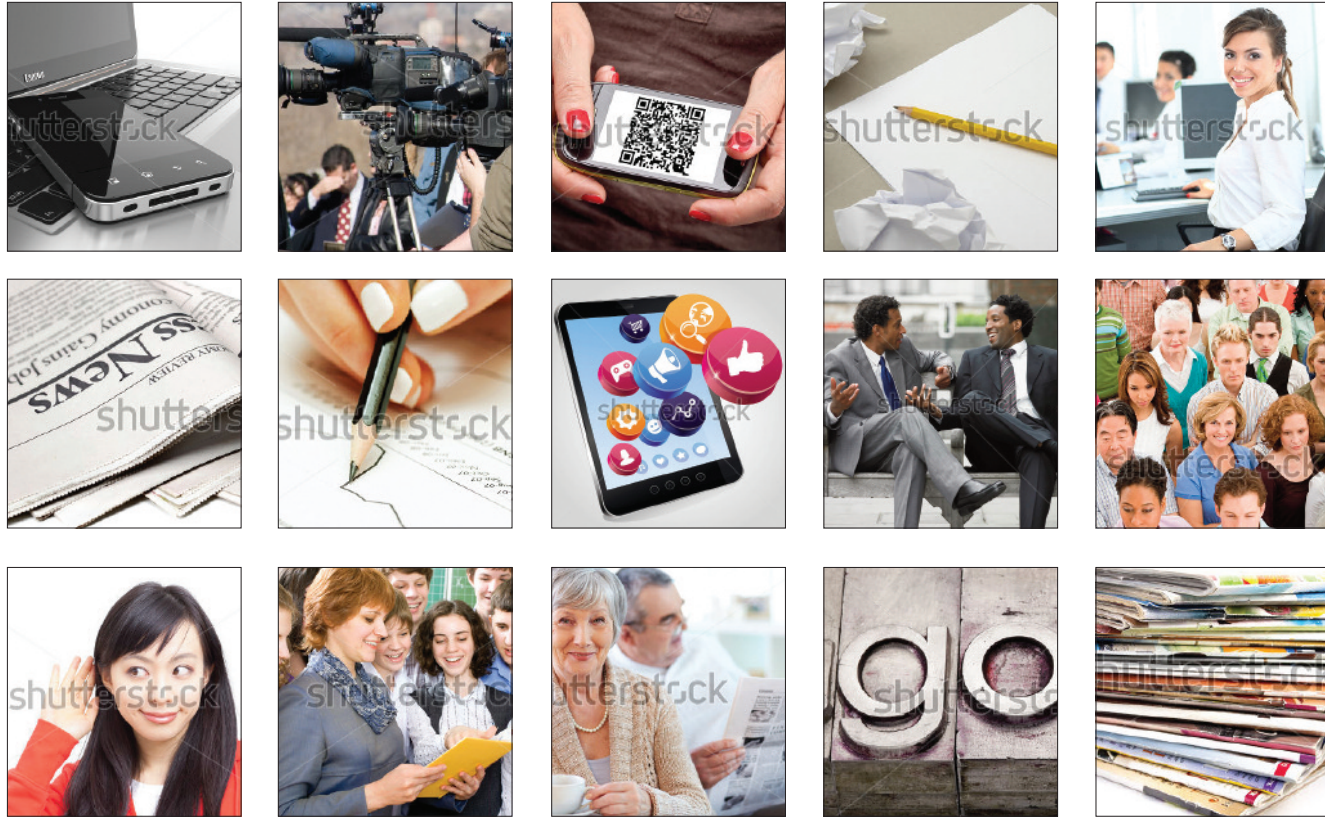


Communication Strategy



Foreword

Communications is a strategic priority for the Council.

A new Council is in place, with a clear vision agreed for moving priorities forward.

In times of change there is more need than ever for effective two way communications and for marketing the Council's services and activities. This itself presents the Council with many challenges.

We need to be clear and focussed on what kind of messages we wish to communicate, especially during times of on-going change and the current financial pressures facing the organisation.

We also need to be clear on the need to listen to our communities and that any information or intelligence gathered is used to inform the way in which we do business. There are a number of drivers in this strategy:

Efficiencies

We are continuing to look at more effective and efficient ways of working to meet the efficiency savings required and these need to be reflected in our communications activities. But with this comes some difficult messages to communicate and a clear strategy is needed on how we explain our position whilst maintaining our reputation.

Closer to the Community

One of our over-arching aims is to be an excellent Council, closer to its communities. If we are to become closer to our communities, we must give people meaningful opportunities to contact the Council, to feedback on the quality of services, as well as identifying new, more effective and efficient ways of doing business. But most importantly we must listen to our customers.

Residents Survey

In 2011 we carried out the residents survey and the findings were fed back to services, for addressing in annual Service Business Plans. We need to demonstrate to people how we have listened and what we intend to do to address their comments and concerns in the future.

The Corporate Communications team has changed since the last strategy was implemented. The team, now known as the Corporate Communications and Marketing team, is responsible for media relations, internal communications, external communications, intranet, marketing, print procurement administration and the Welsh language.

There is more of an expectancy than ever before for staff to become ambassadors for the organisation, as each and every one of us has a role to play in communicating effectively and positively reflecting the professional nature of the Council. To do that we must improve the culture of the organisation, one that is based on our key principles.

Communicating with Councillors

Communications with Councillors is a priority more so now following the introduction of the new Council. We have developed Member Area Groups and town and community clusters and these should be seen as ideal forums for developing communications. There needs to be a commitment to making the Member Area Groups work, not only from its Councillors, but also officers in terms of providing timely, regular and relevant information to Councillors, in particular about issues affecting their wards.

Marketing

Our marketing function needs further development. There is no corporate strategy for marketing the county as a destination or the work of the Council. This work does go on, but there lacks a strategic corporate approach to optimising regeneration, tourism and development opportunities.

This document is one of a number of strategies produced by the Council and there should be clear links between them.

Key strategies linked to this document are the Town and Community Council Charter and the Engagement Strategy. They set out quite clearly how we are going to engage with some of our key stakeholders. This communications strategy is all about agreeing the method to communicate, as well as agreeing the importance of key messages.

An underpinning principle to all these strategies is the Council's commitment to providing public information bilingually. The Council has a Welsh Language Scheme that sets out quite clearly how the Council intends to promote, enhance and develop the Welsh language, as well as monitoring activities to ensure compliance with the scheme.

We will be reviewing the general strategy in three years time, but the Action Plan will be updated every year, to reflect any changes in communication needs and technological developments.



Cllr Hugh Evans, Leader of Denbighshire County Council



Cllr Hugh Irving, Lead Member for Customers and Communities, Denbighshire County Council



Sally Ellis, Corporate Director for Demographics, Wellbeing and Planning.



Jamie Groves Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure

The current position

The Corporate Communications and Marketing functions are undergoing a restructure. This restructure has been carried out in response to the Chief Executive's paper which expresses a need for more co-ordinated communications and far greater marketing of the Council, its services and Denbighshire as a destination.

The restructure aims to deliver:

- A marketing strategy clearly defining our approach to promoting the Council and the county
- A robust organisational structure, best placed to meet the demands defined within the Corporate Plan
- A more focused workforce, better directed to deliver corporate priorities
- A robust Communications and Marketing department working coherently across services with particular focus on regeneration, economic development, business support and tourism

We need to adopt a proactive approach to marketing and communication and keep under constant review the means by which we communicate, so that our audiences are informed about the services we offer and for us to ensure that those services meet- and continue to meet – the needs of residents and visitors.

We encourage departments to be far more open about their activities, so that we can tell the public what is going on. We have used the press to explain our stance, and whilst that is not always what the public want to hear, we feel we have been transparent in the way in which we address the public via the media. We believe that this is having a perceived positive impact on the Council's reputation. As a Council we already use a wide range of communication channels and it is through those channels that we have fed back on the main findings of residents surveys in You Said We Did features.

However, we fully recognise that we have methods of communication that needs further development and we will be aspiring to address these matters in our efforts to become a modern, forward thinking Council with effective communications at the heart of its business.

Media relations:

Over recent years the Council has made great strides in its efforts to improve the relationship with the local, regional and national media.

The Council provides a regular feed of information to the media (around 450 news releases a year). It also deals with many proactive and reactive press enquiries and takes every opportunity available to explain the Council's position. The Council also briefs the media on some of the more topical issues that are likely to generate headlines.

On average 70% of the press coverage about Denbighshire is positive.

Internal Communications

There have been a number of developments in the way we communicate with our staff, with regular feeds of information provided to staff through the Message from Mohammed, Core Brief, Headlines, Denbighshire Today and the corporate intranet.

