

**Salisbury District Council - Communications Strategy - 2004-07
Executive Summary**

**SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL
Communications Policy**

Salisbury District Council recognises the importance of communication. For everything it does, the council will make sure that clear communication plans are in place to maximise public information and minimise confusion.

We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with the public, with our professional partners, and with each other, in order to promote mutual understanding, and facilitate a better service to the people of South Wiltshire.

All our communication will be produced in 'plain English', written for its intended audience and be unambiguous, timely and to an appropriate quality.

All communication and promotional material issued by the council will be branded and therefore clearly identifiable as having come from the council and will include key contact details.

All council communication, whether it is internal or external, will show respect for those with whom we are communicating. It will be prepared in line with other appropriate council policies concerning freedom of information, data protection, fairness and equality, customer care and environmental sustainability.

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1. Introduction

The Audit Commission has assessed Salisbury District Council as a 'good' council with solid foundations to become excellent at its next assessment in 2007. This task is reflected in the council's long-held ambition to be a nationally recognised, high performing council with a strong emphasis on partnership working and engaging the community.

Excellent communication will be key in helping the council meet this target and therefore, the objectives and detailed action plans outlined in this strategy will become critical parts of the council's overall improvement plan for the next three years.

This document is an executive summary communications strategy, giving **some** background information, but focussing primarily upon four strategic objectives regarding communication and their accompanying action plans.

A more comprehensive communications strategy document giving more background information and some wider detail about how we communicate has been written as a working strategy document for service units and will be circulated to service unit heads. It is available to others, on request, from the Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager.

2. Key principles of good communication

The council is committed to providing excellent communications to all its audiences and therefore embraces some key principles which it expects anyone communicating as its representative to also recognise and follow.

- Honest and open, two-way communication
- Strong, accurate and easily accessible communication
- All communication – spoken, written (whether presented on paper or electronically) - should be clear, easily understood, timely and kept up to date.
- All published material should adhere to our accepted corporate style and be easily and instantly identifiable as originating from Salisbury District Council.
- All communication should be accessible to all those who would benefit from it, including groups we recognise to be hard to engage, whether through the traditional definition of being 'hard to reach' or increasingly because of 'lifestyle reasons' - e.g. service families, travellers, ethnic groups, the young, working adults. Consequently the words and images used in communication should demonstrate inclusivity and be appealing to all appropriate audiences.

When communicating as part of a partnership, care must be taken to ensure all parties are happy with communication plans - the message, the tools and the timings must be agreed in advance.

3. Challenges we face

While there have been significant improvements to its communication over the past few years the council continues to face new and fresh challenges which increase the need for clear, innovative communication delivered to all audiences.

- Nationally, local government has the poorest image and reputation of all the public services. Communications plays a key role since it is accepted that residents who feel informed are far more likely to be satisfied than residents who do not feel informed.
- Locally the council has difficult budgetary issues to address in the short term and tough government targets to meet.
- Internally there are major changes planned on service delivery that will impact on traditional methods of working. Examples include: customer access, e-government and strategic partnerships. This will require a change in organisational culture and ethos and impact on many traditional communication methods.
- Feedback from staff focus groups and surveys has identified blockages in internal communications that prevent clear messages getting through.

4. A shared responsibility for the communications strategy

The **chief executive** and the **policy directors** will be responsible for driving the communications strategy by actively, and demonstrably, applying its principles to all aspects of their work. All **service unit heads** will take particular responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation of the communications strategy within their areas of responsibility.

- Each service unit will assess its own commitment to the communications strategy and designate one or more 'key communicator(s)'. As part of the corporate communications and consultation group, the key communicators will, amongst other things, be responsible for ensuring that their particular service unit contributes news to the South Wilts Citizen, the council's web site and other corporate sources of information as appropriate.
- The **Corporate marketing and communications team** provides advice and guidance to members and officers on the communications aspects of major issues facing the council and, through its diverse activities supports the council's core values and political priorities. It has a key role to play in all areas of communication:
 - External communications
 - Internal communications
 - New media – internet/intranet
 - Media relations

- Corporate identity
- Marketing and promotion

Day-to-day responsibility for the delivery of the actions in support of the strategy's objectives lies with the corporate marketing and communications manager and the detailed action plans that follow form the basis of the wider team's annual work programme.

5. Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of the communications strategy are four-fold:

- Through **external communication**, to seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services
- Through **e-communication**, to maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology
- To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong **corporate identity**
- Through **internal communication**, to increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units

The strategy will be continually updated and a rolling three-year action plan will be produced annually. It will be comprehensively reviewed in 2007.

