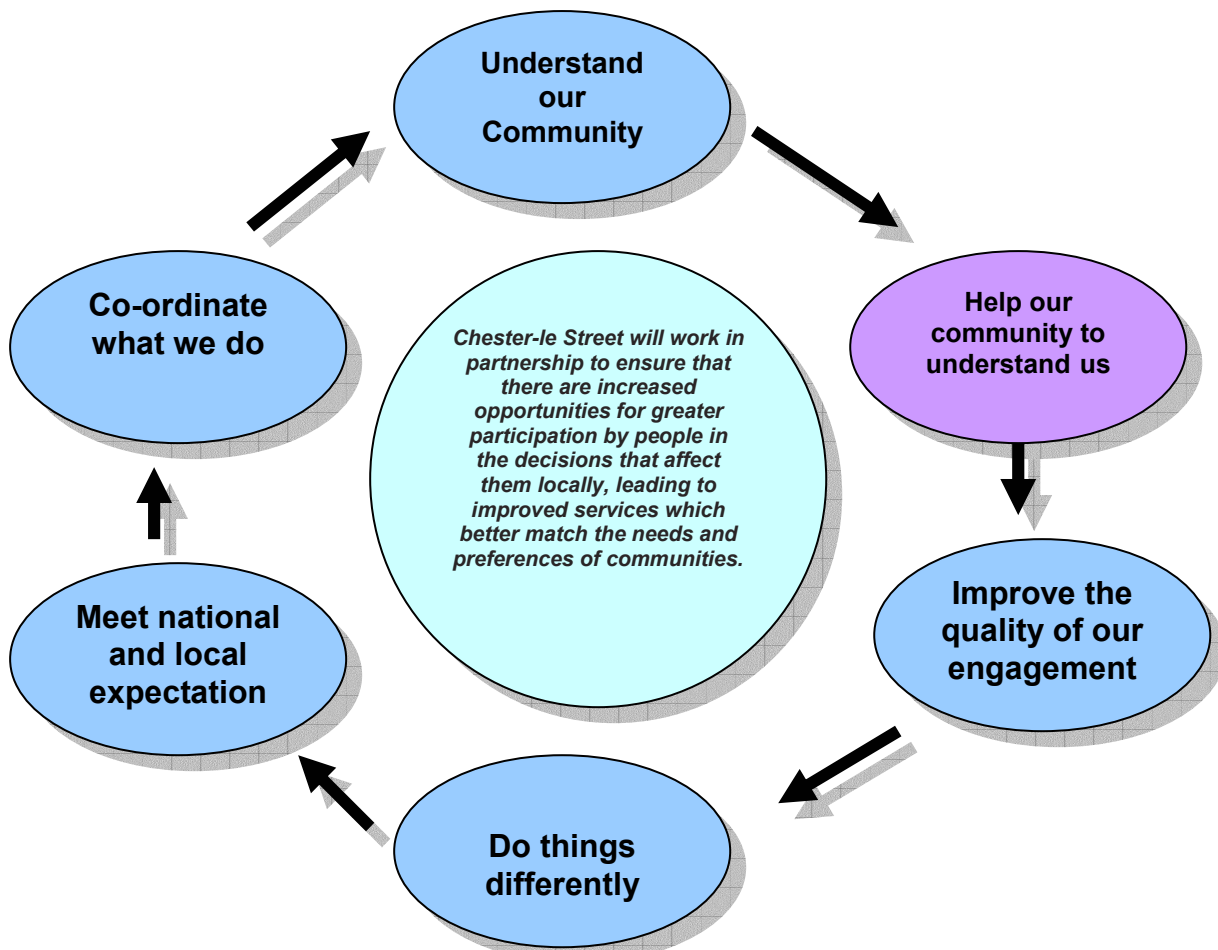


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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Corporate Communications Strategy was first published in June 2003. Since then, many of the actions have been completed, or otherwise, sustained continuously. The purpose of this document is to provide direction, with associated action plans, for the Council's marketing communications over the next three years.
- 1.2 In the recent CPA report, the inspectors concluded that "*Chester-le-Street district council has made significant progress since its corporate assessment in 2003. It is now a 'good' council. The Council has progressed by improving its understanding of the needs of local people and focusing its efforts on meeting those needs. It has clear priorities which it uses to focus on what is important to the public. This includes economic and social regeneration, good neighbourhood management, better social housing and good leisure opportunities. In each of these activities, performance and customer satisfaction has improved since 2003. The Council is working to secure further improvement through partnership working and placing emphasis on good customer service and efficiency.*"
- 1.3 As a '**GOOD**' council, we must ensure that our corporate communication culture and channels are constantly reviewed and updated. The strategy will be at the forefront of managing our reputation across all forms and boundaries and must be seen as a key driver if the Council is to reach its overall goal in **achieving excellence**.
- 1.4 The Strategy underpins the delivery of the Council's seven priorities (Annexe 1). It is directly linked to other corporate documents such as the Corporate Plan 2006-2009, the Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016, the Customer Excellence Strategy, the Equalities Scheme Action Plan and the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy. In particular, both the council's Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy, and the District Partnerships agreed strategy recognises the importance of communications in improving community engagement:



This Strategy responds to the Council's action plan within its Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy which proposes:

- A review of the approach to our marketing against LGA guidance
  - The review of the Communications Strategy under the banner of 'Getting our Message across'
- 1.5 This Strategy is a corporate document that holds relevance at all levels within the organisation. The Customer Relations team's service plan, with its' associated action plans, already links strongly to the Corporate Plan, particularly priority 1, Customer Excellence.
- 1.6 The Strategy compares results from a comprehensive Employee Survey 2003 with those from the most recent Employee Survey, undertaken in December 2005. It also incorporates various indicators (monetary value of media coverage, readership surveys, financial information, benchmark information) to measure the effectiveness of Council communications over the three year period since the first Corporate Communications Strategy.
- 1.7 The Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/2007 makes reference to the Council's 3% year-on-year improvement in satisfaction levels as indicated in the Council's annual customer satisfaction surveys. This suggests an overall improvement in customer perceptions of the Council, and also therefore, a process of continuous improvement in how the Council communicates.
- 1.8 It is considered vital for the Council and its partners to improve its respective reputations. A clear link between how well a Council communicates and customer satisfaction is backed up by IDeA and LGA research<sup>1</sup>, entitled 'Local Government Reputation'. This research was undertaken to understand why, despite an increase in public satisfaction with services, the public's perception of local government was not. The research identified the most important factors influencing customer perceptions (and satisfaction) as:
- perceived quality of services
  - perceived value for money
  - media coverage/mood
  - direct communications
  - district/county performance
  - a clean and safe environment
  - positive experiences of contact with staff

The MORI research that backed up this research, suggests that if a council commits to doing the following well, it will have a significant impact on its reputation and standing:

#### **Communications core actions**

- effective media management
- provide an A-Z guide to council services
- publish a regular council magazine/newspaper
- branding –effective and consistent linkage of council brand to community services
- good internal communications

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<sup>1</sup> The LGA commissioned research with MORI to establish what actions Councils could take to improve their reputation.