The Council also uses staff road shows, quarterly conferences for Middle Managers, the Staff Council and a relaunched Bright Ideas scheme.

The Council is supported by an action plan that values engagement and communication.

One of the most successful developments has been the Excellence Denbighshire Awards which recognises staff achievements and successes.

Investors in People have recognised that the Council has made great strides to improve internal communications, with pockets of very good examples of working. We must share these examples of best practice and encourage other services that do not perform as well to adopt a similar approach. Effective internal communication is key to the success of the organisation.

The current position

External Communications

We have improved the way in which we communicate with residents through regular use of the local media, as well as County Voice, the quarterly newsletter for residents and the corporate website. The Council was recognised by the Wales Audit Office for its Big Debate consultation on the budget setting process.

There have been many consultations over recent years on many issues, ranging from highways works, the BIG Plan and changes to modernising education in our communities.

The Council has improved its efforts to communicate more effectively with specific target audiences, in particular the young and the vulnerable.

Our various teams, in particular Youth Services, have increased their engagement activities with young people through working in partnerships with other organisations and investing time and energy in listening and consulting with young people on issues that matter to them. They are the future taxpayers of Denbighshire and we must continue to involve them in shaping our future business.

We have also responded to the challenge of providing one relevant point of contact for the public, not only through our Customer Contact Centre, but also through our one point of contact for enquiries in Social Services and Family Information Services. They provide services and information that need to be readily accessible, to ensure we meet their needs as effectively as possible.

Social Media

The Council has begun to use social media, with Corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts providing followers with all the latest information and updates from the Council. The Council's Chief Executive and Leader provide monthly blogs and social benchmarking is available on all Denbighshire website pages.

The Council does have a Social Media Strategy in place which dovetails with the Strategy, the Communications Strategy must complement the values and principles included in that document. A lot more emphasis is now being put on social media and we need to make more use of these various channels to communicate to residents. There is an expectation from the Council that this will happen.



The Future Challenges

Whilst we must continue to celebrate our successes to date, there are also a number of strands of work that need developing over the coming years.

We currently have a small but effective Communications and Marketing team but to achieve our ambitions, we do need to utilise expertise that may be available within other departments across the Council.

Marketing

A key challenge is the need to market the authority more successfully. Currently there is a patchy marketing strategy in place. This communications strategy will place a focus on the need for the Council to have a clear approach to marketing Denbighshire's services, as well as marketing Denbighshire as a destination.

We need to be clear about our marketing approach for Denbighshire. We want to be a modern Council that is better at marketing all that is unique about our county, but also clear about how we are going to use our marketing strategy to attract inward investments.

The marketing approach is in development and the Council has recently agreed to two multi-media campaigns. One is on dog fouling, a key issue raised by Denbighshire residents; the other is around the need to promote the fostering service and encourage people to consider becoming foster carers.

Once the Council is clear about its direction, we can allocate the resource necessary to help departments fulfil their marketing needs.

Events

The Council has a small team of employees capable of managing and co-ordinating events on a corporate level. However, linked to this communication strategy is the need to produce an Events Strategy that lays out clearly what we plan to do over the coming years, how we are to fund and attract major events in

the county and to demonstrate the kind of impact this would have on corporate priorities, such as regeneration of the county's economy.

The summer of 2012 saw a number of high profile events in Denbighshire and this contributed greatly to the county's economy. However, the county is seen as the poor relation in comparison with neighbouring counties and we must address this. We must have a clear vision and the confidence to attract major events and be able to compete with the best, for the benefit of communities and our economy.

Social media

To become a modern Council we must embrace the latest technology that meets the needs of the 21st century customer. We need to use this technology to communicate with our audiences, harness the use of social media, and focus our online activity in an engaging, open and honest manner. We already have a Facebook and Twitter presence but we need to be smarter in the use of new technology.

Social media is used by a great number of people and many residents now use Facebook and Twitter to communicate (positively and negatively) about the Council. We need to be monitoring comments and responding proactively to any inaccurate or misleading comments that could damage the reputation of the Council. Investing time and staff resource is vital if we are to respond to this challenge.

Web development

We need to have a far better online presence through Denbighshire's website. It is widely accepted that the current website is not fit for purpose. We need to be clear what kind of services we can offer residents online and how we can use this form of communication to promote our priorities.

Key to this is the need for effective joint working between the Communications and Web teams, to respond to customer needs and realise the ambition of having one of the most popular and accessible Council websites in Wales.

