



Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Communications Strategy

2021

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Author	Corporate Communications & PR Manager

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EQIA	N/A
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ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

COUNCIL'S Communications Strategy describes the Council's strategic approach to the management of Corporate Communications and PR. It was adopted by Council in September 2017 and reviewed in June 2021. Council adopted the revised Strategy on 1st February 2022.

Effective communication is the responsibility of all Elected Members and Officers across the Council.

The Corporate Communications Team is responsible for developing and setting the strategic framework for delivering the Council's communications.

The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee has overall responsibility for making recommendation to Council on corporate communication matters.

The implementation and effectiveness of the policy will be overseen by the Chief Executive of the Council or by officers so designated by him.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Strategy will be monitored and reviewed annually.

Responsibility for monitoring and review will rest with the Democratic and Central Services Manager in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team.



INTRODUCTION

IN this revised Communications Strategy for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council we set out our commitments to communicating effectively with our audiences.

We recognise the changing world we now communicate in, as the pandemic continues to impact on all aspects of Council business and wider society.

It is essential that Council positions itself as a leader within the community and communications, both internal and external, are central to this.

OUR COMMUNICATIONS CONTEXT

WE are tasked with preserving the continuity of high quality public service in the most challenging circumstances and in line with fluid public health advice.

Internally, remote working is now the norm for many teams across Council and it is crucial that there is a renewed effort to foster a sense of cohesiveness, which the success of the communications strategy relies upon.

The pandemic has served to highlight the need for timely, accurate and often reassuring communication, which should remain a key consideration for all service areas.

In everything we do as an organisation we need to question:

- Why are we doing this?
- Who are we doing it for?
- What effect will it have?
- How, when and to whom should we communicate and share information?

KEY PRINCIPLES

OUR guiding principle and driver for all activities should continue to be in the context of the needs and expectations of our ratepayers, and those who live, work and visit the Borough.

We should seek to build on progress to date and reinforce integrated working relationships to provide the best possible service to the public.

We will recognise the continued need for clear, consistent and accurate information, especially during times of crisis.

It's important to recognise that the corporate communications team cannot work in isolation. It relies on the support and input from the Senior Leadership Team, Heads of Service and relevant Officers.

“By collaborating and working together we can showcase how the organisation is working to improve and enhance the borough for all our stakeholders.”



CURRENT POSITION

WE cannot ignore the impact of the pandemic on our current position, and the challenges as well as opportunities this represents.

There has been a commendable demonstration of resilience, illustrated by the swift adoption of new working practices and virtual communications methods and delivery which has allowed Council business (internal and external) to continue.

While many teams are now working from home or in line with social distancing restrictions, the use of Zoom and MS Teams brings staff and elected members together. This new approach has allowed the democratic process and the out-workings of this to continue.

The fluidity of the situation has highlighted the ever-increasing importance of utilising Council's digital communication avenues including its website and social media channels to relay timely and accurate information to the public, the visitor market and the business community.

It is important that these channels are monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure information remains consistent, accurate and up-to-date at all times.

We recognise that different audiences are seeking different information and Council must seek to position itself as an important portal of accurate and useful information for all these segments.



COUNCIL'S VISION & SUPPORTING THEMES

Vision Statement

WE will maximise the benefits of our unique location and landscape by providing accessible, efficient, and sustainable services fulfilling local and visitor expectations.

Mission Statement

Improve the quality of life for our citizens and visitors by:

- Providing effective, accessible and sustainable local public services.
- Improving economic prosperity
- Ensuring local communities are at the heart of decision making.
- Protecting, promoting and enhancing our unique natural environment and assets.

- Advocating for the area and our citizens in local and international arenas.

Strategy Objectives

- Demonstrate civic leadership and Council's role as a champion for the Borough.

- Foster an ethos of effective and efficient working as part of a single corporate unit with a common purpose and culture.

- Encourage knowledge and skills sharing within and across teams.

- Maintain a strong corporate brand which instils confidence and reassurance, which is of particular importance in this changeable social climate.

- Encourage all teams to recognise the value of their work and how it demonstrates the strategic priorities of the corporate strategy in action.

- Communicate achievements, initiatives, and projects from across the Council spectrum internally and externally.

- Adopt a more proactive approach to showcasing Council business and preserving Council's reputation.