### **Cleaner, safer greener core actions**

- ensure a visible cleaning presence with a strong link to the council
- ensure no gaps or overlap in cleaning and maintenance contracts
- have one phone number for all streetscene problems
- know where your grot spots are and why
- set a 24 hour target for action on fly tipping and abandoned vehicles
- aim to have a Green Flag for at least one park
- educate and enforce to protect the environment

1.9 The Council can show some significant best practice against many of these key issues:

- it publishes a popular regular magazine
- its Inspirers have put forward proposals for an A-Z of services
- it has developed good internal communications
- environmental service vehicles and regeneration projects are 'One Team' branded
- it is to have a single telephone number for its neighbourhood management roll out
- it has established 'grot spot' locations using GIS
- It has a 24 hour target for removing abandoned vehicles
- it has a Green Flag for the Riverside
- it has an environmental education programme

1.10 There remains much to be done. It is evident that perceptions are influenced by various types of communications – ranging from the written word, to more visual types of communication.

1.11 This Strategy provides a current snapshot of progress made since it was first published in June 2003. The objective is to recognise and celebrate performance and improvement, and also to identify areas that can be improved upon. This then leads onto action plans to address such issues. The scope of this document is comprehensive with an emphasis on corporate responsibility for communications, especially communications within the council.

1.12 The vision for the Strategy is set out below. It sets out the key purpose of the strategy.

### **Vision**

The Strategy's vision is to facilitate effective two-way communications between the council, its various internal / external customer groups and partners to promote mutual understanding in support of delivering service excellence.

The key purpose of the vision is to improve the Council's reputation in accordance with its drive towards continuous improvement of services.

1.13 Within the broader vision, the Council communications (both internal and external) is moulded around 5 core messages – the Council:

- ...actively listens to, learns, and engages its communities and partners
- ...performs well, and, and continually strives to improve its services
- ...works hard to fulfil the quality of life, and aspirations of local people
- ...takes pride in its work, employees, and members
- ...makes improvements real and long-lasting

## 2. Structure

- 2.1 The strategy is in two distinct parts. The Internal Communications part (section A) should be read as supportive of Organisational Development initiatives and the External Communications part (Section B) should be read as being supportive of the Council's agenda for continuous improvement, especially as documented in the Corporate Plan. To support the target-setting process, action plans with which to realise our vision for corporate communications are included in this strategy.
- 2.2 This document adheres to the principle of 'less is more' as key messages are often lost within an amorphous mass of information. It treats internal and external communications as separate functions. However there is an obvious intersection of the two since the ways we communicate internally are reflected to audiences outside the Council.
- 2.3 The strategy therefore:
- defines each communications function / method;
  - provides a snapshot of performance for each function defined;
  - sets communications objectives, linking these (where possible) with corporate objectives;
  - provides measures for evaluation;
  - includes realistic action plans for each function.

## 3 Responsibility for communications

- 3.1 The day-to-day implementation of this strategy will be driven by the Communications/PR function within the Customer Relations Team. However, the corporate responsibility for communications cannot simply be reduced to a single service within the organisation.

### ***Political Leadership***

The Council's political leadership has indicated that communications is a top priority by establishing a portfolio to address 'Resources and Value for Money'.

Members are expected to be excellent ambassadors for the Council, and assist in strengthening the messages it needs to communicate internally and externally. Portfolio holders in particular, have a responsibility to assist in publicising work within their respective remits.

At ward level, members need to communicate in line with the member's code of conduct, acting as ambassadors for the Council. This strategy can only be implemented successfully with the full co-operation of both the political and managerial functions of the Council.

### ***Strategic Management***

The Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team will be responsible for driving this communications strategy by actively, and demonstrably, applying its principles to all aspects of their work in strategic management.

They will communicate their decisions, and the strategic thinking behind them, clearly and expeditiously to Service Team managers in order that the cascade of essential information to employees at all levels can be instigated (as appropriate) in an accurate and timely manner.

**Senior Management**

Service Team Managers will take particular responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation of this strategy within their areas of responsibility. Implicit to this, they should also establish channels of communication for employees to express their views on council issues, whether it's related to personal, operational, or strategic issues.

Similarly, Service Team Managers should work closely with the Communications/PR Officer to improve existing modes of communications within the council. The responsibility for communicating clearly should also be delegated appropriately to team leaders and supervisors. Guidance on seeking publicity has been published on the Council's corporate Intranet, along with a Media Forward Plan.

**Corporate awareness of communications**

The bottom line in respect of the corporate awareness is that the responsibility to communicate equates with the responsibilities associated with the seniority level of the post-holder. Every employee has a role to play in communicating within, and outside of the Council. Communications is inextricably linked to the Council's OneTeam ethos, and the importance lies in an assumed ambassador's role of all employees.

The Council will ensure that it maintains a media forward plan on the corporate Intranet. Senior Officers, along with their teams, have a clear responsibility to identify potential media opportunities, especially where it can be related to the continuous improvement process and the Corporate Plan.



## Part A. Internal Communications

### 4. Internal Communications

#### Context

- 4.1 Not only are employee perceptions relayed to the outside world, but they also have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness with which services are delivered. Developing a strong culture committed to service excellence, and thus, continuous improvement, requires effective communication within the council.
- 4.2 These modes or tools for communications are discussed under the following sub-headings:
- Personal / face-to-face communications
  - Print-based materials
  - E-based communications

#### Current Snapshot

- 4.3 The authority currently has 455 (351 are full time / 104 are part time) employees, working in or from the Civic Centre or its seven satellite offices (Sacriston depot, Sacriston housing office, Bullion depot, Careline, the Riverside Complex, Chester-le-Street Leisure Centre and Selby Cottage). Since the last Strategy, all employees and members will now have access to ICT facilities in the Council, whereas previously, less than half of all council employees had access to a personal computer.
- 4.4 Each employee needs to be kept well informed about the council's role and objectives and have the opportunity to participate in its affairs by feeding back ideas and comments. A well informed and involved workforce has great potential for promoting public awareness and appreciation of the council. This also links strongly with the Council's work towards IIP accreditation.
- 4.5 Internal communications has improved significantly since the 2003 Employee Survey as evidenced by the latest published survey in 2005:
- 77% of respondents say that messages are well presented, up from 61% in 2003
  - 80% of respondents feel that messages are relevant to them, up from 73%
  - 78% of respondents felt that the information they received was understandable, up from 71%
  - 68% of respondents would speak well of the Council outside the organisation, up from 54%
- 4.6 Overall, 56% of respondents now feel that we are communicating well, by contrast, only 34% of respondents thought so when surveyed in 2003. This represents a significant improvement in internal communications, which is further underlined by the change in respondent feelings regarding elected Members. In 2003, only 27% felt that Members had a clear vision of where the council was going. In the most recent survey, 56% of respondents felt Members had a clear vision.

## Key Objectives

4.7 Key overarching objectives for internal communications are:

- **Improve information flow throughout the council, and across service teams**
- **Generate the commitment of employees to the success of the council**
- **Enable the council better to meet the needs of its customers**
- **Increase understanding and knowledge of council's vision, and corporate objectives**
- **Supportive of employees during periods of organisational change**
- **Improve cross-cutting communications, especially with regard to satellite offices and between different grades of employees**

## 5 Personal / Face-to-face communications

5.1 Face-to-face communications facilitates the immediate two-way process where ideas are shared and information exchanged on a personal basis.

### Current Snapshot

5.2 Significant improvements have been made when comparing responses between the 2003 and 2005 Employee Surveys:

- established **quarterly briefings** by the Chief Executive, Leader, and other Directors has led to respondents citing this method of being made aware of Council issues as the most important face-to-face communications method from 5% in 2003, up to 68% in 2005
- **team meetings** has also improved as a meaningful method for communicating with employees, up from 38% to 64%
- **Employee Forums'** as a way of face-to-face communications, has also improved slightly as a method for involving employees and sharing information on Council issues, up from 38% to 45%

5.3 During the time of the 2003 survey, the 'grapevine' was the most useful face-to-face mode for getting information about Council issues. Even though it can be functional, it often leads to mixed messages and misunderstandings. However, this mode of communicating now ties with team meetings as the second most important face-to-face interaction at 64%.

5.4 The successes in improving face-to-face communications can be attributed to a strong commitment to communications by a new managerial regime and political leadership to communications, coupled with the additional organisational development function to support the face-to-face element of internal communications.

- 5.5 The challenge over the next three years will be to sustain this improvement. The Organisational Development team has identified their own action plan, in consultation with employees, to address key issues of concern as highlighted by the most recent survey. These actions often relate to the different modes of communication, inclusive of strengthening face-to-face communications across the Council. We need to get consistent messages over to our staff and ensure that any changes are explained. We need to further develop the 'can do' culture, and ensure that staff feel that they are part of something big – an improving council which is going places.

## Key Objectives

### 5.6 Key objectives and actions for face-to-face internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsibility	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Ensuring adequate information flows throughout organisation	Sustain Quarterly Chief Executive / Leader briefs, and extend to different locations. (In addition, topic specific briefing sessions.) Increase the quality and information flow throughout all levels of the organisation via team meetings	Continuous (minimum 4 per annum)  Continuous (minimum 12 per annum)	Chief Executive / Leader / Head of Organisational Development  Service Team Managers / Supervisors / Team Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources</li> <li>Lack of availability</li> <li>Continuity</li> <li>Employee input</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources</li> <li>Lack of availability</li> <li>Continuity / regularity</li> <li>Lack of commitment</li> </ul>	Employee Surveys; attendance figures; satisfaction figures from briefings  Agendas and minutes; decision sheet, or notes from meetings; Employee Surveys; IIP accreditation
Facilitating greater involvement of Members and Chief Officers in face-to-face communications	Create opportunities for Members and Officers to participate in the Employee Forum, Corporate briefing sessions, satellite office / team visits by Members and Chief Officers as suggested in the HR team's Action Plan.	Continuous (format and schedules to be agreed)	Human Resources Team / Members / Chief Officers / Service Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources</li> <li>Lack of availability</li> <li>Continuity / regularity</li> <li>Buy in from teams / individual officers</li> </ul>	Employee Surveys; feedback evaluation sheets (HR); Manager's performance appraisal
Ensure greater employee engagement & representation in Employee Forum	Plan a recurrent campaign to promote each Employee Forum, particularly by providing feedback on key issues to all employees.	October 2007 - ongoing	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources</li> <li>Buy in from teams</li> <li>Failure to implement change</li> </ul>	Circulate agenda & minutes prior / after meetings to staff; publish on Intranet & in <i>TeamTalk</i>
Facilitate two way communications through-out the Council	Identify opportunities, in addition to the staff suggestion scheme, team meetings and briefing sessions for ensuring employees are fully engaged.	October 2007 - ongoing	Human Resources Team / Communications/PR Officer / Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources</li> <li>Failure to support / implementing change</li> <li>Failure of employees to interact</li> </ul>	Number of staff suggestions per quarter; evaluation sheets at corporate briefing sessions
Monitor progress of face-to-face communications	Assess progress primarily through the Staff Survey, and identify areas for improvement in face-to-face communications. HR team to produce action plan to address key staff concerns.	Sept 2007/8/9	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing resources (budget for staff survey)</li> <li>Failure to address issues of importance to employees</li> </ul>	Staff Survey, and subsequent action plan by HR

## 6 Print-based materials

- 6.1 Print-based materials primarily support face-to-face communications, inclusive of letters, memos, agendas & minutes of meetings, newsletters, posters and leaflets. This mode of communication can be employed variously to formalise communications, especially where it is targeted appropriately.

### Current Snapshot:

- 6.2 Significant improvements were made since the previous Strategy:
- an 8-page, bi-monthly employee newsletter, *TeamTalk*, was established in November 2004. After e-mail at 77%, respondents indicated *TeamTalk* as the second most useful communications tool (74% of respondents) to make them aware of Council issues
  - the establishment of *Members' Update*, a monthly news sheet produced by, and for, elected Members in aid of the continuous improvement agenda
  - more proactive management of notice boards
- 6.3 Since it was identified as a gap in the previous Strategy, *TeamTalk* was established in November 2004. Since then, one readership survey was undertaken to assess the usefulness of this method of communications. 93% of respondents rated the magazine (overall) as either good or excellent, with a similar percentage of employees agreeing that it is well written and presented.
- 6.4 The challenge over the next three years would be to sustain the momentum of this publication's success (also ensuring that it reaches external offices). Staff ownership is encouraged by inviting all employees to contribute formal and informal news to this magazine. Contributors are given recognition by having their names / photograph with their article/s.
- 6.5 The establishment of *Members' Update* has provided a newsletter 'for and by members' to further support Member communications, with an emphasis on the improvement process. Issues around improvement are reported upon by inviting contributions from portfolio holders, as well as members at ward level. A rota-system works well to ensure the monthly publication of this newsletter prior to (or at) each full Council meeting.

