
Meeting: Executive
Date: 6 April 2010
Subject: Communications Strategy
Report of: Cllr Richard Stay , Deputy Leader of the Council
Summary: The report proposes a communications strategy for the Council to enhance customer satisfaction.

Advising Officer: Richard Ellis, Director of Customer and Shared Services
Contact Officer: Georgina Stanton, Assistant Director of Communications
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Key Decision Yes
**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Effective communication with residents, Members, employees and partners is fundamental to the achievement of all of the Council's priorities.

Financial:

The costs of the strategy will be met from existing resources, within Communications and from other budgets where initiatives relate to shared areas of work (e.g. Community Engagement, Human Resources and Sustainable Communities).

Funding for the continuation of News Central is being reviewed in light of the budget settlement for 2010/11.

Legal:

All Communications activity conducted by the authority and proposed within this plan will be consistent with the statutory code of conduct for local government communications.

Risk Management:

Corporate reputation is widely recognised as an organisational risk in both the private and public sector.

The measures proposed in the communications strategy are primarily motivated by the ambition to enhance customer satisfaction and staff engagement.

Effective delivery of these measures will also contribute to the positive management of the risk of reputational damage.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Employees of the Council are identified as a priority audience within the strategy which recommends a range of initiatives to enhance staff communication.

Equalities/Human Rights:

The Council has legal duties to promote race, gender and disability equality and to tackle discrimination experienced by other vulnerable groups.

It is therefore an explicit responsibility of the communications function and this strategy to ensure that all of its activities and publications are developed in ways which actively support these duties. This responsibility extends beyond the conventional responses of making materials accessible to vulnerable and hard to reach groups (e.g. by producing News Central in alternative formats) to developing new communication channels and techniques that are more likely to reach these audiences.

Community Safety:

National and local research demonstrates that community safety is a priority issue for local residents. In recognition of this fact, the communication strategy identifies as an area of priority, the need to raise awareness of the Council's role, with partners, in helping to make Central Bedfordshire a safer, greener and cleaner area.

Sustainability:

The communication strategy development is closely aligned to the Web Development Strategy. This will lead to enhancements in our on line presence that reduce our dependency on printed literature which will bring both economic and environmental advantages.

This strategy will positively contribute to the Council's ambition to reduce energy use. The Carbon Trust estimates that robust internal communication campaigns can promote changes in behaviour leading to reductions in energy use of up to 10%.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

- The strategy was considered by the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22nd February.
- The Committee made a number of presentational and editorial changes to the document which have been incorporated in the draft presented to Executive. The principal issue raised by the Committee was a suggestion that the core

objective for the strategy and communications activity must be to improve customer understanding, awareness and therefore satisfaction with Central Bedfordshire Council. This feedback has also directly influenced the draft being considered by Executive.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. That the Executive considers and amends the strategic objectives, core strands of activity and performance measures within the strategy.**
- 2. That the Council be recommended to approve the strategy for implementation.**

Reason for Recommendation(s): So that communication activity within the council can be focused on priority actions to enhance customer satisfaction.

Executive Summary

Communications is fundamental to the work of the Council. When managed well, it can support Members, customers, colleagues and partners of the Council and enable it to achieve its core objectives.

The Communications Strategy is proposed to give a focus and direction to the way in which Central Bedfordshire Council will deliver planned, sustained and two way communication with its key audiences.

The strategy draws on local research and national best practice in recommending key objectives, critical performance indicators, priority audiences, messages and services.

It also proposes seven priority campaigns for the period 2010 -11;

- Enhancing communication channels – including the website and News Central
- Stakeholder communications – improving our relationship with key organisations and individuals
- Delivering core campaigns
- Developing internal communications
- Developing relations with the local and national media
- Improving our ways of working

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Communication Strategy 2010 - 2012

Appendix B – Local Government Association Reputation Campaign.

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

What Influences Public Satisfaction – Research Study published by the Local Government Association 2005.

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands.