



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to: Council

Date of Meeting: 26th July 2007

Report from: Craig Etherington - Customer Relationship Manager

Title of Report: Corporate Communications Strategy

Agenda Item Number: **11**

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Council to adopt the proposed Corporate Communication Strategy 2007 – 2010 attached at appendix 1.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Corporate Management Team, ICT Manager, other Service Team Managers, Executive Portfolio Holder and key partners and stakeholders have been consulted during the development of the proposed Corporate Communication Strategy 2007 – 2010.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The strategy underpins the delivery of all of the Council's priorities. It is directly linked to other corporate documents such as the Corporate Plan 2007-2010, 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:

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial and Value for Money

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 will incorporate a more integrated approach to marketing their services to ensure greater consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in council communications. It is envisaged that by adopting a more joined up approach to the production of print based information, and with greater use of e-based communications systems, improved efficiencies will be identified.

4.2 Legal

There are no specific legal issues associated to this report.

4.3 Personnel

There are no specific personnel issues associated with this report.

4.4 Other Services

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.

Directors and Service Team Managers, in conjunction with elected members, 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.

4.5 Diversity

The Council is committed to ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders are given full and equal access to the services we deliver. This strategy will provide further opportunities for us to engage and communicate more effectively with customers from BME communities and will be linked directly to the Equalities and Diversity Working Group.

4.6 Risk Implications

Effective communication is vital to the success and failure of many of the Council's initiatives. Managing and protecting our reputation is essential if we are to continue to progress as a successful Council. The strategy and associated actions will ensure, through effective communication and marketing that we protect our reputation.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder issues associated with this report.

4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

4.9 Other Implications

While a key requirement in respect of corporate awareness is that the responsibility to communicate equates with the responsibilities associated with the seniority 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.

To ensure that such a culture exists within the Council, the Public relations team will promote widespread access to, and involvement in the monitoring and development of the strategy. Updates and progress reports will be presented to the Programme Management Board on a regular basis.

5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL

5.1 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.

5.2 The 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 the strategy is comprehensive with an emphasis on corporate responsibility for communications, especially communications within the Council.

5.3 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.

5.4 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 fulfill the quality of life, and aspirations of local people
- ...takes pride in its work, employees, and members
- ...makes improvements real and long-lasting

5.5 A number of actions and initiatives developed by the Council over the past 3 years have been to focus on developing systems for communication. This strategy will not only build on this success, but will also focus on the cultural aspects within the Council. It will act as a key driver to ensure that elected members and officers at all levels see the opportunities to communicate their success and achievements across a broad range of media and therefore continually enhance the growing reputation of the Council and its partners.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that the proposed Corporate Communications Strategy 2007 – 2010 is adopted.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO

- 7.1 Corporate Plan 2007 -2010,
- 7.2 Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016,
- 7.3 Customer Excellence Strategy,
- 7.4 Equalities Scheme Action Plan,
- 7.5 Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy.

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