### Key Objectives

#### 6.6 Key objectives and actions for print based internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsibility	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Support face-to-face information flows with printed materials	Publish bi-monthly newsletter <i>TeamTalk</i>	Continuous (minimum 6 per annum)	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources.</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise external supplier</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Sustain relevance of magazine by continuous evaluation through readership surveys	annually - continuous	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Failure to improve employee communications</li> </ul>	Documentary; feedback articles
	Involve employees as key contributors across the organisation	continuous	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Willingness of employees to contribute</li> <li>• Engagement with all service teams</li> </ul>	Invitations to contribute via e-mail and in publication
	Publish monthly Members' Update to communicate specifically progress re the improvement agenda	Continuous (12 editions per annum)	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> <li>• Members contributions</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Publish regular core briefs on the Intranet	Continuous	PA to Chief Executive / CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Random nature</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Sustain proactive management of notice boards across the Council offices	continuous	Service Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Stakeholder conflict / inclusiveness</li> </ul>	Documentary + photographs
	Update various elements to make the induction pack user-friendly (in co-operation with the Head of Organisational Development)	September 2007	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Failure to retain new employees</li> </ul>	Documentary

## 7 E-based communications

- 7.1 E-based internal communications Include any communications and information circulated, or available, in electronic formats such as represented by e-mail, the Website, databases and public/network folders/Intranet.

### Current Snapshot

- 7.2 Internal communication has been significantly boosted by the introduction of a corporate Intranet. This shared resource supports effective information management through-out the Council by providing a user-friendly interface where information is stored and updated. Coupled with this, the ICT team is, further to a staff suggestion, rolling out a project that would enable all employees and Members to have access to personal computers, in effect, access to e-mail, and the Intranet).
- 7.3 The importance of e-mail in supporting face-to-face and print-based communications is underlined by 77% of respondents (in the latest Employee Survey) indicating this as the most useful tool through which employees were made aware of Council issues. It should be noted that these findings only relate to those respondents that had access to a personal computer. It is hoped that a 100% access to a personal computer will greatly contribute to the two-way communications process in the Council.
- 7.4 Core briefs were introduced in 2005 to bridge the communications gap between CMT meetings and employees. Core briefs are circulated via e-mail to all employees that have access to this medium. However, only 51% of respondents in the most recent Employee Survey cited this mode of communications as providing them with information about Council issues. With greater access to this medium, and with a more frequent production of the briefs, communications within the Council could be greatly enhanced.
- 7.5 Certain service teams (Revenues and Benefits, Housing, and Leisure) publish their own newsletters on the Intranet / via e-mail. This indicates initiative by teams to communicate about their services, and can assist in enhancing better understanding between teams in the Council. Corporate communication standards are necessary to ensure consistent branding across all Council communications, especially where this is circulated externally. The usefulness of the Intranet can be further improved upon.

## Key Objectives

### 7.6 Key objectives for E based internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Provide 100% access to ICT equipment across the Council	ICT roll-out programme for ICT access across the Council, with support by Service Team Managers, and the ICT team	April 2007	ICT Manager / ICT Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited skills / expertise of manual workers</li> </ul>	All employees signed up to ICT user policies
Guidance for employees on good practice in communications	Draft corporate communication standards to facilitate improved communications, within, but also outside the Council	August 2007	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Capacity of PR team</li> <li>• Buy in from other teams</li> </ul>	Published on Intranet
Establish protocols for proper usage of ICT equipment to support face-to-face and print communications	Established through the ICT users policies which includes a basic guide to the uses of e-mail, inclusive of good practice when sending e-mails, out-of-office messages, response times to e-mail enquiries etc.	August 2007	ICT Manager / ICT Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited skills</li> <li>• Inefficient use of ICT infrastructure</li> <li>• Failure of employees to follow protocols</li> </ul>	Employees have to sign up to these policies prior to gaining access to e-mail / Intranet
Support the usefulness of the Intranet and e-mail as communication tools	Ongoing review of the content management system of the Intranet to ensure its usefulness as an information management / sharing tool. Inclusive of reducing the use of paper / printing / photocopying	Quarterly	Modernisation Project Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Inefficient / inappropriate use of ICT infrastructure</li> <li>• Buy in by all service teams</li> <li>• Attendance at modernisation project team meetings</li> </ul>	Documentary



## Part B. External Communications

### 8. External Communications Context and Audiences

- 8.1 Some local authorities make the mistake of thinking of ‘the public’ as a homogeneous audience with which they need to communicate. Reality is that the council’s audiences are made up of a whole range of specific groups whose interests in and knowledge and expectations of the Council will vary tremendously. This Strategy takes that into account.
- 8.2 The Council needs to develop key messages for each of the objectives stated below. The emphasis is on groups that have specific needs as far as information is concerned, and how they access council services, and service-related information. Modes or tools for communications are discussed under the following sub-headings:
- Print-based materials
  - Media Management
  - Advertising
  - Community Relations
  - E-based communications
  - Corporate Branding and identity
  - Continuous service improvement

#### Current Snapshot

- 8.3 The Council’s commitment to communicate (and engage) with its various target audiences are demonstrated, especially, by the Corporate Plan, Community and Engagement Strategy, Sustainable Community Strategy, and Customer Excellence Strategy. These strategies contain aims to ensure that residents, service users and all other interested parties are well informed have their needs taken into account and, most importantly, have the opportunity to be involved in the planning, prioritising and monitoring of our services.
- 8.4 Successful consultation requires the appropriate transmission of information to explain how the Council has made use of (acted on) their views. The Council’s positive relationship with the media ensures that its various audiences are informed on decisions and actions taken by the Council in a timely and open manner. In addition, the council publishes a wide range of material (in both print and electronic formats) to inform residents and customers of the services we provide.
- 8.5 Adopting a more corporate approach (operational and across service teams) to external communications will support our corporate objectives as it relates to our Corporate Plan. Quite often, corporate literature is the only tangible element in the council’s portfolio of services. Individual service teams should incorporate a more integrated approach to marketing their services to ensure greater consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in council communications.