5.1 Strategic Objective 1: External communication

To seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services

- We will protect and enhance the reputation of Salisbury District Council
- We will earn understanding and support for the organisation, while at the same time influencing opinion and behaviour
- We will actively educate and inform the public about the council, its practices and its services
- We will take a targeted, high profile approach to major local issues
- We will give equal support and attention to all geographical areas covered by Salisbury district

It is accepted that there is a direct correlation between the amount of information residents have about their local council and the amount of confidence and support they have in that council. In late 2003 MORI carried out a BVPI General Survey in the Salisbury District Council area. In line with national experience this survey showed a correlation between the extent that residents feel informed about the

council and their overall satisfaction with the council. For example, nearly 80% of informed residents are satisfied with Salisbury District Council's performance whereas for uninformed residents the satisfaction level falls to less than 40%. Residents can feel informed about the council and about what the council does in a number of ways, many of which rely on mature communication processes. This points to the importance of having a wide variety of external communication tools available.

The media is one of the primary external sources of information about the council for many residents. So on-going improvements and developments to the council's media relations approach are suggested in the strategy's action plan. There is also a separate media relations protocol giving information on the issuing of press releases and appropriate spokespeople.

5.2 Strategic Objective 2: E-Communication

To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology

- We will continually seek out and exploit the opportunities presented by electronic communication, internally and externally, to benefit the council and the communities it serves.
- We will support the use of e-communication by training our staff and elected members in its use.
- We will use the council's website to promote the council and its services and to facilitate channels of communication that the public can use to speak to us.
- We will use a redeveloped intranet site to communicate fully with our staff and elected members, and actively encourage its use.

5.3 Strategic objective 3: Corporate Identity

To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong corporate identity

- We will provide information in a clearly branded, concise fashion to both internal and external audiences
- We will promote the individual services provided by the council, but always be mindful of their contribution to the corporate body as a whole
- We will always adhere to the guidelines laid out in the publications and printed material protocol and any corporate identity protocol and style guide there may be

Communication, especially printed material, is not simply about how it looks – but about whether it is easily understood. So some suggested actions look at cementing

the improvements to the corporate identity through language - the use of plain English and the establishment of reader panels as well as the introduction of a council-wide style guide.

5.4 Strategic Objective 4: Internal Communication

To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units

- We will maintain a strong two-way flow of information within the council that supports and encourages teamwork, trust and loyalty.
- We will inform all our staff and members of issues and events that affect the council and the impact it will have upon them.
- We will consult our staff through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practice and procedures.
- We will listen as well as talk in our daily dealings with colleagues and elected members.

It is envisaged that a separate strategy outlining developments in internal communications over the next three years will be a direct outcome of this wider strategy.

6. Delivering the strategy and action plans

The following pages show how we will achieve this, and when. Resource implications are included, however most of the expenditure will be met from existing budgets.

The four strategic objectives are extremely far-reaching and rely upon efficient and consistent use of a number of communications tools. Please refer to the action plans that can be found in the pages that follow.

We will periodically measure the success of the strategy and establish information regarding the council's reputation and levels of customer and staff satisfaction through formal surveys (external and internal) and mystery shoppers, focus groups, established forums (tenant's panel, People's Voice, Tomorrow's Voice), the South Wilts Citizen and the website.

Appendix I: Communications Strategy – Action Plan 2004 - 2007

Strategic objective 1. External Communications: (PMS ID 169, 822)		To seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Press releases, media briefings	Continue to issue press releases in support of corporate and service unit activities		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Media Monitoring	Carry out benchmarking exercise to set current status		Complete monthly and annual report	Complete monthly and annual report	PR Officer
	Develop process of media monitoring/targets	198			PR Officer
Proactive support to Journalists	Survey targeted journalists and establish their requirements		Carry out annual survey	Carry out annual survey	PR officer
	Establish 'media resource centre' on web site		Keep resource centre updated	Keep resource centre updated	PR Officer/web team
Facilitate a corporate approach to media relations	Revise the media relations protocol	197 ongoing	Keep under review and amend if required	Keep under review and amend if required	CMCMgr/PR Officer
	Develop and implement appropriate training sessions for service units and members		Ongoing as required	Ongoing as required	PR Officer

Strategic objective 1. External Communications:		To seek continued Improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
	Work with members of corporate communications and consultation working group to develop annual PR plan		Produce annual PR plan from portfolio plans	Ongoing	PR Officer/CMCMgr
Raise the national profile of the council through PR	Target local government media. Develop use of trade press		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Corporate campaign	Define and implement a 'value for money' focussed campaign Sept-May	823	Identify and implement annual campaign – Sept – May	Identify and implement annual campaign – Sept – May	CMCTeam
External recognition for communications work			Enter for 'comms team of the year award' and council magazine of the year award	Enter for industry award with a community promotional campaign	CMCTeam
Promote community leadership role	Profile community planning work, SWSA, other partnerships		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Service unit campaigns	Implement PR strategies for identified projects from annual PR plan		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Raise council's profile via civic PR	Develop annual PR plan from Chairman's charity/cause		Implement annual Chairman's PR plan	Ongoing	PR Officer

