

Appendix 1 WDC Communication Strategy

1. What is a Communication Strategy?

Communication plays a vital role in everything we, staff and councillors, do at Warwick District Council.

An effective Communication Strategy agrees the different ways an organisation will deliver messages to its audiences in an organised and targeted way.

This strategy will outline how Warwick District Council aims to keep different groups of people informed and to encourage two-way communication. Through this strategy we, staff and councillors, will be reinforcing the message that Warwick district is a great place to live work and visit and that the council is playing its part by working hard to recycle, keeping our surroundings beautiful and towns vibrant. All this is underpinned by great customer service for all our residents and visitors and a careful approach to budgeting to achieve our mission.

2. Why is a Communication Strategy Important Now?

In this challenging period of economic turbulence our residents, visitors, local businesses, partner organisations, staff and members have a right to know about:

- Our services.
- Our performance – what we are doing well and where we need to improve.
- How we are spending public money.
- The decisions we make and how they are taken.

Customer perception is determined by all aspects of communication - from the way we write emails and letters and answer the phone, through to the newsletters, posters and leaflets we produce. A Communication Strategy will provide a framework that helps to protect and enhance the reputation of the council.

Delivering effective communication improves:

- Our relationships with residents, visitors, businesses and partner organisations.
- Our knowledge of customers and their demands on our services, helping us to improve how we deliver.
- Residents' awareness and understanding of the services we deliver.
- The ability of staff to be effective and positive ambassadors for the council.

This Strategy covers the period from April 2013 – April 2016 and is intended to provide a consistent approach to communication. It will help

us deliver our own corporate objectives. Most communication initiatives will be delivered as part of our everyday activities and developed through service area plans. This will include communication to support the Fit for the Future Programme.

Staff will need to understand the Communication Strategy, why effective communication is important and what role they have to play in delivering it.

3. Key Principles of the Communication Strategy

We will:

- Be polite, considerate and honest with our customers, and aim to meet their expectation of high customer service standards.
- Ensure the effect of our communication can be measured and evaluated - by doing this we will ensure our approach begins and ends with the customer.
- Ensure our communication engages and encourages residents to become involved in shaping their public services.
- Be aware that the Localism Act will mean new opportunities for local authorities and citizens. Our communication will reflect this and will help to empower communities and manage expectations.
- Understand our customers by identifying defined audience groups and using that knowledge to inform what and how we communicate.
- Use the appropriate channel for the audience and subject matter with digital channels explored and exploited wherever possible.
- Ensure all communication is accessible, particularly for those requiring large print, Braille or CD format, providing translation when appropriate.
- Be consistent across all channels and use plain English.

Audiences

Staff need to understand who they are communicating to - who is their target audience? We have a number of different audiences to consider for each communication;

- Residents
- Tourists & visitors
- Tenants
- Councillors
- Stakeholders & Partners
- Local businesses
- Complainants
- Hard to reach groups – poor accessibility to communication, language barriers, geography, special needs

4. Delivering the Communication Strategy

Delivering the Strategy and Action Plan requires a commitment from everyone at Warwick District Council:

Corporate Management Team - Communication is a priority activity for the authority's management team (CMT). The team will communicate key corporate decisions accurately, clearly and speedily to all employees. They will also take the lead in communicating messages to the public and partner organisations, and ensuring communication is two-way.

Senior Management Team - The Communication Strategy is owned by the Senior Management Team. Heads of service have responsibility for creating awareness of, and implementing, the communications strategy among their teams and the wider public. Service area plans will include key communication actions and will be based on sound customer insight. They also have responsibility for establishing two-way channels of communication with their teams and their customers. This will ensure employees are aware of key authority and service decisions and provide opportunities for feedback from employees to the management team. It will also ensure that customer feedback is used to improve and target services.

All employees - All staff have responsibility for communicating with the public and with their colleagues. It is important that our key principles for communication are followed. This will help ensure accurate, honest, appropriate and timely information flows openly from the organisation at all levels. It is also vital that our employees are kept well informed about the authority's key themes, measures and performance so they can be effective advocates for the authority and support other channels of communication.