## Key Objectives

8.6 Key overarching objectives for external communications are therefore:

- improve information flow between the council and its various external audiences to enhance mutual understanding
- improve communications and access to information with 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear' groups
- increase positive perceptions of the council through communications
- safeguard the council's reputation with external stakeholders, especially as represented through the media

## 9. Print-based Communications

9.1 These relate to any council published document. This will be any public strategy or plan. Of key importance are the Council's flagship magazines such as District News, but also includes leaflets, letters, flyers and other service related materials e.g. fridge magnets and stickers.

### Current Snapshot

9.2. In accord with good practice recommended by the LGA the council regularly produces a community magazine. The District News is produced four times a year and circulated to 24 000 households. Continuous improvements are being made to the design and content to ensure a consistent and credible source of information to benefit the district's entire community. Each issue sees 140 schools, community centres, parish councils etc. invited to contribute to the magazine's content. The Council has won a national award in 2002 for the way in which it has involved the local community.

9.4 A readership survey undertaken in July 2005, found that 84% of respondents rated this publication as 'excellent' or 'good', with 87% rating it as 'informative'. This was supported by the shelf-life of the magazine which indicated 66% of respondents keeping the magazine for longer than a week. Other district councils in the County have copied the survey used for District News to assess their respective publications. It is hoped that their results will be shared to identify common themes of importance to residents.

9.5 Issues which readers wanted more coverage of included the following: environmental issues / street cleansing / refuse collection; safety / crime prevention / anti-social behaviour; and leisure / arts news.

9.6 Each year, the Customer Relations team produces various printed materials for a variety of service teams, aimed at external audiences, ranging from leaflets and booklets, to more substantive documents like the 184 page Corporate Plan, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Regeneration Strategy. To improve the Council's print management, the team has established a detailed database capturing details of each request for design, proofreading and printing. Details on the database will identify opportunities for improvement, especially in relation to value for money.

## Key Objectives

### 9.7 Key objectives for print-based external communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Maintain and improve publication of District News as flagship council magazine in line with the LGA's Reputation Campaign, and by benchmarking exercises with other District Councils.	Maintain good relationships with internal and external contributors	Continuous (4 editions per annum)	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> <li>• External suppliers</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Assess relevance and identify areas for improvement relating to content through readership surveys	September 2007; December 2008	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited capacity</li> <li>• Creating unrealistic expectations</li> <li>• Respond to key actions within the survey findings</li> </ul>	Assess quality through readership surveys
Support the Equalities Scheme Action Plan	Promote equal access to Council documents / publications by providing alternative formats (different languages, signing, large print, audio & Braille) on request	continuous	Equalities & Diversity Working Group / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Failure to communicate equitably</li> <li>• Failure to comply with legislation</li> </ul>	Documentary; invoices; electronic database
	Investigate Council guide to council services for people with visual impairments	October 2007 (annual)	Communications / PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to increased expenditure for production of guide</li> <li>• Failure to communicate with hard to reach groups</li> <li>• Limited expertise / capacity</li> </ul>	Audio cassette; documentary
Improve print management in the Council (in accordance with value for money & consistent branding principles)	Set up corporate database within the Customer Relations team to list all details of print and design work requested by various service teams	November 2007 – maintain continuously	Graphic Design and Communications Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Failure to identify value for money solutions</li> </ul>	Documentary; electronic database
	Set up simplified procedures for print / design requests. Quantify the year-on-year costs of printing across the Council's service teams	September 2007 – continuous improvement / review	Graphic Design and Communications Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Failure to identify value for money solutions</li> </ul>	Database; procedures published on Intranet
Improve greater access to Council services by producing an A-Z in line with LGA's Reputation campaign objective	Produce an A-Z in the most appropriate format(s) to serve as a useful resource for all residents in the District.	October 2007	Communications/PR Officer / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependent on funding</li> <li>• Failure to comply with LGA Reputation Campaign undertaking</li> </ul>	A tangible booklet / fridge magnet with an A-Z listing of services and contact details

## 10 Media Management

- 10.1 Media Management is defined as any form of external agency that broadcasts or publishes information for public consumption. Includes mainly regional press (The Northern Echo / Chester-le-Street Advertiser, The Journal, Evening Chronicle and Sunderland Echo), and regional broadcasters (BBC Radio Newcastle, Sun FM, Metro FM, Durham FM, BBC Look North, Granada Media - Tyne Tees). Under certain circumstances, the national local government press and national press are circulated media releases.

### Current Snapshot

- 10.2 Since the previous Strategy, the team:

- has significantly increased issuing media releases, from 58 in 2003/4 to 110 in 2005/6.
- was successful in having 458 articles published in regional newspapers during the 2005/6 financial year, worth close to £200,000 in advertising value equivalent
- maintained a very good ratio of positive versus negative coverage of 9.3 – 1.6

More effective media management since the previous Strategy is due to the following:

- introduction of a corporate media forward plan published on the Intranet
- increased willingness of members and officers to participate in media issues
- publication, on the Intranet, of guidance on seeking publicity
- closer involvement of the HR / Comms portfolio holder in media management

- 10.3 Top media issues over the last three years included housing, environmental-related, leisure services, regeneration, and revenues & benefits. The Dreamspace incident in July 2006 was successfully managed by the team to guard the Council's reputation within the region and nationally. However, it had an impact on the team's capacity to fully focus on other issues.

- 10.4 Currently, the team sets a target of issuing a minimum of 100 press releases per annum. Key themes to be represented, in line with the Council's improvement agenda, over the next three years include:

- "you said, we did" styled articles to demonstrate the Council's commitment to improvement through consulting & engaging meaningfully with its residents
- visible improvement initiatives, especially regarding regeneration and environmental issues
- promotion of e-services to encourage take-up of these channels
- council performance and improvement

- 10.5 During the last financial year, around 300 media enquiries have been answered successfully. Often overlooked, this is often where the media requires a response from the Council in relation to a negative issue. The team drafts appropriate responses, in consultation with relevant officers and members, to counteract potential negative media coverage.

- 10.6 A media clippings service is in operation to inform key members and officers of the Council's reputation in the regional media. The distribution list was recently reviewed with the Assistant Chief Executive and the Member portfolio holder for HR / Communications to ensure a fairer and more cost-effective distribution of these clippings. Service teams have access to these through their service heads, and two copies are circulated to the Members' Room.