Strategic objective 1. External Communications:		To seek continued Improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Key messages – corporate	Develop key messages		Evolve key messages	Evolve key messages	CMCMgr
Service unit communication strategies			Consider the development of unit strategies	Ongoing implementation of strategies	CMCTeam with Service Units
Support to service units in promoting their service	Develop series of 'how to' guides covering all aspects of communication		Commission corporate support material		
Corporate caravan			Review and update the caravan and its use		CMCMgr with Parks service
The South Wilts Citizen	Publish three editions - July, October, February		Publish four editions - depending upon advertising revenue	Publish four editions - dependent upon advertising revenue	PR Officer
The Corporate Plan	Publish full and short version - July (staff and stakeholders)		Publish full and staff version - July	Publish full and staff version - July	CMCTeam
Best Value Performance Plan (county wide)	Publish annually (March)		Publish annually (March)	Publish annually (March)	CMCTeam
Letters	Start to re-write all standard letters (with CC)				CMCMgr/CCMgr
Gatekeeper - <i>also see corporate identity action plan</i>	Establish reader panel				Comms Officer
Communications charter	Write and publish charter (based on policy)				CMCMgr/CCMgr

Strategic objective 2. E-Communications:		To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Web site	Identify and write missing text and implement process to sustain up-to-date web site	762			CMCTeam
Email	Publish email policy and develop corporate standard for look, salutation and sign off				CMCTeam
Style guidelines	Publish editorial and 'SDC specific' style guide				CMCTeam
Members pages			Develop interactive pages for use by members		e-gov officer/DSU
Media centre			Develop interactive resource pages for media		e-gov officer/ PR Officer
External sites' policy	Write policy	765			CMCMgr/e-gov officer
Marketing and Communications strategy	Define and implement a PR and advertising campaign to promote the web site and its services	763	ongoing	ongoing	e-gov officer/CMCMgr

Strategic objective 3. Corporate identity:		To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong corporate identity			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Corporate identity and logo	Carry out a review of the corporate identity and start to implement recommendations	Includes 178			CMCTeam and working group
Establish templates	Stationery, external publications, presentation, email format, signage, notice boards etc	174 and 565	Apply template approach to internal communication		Comms Officer
SDC style guide	Publish guides to support resultant protocols - web related, wider council editorial	174			CMCTeam
Gatekeeper and publications and printed material protocol - incl. letters	Continue to work to the disciplines outlined in the protocol				Comms Officer
Graphic Design	Create framework agreements with preferred designers				CMCTeam
Plain English and crystal mark membership	Consider corporate membership, identify top 5 leaflets/forms for crystal mark	179			Comms officer
Advertising and sponsorship of corporate publications and locations		181	Identify scope and guidelines		CMCMgr

Strategic objective 4. Internal Communications: (PMS ID: 173)		To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Audit of internal communications	As part of the corporate identity review, in part		Further work as defined	Further work as defined	CMCTeam
Internal communications strategy			Write strategy		CMCMgr/PPT
Intranet		764	Design and populate new intranet site		e-gov officer/CMCMgr
People Matter	Write clear editorial policy and production schedule - consider frequency				CMCMgr
The Bulletin	Write clear editorial policy and production schedule - consider distribution				DSU
Corporate identity	Consider 'internal branding' as part of the overall corporate identity review				CMCMgr
'we're proud of' campaign			Implement 'pride in staff' campaign to reflect successes		CMCTeam
Member handbook	Write and publish				Working group

Strategic objective 4. Internal Communications: (PMS ID: 173)		To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
'Year Book'			Produce annual compilation of people-related successes	ongoing	People Matter editors
CPA improvement plan	Incorporate into corporate plan, issue email updates internally				PD/Working group
Office centralisation	Develop comprehensive communication plans to ensure staff and members feel well informed		ongoing	ongoing	PD/CMCMgr
Improving customer services	Develop comprehensive communication plans to ensure staff and members feel well informed		ongoing	ongoing	PD/CCMgr/CMC Mgr

Where abbreviations occur:

PD= Policy Director

CMCMgr= Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager

CMCTeam= Corporate Marketing and Communications Team

CCMgr= Customer Care Manager

PMS= Performance Management System