WHO COMMUNICATES AND HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Target Audience	Partner	Communication Actions
The Mayor	Chief Executive The Mayor's Office	Chief Executive briefing, Councils minutes and agendas, press releases, photo opportunities, speeches, Mayor's Diary on corporate website, video conference channels, video messages.
Elected Members	Chief Executive	Council minutes and agendas, press releases, text alerts, monthly forecast of events, briefing notes, video conference channels.
Council Staff	Democratic Services Senior Leadership Team	Weekly staff e-zine (collated and issue via corporate communications), Staff Portal, consistent cascade of information from management, video conference channels.
Citizens	All Departments	Corporate website, corporate social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), annual newsletter, press releases, photocalls, advertisements, publicity material.
Visitors	All Departments	Visit website, corporate website, Visit social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), Events team social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), advertisements, publicity material, press releases and photo calls.
Community Groups	All Departments	Corporate website, corporate social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), annual newsletter, press releases, photocalls, advertisements, publicity material.
Key Partners Business Community Statutory/ Voluntary Agencies	All Departments	Corporate website, social media, network opportunities.
Section 75 Groups	Equality Forum	Provision of accessible information, SignVideo service.

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES

WE will continue to develop our digital channels as direct links and two-way communication channels to the public and external partners.

Through ongoing review and development, we can build valuable, accurate and useful resources of information which contributes to a positive public profile. This should be complemented by strong local and regional media relationships.

We will aim for openness and transparency in everything we do and strive for accuracy and timeliness in our communication activities, both internally and externally.

We will work with key communication champions from across the organisation to foster consistency to build trust and reassurance and celebrate success.

We will look beyond the parameters of individual teams and directorships to collaborate and develop a 'one unit' ethos.

Collectively we will look forward for opportunities, threats and risks to reputation in order to plan and be prepared.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

TO maintain our corporate brand and public confidence we must redouble efforts to nurture a 'one unit' ethos across the organisation.

Our communication should be as timely as possible, without compromising on accuracy or accessibility. Current working methods have highlighted the importance of timely internal communication within the organisation.

There should be a renewed emphasis on the need to communicate well internally, with integration across services areas and with SLT a crucial consideration.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

EFFECTIVE media relationships are an important consideration of our communications strategy.

These relationships should be guided by principles of openness and transparency.

Media enquiries are received every day, and the Corporate Communications team work in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the provision of accurate and effective responses.

The Corporate Communications team cannot respond to media enquiries in isolation. The SLT and relevant officers must support the team in order to provide accurate, agreed responses.

Facilitating this flow of information is essential to maintaining effective relationships with the media, and this is integral to the work of the Corporate Communications team. By working with the media on reactive matters we can protect and preserve our Council's reputation in the community.

At times throughout the year, or to coincide with major events or announcements, the Chief Executive may decide to hold media briefings which will also help to foster positive media relationships.



SETTING THE AGENDA

Greater collaboration and forward planning are important considerations that will allow us to share our key messages at our chosen time instead of reacting to media demands and matters arising.

However, as a corporate body we are bound by decision-making processes which often dictate the timing and pace of our communication activities.

Issuing an accurate message, which reflects the decision of the corporate body, is more important than issuing a piece which could ultimately lead to mixed messaging, confusion and mistrust in our brand.

We recognise that this can be frustrating, especially at times of loud external commentary, but corporate communications will always be guided by the governance which exists around council business. However, by forecasting and identifying issues in advance of a Council decision we can place ourselves in a more proactive position.

As set out at the beginning of this document, effective communication is the responsibility of elected members as well as Council officers. While elected members will all have their own diverging opinions and positions on Council matters, their support in creating a positive public profile for the organisation is vital. Elected members are often in a position of influence within their communities and therefore how and what they communicate, including online activity, can impact on Council's public reputation.

The Code of Conduct for Councillors and the NIPSO Guidance on the Use of Social Media both remind elected members that their conduct must not bring their position, as well as the Council, into disrepute and this is something to be mindful of.



DELIVERING TOGETHER

Effective communication activity should demonstrate Council's strategic priorities and confirm our position as a champion and advocate for our ratepayers.

An associated Action Plan has been developed to complement this Communications Strategy and guide our communications activity.

It outlines the key issues we face and how we can address them. There is a need for greater collaboration, proactive preparation and forecasting for both opportunities and risk.

As an organisation we need to recognise the importance of working together as an efficient corporate unit with a common purpose and culture.

Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic we should continue to look for opportunities to highlight best practice, achievements and 'good news stories' from across the organisation.

All employees should be encouraged to reflect on their contribution to the organisation and work with the team to proactively highlight corporate strategy goals in action.

These are a demonstration of our commitment to the borough and our ratepayers and will allow us to promote and uphold our brand within the news agenda.

This can only work via a reciprocal relationship with the corporate communications team, which will be fostered through the Communications Liaison Group.