## Key Objectives

### 10.7 Key objectives for media management are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Manage the Council's reputation in the media	Issue at a minimum of 100 media releases per financial year. This, in combination with identifying media photo opportunities, interviews, articles etc.	Annual	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> <li>• Managing Council's reputation</li> <li>• Buy in from other teams / stakeholders</li> </ul>	Media Forward Plan; database of media releases
	Answer media enquiries as a priority, yet be honest and factual	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Managing Council's reputation</li> <li>• Co-operation from other teams / stakeholders</li> </ul>	Coverage in media – media clippings
	Encourage greater usage of media forward plan across the Council	continuous	Communications & PR Officer / Customer Relationship Manager / Chief Executive / Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Managing Council's reputation</li> <li>• Co-operation from Service heads</li> </ul>	Media Forward Plan; database of media releases. Coverage in media – media clippings
Media training for Members and Chief Officers	Implement media training day for Members and Chief Officers (possibly in conjunction with ANEC)	November 2007	Communications/PR Officer / Corporate Training Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependent on financial support by ANEC</li> <li>• Inability to put forward appropriate spokespersons (damage to reputation)</li> </ul>	Documentary
Inform Members, Chief Officers and Service Team Managers of press coverage	Papers (regional) are scanned on a daily basis to provide a collated list of relevant clippings which is circulated on a weekly and bi-weekly basis.	continuous	Customer Relations Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Failure to share information internally</li> </ul>	Documentary
Inform Members and employees on media issues	Annual presentation to Members and employees on the Council's reputation in the media	October 2007/8/9	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Limited capacity / time</li> </ul>	Documentary; feedback sheets

## 11 Advertising

- 11.1 Advertising in the context of this Strategy can be defined as paid for editorial or advertising space, especially as it relates to statutory notices, tenders, and recruitment advertising in both the local and national press.

### Current Snapshot

- 11.2 The use of advertising by the Council is generally limited to local newspapers, particularly the Chester-le-Street Advertiser (Northern Echo spin-off free paper) as it provides the greatest readership on a district-wide level, reaching 17,000 households.
- 11.3 Generally, statutory notices, especially where it concerns planning and building control, are placed in the Advertiser. During the 2005/6 financial year, a total of 37 statutory notices were published at a cost of £16, 508.
- 11.4 Recruitment advertising is placed variously in the local and national press, depending on the needs or skills detailed in the advertisement. During the 2005/6 financial year, recruitment advertisements were placed at a cost of £39,953. However, some of these costs were part-funded by partners.<sup>2</sup>
- 11.5 Advertising is currently co-ordinated by the team that liaises directly with the Council's corporate advertising agency (Pearsons), on behalf of service teams requesting advertisements or notices to be placed. Recruitment advertising is co-ordinated by the Human Resources team.
- 11.6 All advertising should be viewed as an opportunity to further promote the council, and what it stands for. Recruitment advertising in particular should include standard phrases and include our key messages to highlight our equal opportunities drive.
- 11.7 Within the council, there are often unrealistic expectations about placing an advertisement due to issues related to time scales, briefing and proofing processes. The process for requesting and approving advertisements could be improved.
- 11.8 Other standard adverts are placed in directories such as the BT directory; the Yellow Pages, and the Thompson's Directory. The average annual expenditure on these types of adverts is around £2,000.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this cost excludes larger campaigns for 9 Housing positions, Head of Planning & Environmental Health, and Head of Regeneration posts

## Key Objectives

### 11.9 Key objectives for advertising are:

Objective		Action		Timescale		Performance Measure	
Improve the effectiveness and efficiency with which advertising requests are made and dealt with	Review step-by-step procedure for those wanting to request the placement of advertisements	Customer Relations Team / Human Resources Team	October 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Inefficient use of resources</li> <li>• Unrealistic expectations within teams</li> </ul>	Documentary; published on the Intranet		
	Review advertising arrangements for recruitment & public notices, inclusive of alternative methods for advertising planning notices	Purchasing Manager / Communications/PR Officer	July 2007 - continuously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Inefficient use of resources</li> <li>• Not achieving value for money</li> </ul>	Documentary		

## 12 Community Relations

- 12.1 Community relations in the context of this Strategy relates to any communication that aids and facilitates understanding between the Council and the local community. Community-based organisations (Residents' and Tenants' organisations and parish councils) are often overlooked in communications strategies.

### **Current Snapshot**

- 12.2 There is an important need to ensure that local government issues are managed and communicated in a way that promotes awareness, understanding and involvement among the public and/or specific interest groups. The council and partnerships Community Engagement and Involvement Strategies aim to improve opportunities for engagement and a Working Group has been set up with partners to seek to achieve strategy vision.
- 12.3 These issues range from strategic (Sustainable Community Strategy; Pelton Fell regeneration project etc.), to operational issues (eg changes in refuse collection dates/times over public holidays). Poorly communicated operational information negatively impacts on the customer's experience, thus leading to dissatisfaction resulting in a high number of complaints. Providing the right information at the right time ensures that the Council stays on course towards achieving customer excellence as captured in the Corporate Plan.
- 12.4 Communicating through existing structures in local communities also has the potential to benefit the Council as these structures generally have more credibility (and legitimacy) than local government structures - in essence, the spirit of the recently published Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities.
- 12.5 The objectives and actions detailed below aim to support and strengthen both the Community Engagement & Involvement Strategy, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Corporate Plan objectives. The focus is on bridging the divide in 'mutual understanding' between the council and the various communities / interest groups it serves.



## Key Objectives

### 12.6 Key objectives for community relations are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Establish better communication channels with community-based organisations	Establish database of community-based publications/editors (as a credible third party), and share information by circulating media releases. Can also be tapped as a source for consultation.	November 2007	Communities Partnerships Team / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Failure to effectively engage our communities</li> <li>• Misinformation</li> </ul>	Captured on electronic database
	Empower residents' and tenants' associations through the provision (donation) of obsolete personal computers in co-operation with the Communities / Partnership team and ICT service teams	continuous	ICT Team / Communities & Partnerships Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Inefficient use of resources</li> <li>• Maintenance of equipment</li> <li>• Training for tenants and residents groups</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Make better use of notice boards in community centres / halls & engage with parish councils – as part of the 'Community Hubs'	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Missed opportunity in communicating efficiently with communities</li> </ul>	Number of centres involved
	Publish YARN (Your Area Residents' News) twice a year on behalf of the District Partnership	April / October – 07/08/09	Communities & Partnerships Team / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Inefficient communications by District Partnership</li> <li>• Support of partners / tenants and residents groups</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Establish and publish regenerations news in conjunction with Head of regeneration.	October 2007 – March 2008	Head of Regeneration / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Inefficient communications by District Partnership</li> <li>• Support of partners / tenants and residents groups</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Publish the Town Centre newsletter on a quarterly basis in conjunction with the Town Centre Manager	Continuous (4 per annum)	Town Centre Manager / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Inefficient communications / engagement with business community</li> </ul>	Documentary