Councillors - The authority's councillors are a vital channel of communication, representing the authority at a local, regional and national level. As well as being informed about events and services, members also need to be kept up-to-date with major corporate projects, events or issues which could affect people living in Warwick district communities or visitors to the district.

The Media Team - Staff and service areas will be expected to co-ordinate and deliver their own communication. They will be supported by the media team in terms of the messages delivered, ensuring consistency across all channels, ensuring appropriate guidelines are followed and that messages are written in plain English. Advice and support will be provided to SMT on appropriate methods of internal communication. They will also co-ordinate the day to day management of the media function by being the first point of contact for the press, staff and councillors.

Community Partnership Team (CPT) –provide advice on the most effective methods of communication with diverse communities in Warwick District. They will support staff and service areas in choosing the most appropriate method of communication to engage with all sectors of the community, use the 'Engaging with Communities Co-ordination Group' to reach key groups and offer guidance on how to complete the feedback loop. The CPT is often the first point of contact with communities.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

This is communication that leaves the council and reaches the public arena. It includes:

Emails, letters, reports, published documents, social media, newspaper articles, website, posters, leaflets, booklets as well as phone conversations and face to face contact between staff and customers.

Key Aims

1. To deliver information about the council's services and facilities and how customers can access them, as stated in the Channel Strategy.
2. To remain customer focused, encouraging two-way communication with customers.
3. To reflect the human face of the council, taking ownership of issues/problems and dealing with them openly, honestly and consistently across service areas.
4. To use the appropriate channel for the audience and subject matter, using cheaper channels and self-service where possible.
5. To ensure compliance with changes in guidelines or Government Policy.
6. To support emergency situations with simple, effective communications.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

This is all the information that is shared within an organisation between various levels of staff and Members. It includes;

Emails, intranet, team meetings, chief's speech, blog, publications, newsletters, documents, minutes/agendas, one-to-ones, appraisals, gossip, notice-boards, as well as all external communications that staff receive.

Key Aims

1. To communicate important news, issues, key projects, problems to staff and members in a timely and effective way.
2. To ensure that all communication is understood by staff regardless of grade and work area (onsite/offsite).

3. To ensure staff receive important, controversial, or topical information before it reaches the public arena, so they can support the communication externally.
4. To equip staff and councillors with the information they need to be;
 - a. Empowered and enthusiastic because they know what's going on.
 - b. Effective ambassadors for the council.
 - c. Able to confirm and clarify other communication received by residents, if asked.
5. To encourage two way communication through the appraisal system and feedback questionnaires
6. Address the gossip aspect too by ensuring that communication is accurate and timely and does not leave gaps for speculation and misunderstanding.
7. To be clear, business like and polite, using salutations; to talk rather than email, to target emails appropriately rather than copying in everyone.

MEASURES

Communication needs to be measured and evaluated to ensure it is achieving its aim. The Media Team can assist in reviewing the measures and processes we have in place for communication.

This will be achieved by;

1. Encouraging senior management and service areas to set realistic goals for their communications and to understand what they are trying to achieve.
2. Using the information from lessons learned and to inform future recommendations.
3. Ensuring all information and customer feedback is shared across the council.
4. Consultation with customers – regular questionnaires and opportunities for feedback will be incorporated into the process.
5. Carrying out consultation with staff, using the Staff Focus Group and Survey Monkey on the intranet to encourage two-way dialogue.
6. Following a consistent approach for dealing with complaints which demonstrate the council's open and honest approach as well as its human face.
7. Measuring the customer experience eg. Mystery Shoppers can be used to assess face to face and telephone communications.

5. Review of the Communication Strategy

Warwick District Council will treat the Communication Strategy as "business as usual" with a view to constantly evolving the strategy. Regular review of communication actions will be monitored through service area plans.

A formal review of this document will be carried out annually.

6. Communication Strategy Action Plan

This Action Plan will provide a framework for ensuring the Communication Strategy is implemented across the whole council, and who has responsibility for it.

Whilst many of the actions will be co-ordinated by the media room, it will be the responsibility of SMT to make sure that their staff understand the principles and can implement the necessary actions.