## 13 Communicating with/in partners/hips

- 13.1 A relationship where two or more organisations work together with trust, openness and honesty to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes they cannot achieve alone. This includes a wide range of organisations spanning the public, charitable and private sectors, as well as arrangements as part of the Local Area Agreement and the District Partnership – the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 13.2 The Partnership Strategy, adopted by the Council in 2006, considers the nature and purpose of partnerships, and details the Council's partnership arrangements. The Strategy is supported by a three year action plan.
- 13.3 An audit of Council partnerships, undertaken in February 2007, identified in excess of sixty such partnerships. Within the context of communications, two main issues arise where it concerns partnership working.
- 13.4 The first concerns the internal communications arrangements, in other words, how partners operationally communicate amongst themselves, which is often set out in the partnership protocol or terms of reference.
- 13.5 The second issue concerns communicating (externally) the successes in terms of outcomes. At the moment, the Council does not have an adequate approach to decide who takes the leading responsibility within a partnership for communicating its successes. Clearly, there is also a need to establish a protocol within partnership working to determine a co-ordinated approach to external communications.
- 13.6 Where it concerns communications, the Partnerships Strategy's action plan refers to the promotion of partnership working, especially where it can be related to specific outcomes resulting from such work, and how communities can become aware of how they can be engaged (where appropriate).

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Promote partnership outcomes, inclusive of LAA, and District Partnership work, with external and internal stakeholders.	Promote partnership outcomes via Council channels such as District News, the corporate website, TeamTalk, media releases.	Ongoing	Customer Relations Team / Service Teams / Assistant Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Buy in from service teams</li> <li>• Failure to build on reputation</li> </ul>	Documentary evidence (articles in District News & TeamTalk; media coverage)
Communicate partnership working and successes in a timely and consistent manner	Establish a basic guidance document on a partnership approach to external communications	February 2008	Communities & Partnerships Team / Assistant Chief Executive / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Buy in from service teams &amp; stakeholders</li> <li>• Failure to build on reputation</li> </ul>	Document published; consultation feedback

## 14 E-based external communications

- 14.1 For the purposes of this Strategy e-based external communications includes any communications and information circulated, or available, in electronic formats such as represented by e-mail, the Inter- and Intranet.

### Current Snapshot

- 14.2 The Council has made significant improvements since the previous Strategy with the re-launch of the Council's greatly enhanced website, the launch of a corporate Intranet (see Internal Communications), as well as an updated ICT Security and Good Practice Policy to support these tools.
- 14.3 Most of the 'IEG' (Implementing Electronic Government) associated actions have now been fulfilled. The greatest challenges ahead relate to:
- the continuous review of information of content on the Council website, and more importantly,
  - to promote the uptake of electronic services such as e-billing and online payments
- 14.4 The shift in emphasis will be from publishing information to transacting with our customers. The Customer Relations team has embarked on a campaign to promote the range of online services, put in place by the ICT team, offered by the Council.
- 14.5 The latest version of the website is also more accessible to residents whose first language is not English, as well as for people with visual impairments (subscription to ReadSpeaker). Future reviews will be undertaken in view of customer feedback.
- 14.6 Apart from assistance with the continuous review of the website, the Customer Relations team also piloted the use of SMS technology as part of an integrated campaign to support the Council's benefit take-up and anti-fraud campaign.

## Key Objectives

### 14.7 Key objectives for e based external communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Improve Council Website to benefit primarily residents in the district	Re-design homepage	continuous	ICT Team / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget</li> <li>• Managing Council's reputation online</li> <li>• Lack of webmaster role</li> <li>• Failure for service teams to support and update information</li> <li>• Transformational Government agenda</li> </ul>	Online Survey; Home Page interface, general residents satisfaction
	Annually review the Council's web content and publishing guidelines (in consultation with the ICT team) to aid web co-ordinators in various service teams	November 2007 / 08 / 09	ICT Manager / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Managing efficient / appropriate use of ICT infrastructure</li> <li>• Transformational Government agenda</li> </ul>	Documentary; published on Intranet
Improve and promote the uptake of online services	Assist / advise the ICT team in the ongoing improvement of content as managed by various service teams	continuous	Customer Relations Team / ICT Team / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Buy-in from teams</li> <li>• Outdated information</li> </ul>	Up to date information, increased usage of web-site
	Promote the uptake of e-services through District News, Website, leaflets, posters and other promotional materials	continuous	Customer Relations Manager / ICT Manager / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resources</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> <li>• Limited public interest</li> <li>• Limited resources to have a real impact</li> </ul>	Documentary
	Promote the usage of e-mail / online services by Members	September 2007	Personnel & Communications Portfolio Holder / ICT Manager / Customer Relations Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Might incur expenditure on training and equipment</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> <li>• Non-efficient use of Council's resources</li> </ul>	Documentary / uptake figures

## 15 Corporate branding and identity

- 15.1 Corporate branding can be described as the way in which the Council presents its services and information visually to external audiences. This relates to a consistent way of communicating to all our diverse audiences through visual and written communications.

### **Current Snapshot**

- 15.2 At the beginning of 2006, the Council became one of the first Councils in the region to sign up to the Local Government Association's Reputation campaign. The aim of this campaign is to promote the Council and its services by focusing on making Council services more visible to the public (e.g. branding council vehicles with the 'OneTeam' logo, and having a more consistent approach to corporate branding as it relates to corporate publications).
- 15.3 One strand of this campaign is to improve branding of community-based services such as environmental services and regeneration projects. The way in which the Council brands itself poses room for improvement, and this will be addressed in the action plan.
- 15.4 Over the last year, the Equalities and Diversity Working Group has informed a draft set of Corporate Communication Standards to be published on the Council's Intranet by March 2007. Effectively, this is a set of guidelines that will, to a great extent, address issues such as communicating with diverse audiences, branding, media protocols, and guidance on Plain English (inclusive of a style guide).
- 15.5 The guidelines will set standards for service teams in marketing and branding terms to ensure that messages and visual representations of the Council are consistent with the 'OneTeam' ethos which was a result to indicate internally (and externally) the Council's commitment to continuous improvement. The guidelines reflect good practice from around the country, and it is hoped that this will strengthen the Council's approach to communicating internally, but especially, externally. It is intended to make this set of guidelines available on the Intranet by the time it is finalised.

## Key Objectives

### 15.6. Key objectives and actions for corporate branding and identity are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Enhance uniformity of messages / visuals communicated by the council to external and internal audiences	Finalise and publish Corporate Communications Standards electronically, and enforce Council-wide compliance	October 2007	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource</li> <li>• Limited capacity</li> <li>• Buy-in from service teams</li> <li>• Managing Council's reputation</li> </ul>	Intranet; documentary
	Ensure consistent branding across all community services, particularly: environmental, regeneration and leisure service teams in support of the LGA's Reputation campaign	September 2007 - ongoing	Customer Relations Team / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing budget / resource, though certain times might incur expenditure</li> <li>• Managing the Council's reputation</li> </ul>	Photographs; documentary; electronic picture database
	Establish photographic library on Intranet as a corporate resource	November 2007	Graphic Design & Communications Assistant / Public Relations Assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource, though expenditure might be incurred by expanding stock photographs</li> <li>• Limited capacity / expertise</li> </ul>	Published on the Intranet
	Advise and support service teams to brand vehicles, uniforms, signs, banners etc.	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing resource, though expenditure might be incurred by service teams</li> <li>• Managing the Council's reputation</li> </ul>	Intranet / documentary / photo archive of branding initiatives

## 16 Continuous Service Improvement

- 16.1 The council's reputation will not improve unless it provides improved services which show better value for money. The LGA research shows the particular need to improve the visibility of Council services, especially those delivered at a neighbourhood level, the so called 'streetscene'. If services are better perceived However, all services need to continue to improve. If people feel that and see that services are good then this is perhaps the most effective communications tool we have at our disposal

### Current Snapshot

- 16.2 The council embarked on an ambitious improvement programme following its 'poor' Comprehensive Performance assessment judgement in March 2004. The effort in terms of service improvement is evident:
- The council is making good progress overall according to the Audit commission and a re-inspection is due to take place in February 2006
  - The housing service has improved from 'Poor' to 'Fair'
  - The environmental Services has improved from 'Fair' to 'Good' with 'promising prospects of improvement'
  - Revenues and Benefits have completed a 255 point Improvement plan and is showing top quartile performance
  - The planning service is out performing similar services in the region
  - Selby Cottage received an 'Outstanding' OFSTED report
  - About 80% of our key performance indicators have improved
  - Customer satisfaction is improving as a result
- 16.3 The council needs to maintain this momentum and show improvement and value for money across all services. All staff need to become ambassadors for the organisation and indeed this message is regularly communicated to staff at employee briefings.



## Key Objectives

### 16.4 Key objectives for Continuous Service Improvement are;

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Ensure the council continues to focus on its improvement programme	Implement IRP2 Learn from the 2007 CPA inspection and develop a further improvement programme as a result	December 2007	Improvement & Performance Team	Within existing resource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited capacity</li> <li>Buy-in from service teams</li> <li>Managing Council's reputation</li> </ul>	At least Fair CPA re-categorisation Improved future service inspection outcomes
Ensure individual service plans include proposals for service improvement	Ensure corporate service planning template includes individual service improvement plans Monitor implementation of improvement plans through programme Management Board	December 2007 - March 2010	Improvement & Performance Team	Within existing resource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited capacity</li> <li>Buy-in from service teams</li> </ul>	Improved future service inspection outcomes
Develop an ambassador culture within the council	Provide awareness training for all staff around going the extra mile Reward achievement Challenge inappropriate behaviour	June - August 2008 Continuous Continuous	Improvement & Performance Team	Within existing resource <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buy-in from service teams</li> <li>Managing Council's reputation</li> </ul>	Increase in customer satisfaction across

## 17 Monitoring and Reviewing the Implementation of the Strategy

- 17.1 Strategies rapidly become obsolete unless constantly reviewed as part of a permanent strategic management process. In addition things change and communities will require different things. The strategy may change as a result of engagement with our communities. This document is therefore a living document which will be reviewed on the basis of such change.
- 17.2 It is intended that the implementation of the Strategy will be initially monitored by the council's Project Management Board and will be led by the Assistant Chief Executive. This ought to continue until a more specific project board is developed as part of other Strategy proposals (Community Engagement and Involvement Working Group)
- 17.3 Reports on progress will be made to Corporate Management Team and the Executive through the Corporate Performance Reporting System. Such reports will also be made available to Scrutiny panels in due course. Where there is any slippage corrective action will be taken. Where there is a need to significantly review the plan this will be by council resolution. Minor changes to the plan will be the responsibility of the Project Management Board.
- 17.4 There are clearly resource issues associated with the implementation of the Strategy. It is anticipated that most of the action plan will be achieved by developing revised more effective practices and new ways of working. Where there are significant resource implications these will be identified and considered in the more detailed project plans that will be developed to achieve the Strategy action plans. A key risk to the delivery of the strategy is the availability of officer time to deliver the action plan. This will need to be managed within the organisation.
- 17.5 The Communications/PR Officer, the Graphic Design & Communications Assistant and Customer Relations Assistant take prime responsibility for many aspects related to the operational implementation of this strategy. However, at the outset of this document, it was noted that communications cannot simply be reduced to two people within the organisation. Responsibilities for implementation were emphasised earlier on.
- 17.6 Future strategy reviews will coincide with future comprehensive employee surveys (similar in design to the Employee Survey 2005) which will enable a valid measure for assessing progress. Other measures, inclusive of readership, online, and customer satisfaction surveys, will continue to be used as a method for monitoring and evaluation purposes. In addition, important outputs will be measured as set out in the Customer Relations team's service plan. Internal communications will be improved where gaps are identified in subsequent employee surveys, as is currently the case with the Organisational Development team's action plan to address employee concerns from the 2005 employee survey.

## **References / evidence**

This strategy has been prepared by using:

- ***Audit Letter Chester-le-Street District Council 2005/6***
- ***The Corporate Plan Corporate Plan 2006-2009***
- ***The Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016***
  
- ***The Local Government White Paper – Strong and prosperous communities (2006)***
- ***Employee Surveys 2003 & 2005 Findings, PWR***
- ***District News Readership Survey 2005***
- ***TeamTalk Readership Survey 2006***
- ***Residents' Opinion Surveys 2003; 2004; 2005***
- ***Local Government Reputation LGA/IDeA 2006***

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