Changing the culture of the organisation

We need to make sure that our Councillors and staff feel proud to be working for Denbighshire, so that they can act as ambassadors for the Council. Anecdotal evidence suggests that is patchy. That is why we need a co-ordinated approach to improving internal communication, as well as communications with Members.

One key area of work for the Council has been the development of the relationship between the Council and Town and Community Councils. There has been a definite improvement in the relationship with many of them, resulting in the creation of the Town and Community Council Charter that has been adopted by the majority of the councils. This Charter sets out in real terms the commitment from the councils and Denbighshire on how they will work together, what kind of service they can expect and ways of more effective communications. This must be seen by services as a positive move and we must embrace every opportunity to contribute to this. Town and community councils are key partners and have a strong voice locally and in county council businesses.



The Strategy context

This Communications Strategy must be considered within the wider Council's agenda.

The Chief Executive's paper 'An Excellent Council, Closer to its Communities' outlines the need to become closer to the community. The Council needs to be a sector leader, known for its excellence and for using the resources to the best of its ability to provide the best services possible for the residents of Denbighshire. He makes it quite clear that the Council must listen to the views of residents and use the information to inform its future direction.

The Leader of the Council has also made it clear about the need for Councillors to become ambassadors for the Council in their wards and communities. There needs to be greater consistency on how Councillors communicate with business and community groups in their areas. Councillors should be the first point of contact for constituents with any concerns. By having Councillors that are committed to improving communications, we can greatly reduce the number of complaints making their way into the press and this in turn will have a positive impact on the Council's reputation.

The on-going financial situation means that we need to be smarter in the way we deliver. However, the need for effective communication is greater than ever before. We need to be clear on our messages, have consistency in what we say and do and demonstrate that we can provide better value for money.

Our communications strategy must take into account feedback from residents. The findings of the last residents' survey clearly state what are the issues that concern and interest our residents, their perceptions of council services, how they wish to be communicated with and what should be the Council's main priorities. We recognise that this is only one method and we need to make use of other existing channels to gather feedback. We need to demonstrate to our residents that we will respond and listen in order to inform our business.

The bi-annual staff survey also gives us a snapshot of how communication is perceived by members of staff. The next survey is due in early 2013 and this will give us a clear picture of whether communications efforts across the authority have made a positive impact. The Council's priorities of improving the customer experience, improving economic and community ambition and being a modern council should be at the heart of our communications activities.

Our Vision and Priorities

This strategy sets out how the Council aspires to improve internal and external communications over the next three years.

This builds on a significant amount of improvements made over recent years in how the Council communicates with its various audiences.

The vision guiding our delivery is that:

"By 2015, the Council will be recognised for the quality of its communication and will be known as an authority that listens to its staff and its Members. Our business will listen to what customers want and need and they can help us shape the future direction of our business."

In order to shape the future direction of the business, we aspire to:

- Improve the way in which we communicate with our staff and other key audiences
- Manage our reputation by improving the way in which we listen to residents
- Empower Members to be ambassadors for Denbighshire through effective communication
- Strengthen and enhance Denbighshire's brand and identity

In terms of communication, we will act in accordance with the following principles:

Integrity and honesty - we will never knowingly mislead the public, media or staff on any issue.

Openness and accountability - we promote openness and accountability in our dealings with the media, the public and staff, whilst respecting confidentiality.

Fairness - We would not routinely favour one media source over another.

Strong effective communication - this is essential to how we work and provide our services.

Clear communication - spoken, written and electronic will be clear, easily understood, timely, relevant and up-to-date.

Welsh language – The Council is committed to a bilingual Country and County and are working to ensure that every citizen is able to use either Welsh or English as they go about their daily life, including their business with the Council. Denbighshire County Council aims to safeguard and promote the use of the Welsh language throughout Denbighshire through the services it provides, through the partners it works with and through its role as a major employer and contractor within the County. Our Welsh Language Scheme identifies our obligations in meeting the public face to face, through correspondence, telephone communications, public meetings, websites, publications, signs and notices and in the recruitment and training of staff.



Delivering Our Key Outcomes

Our desired outcomes

To work towards delivering our vision and realising our aspirations we have four key outcomes.

These four key outcomes summarise what we want to achieve in delivering our vision and aspirations. This Strategy will ensure:

1. We make the best use of resources to keep our staff well informed about the issues that matter to them and the priorities of the Council.
2. People living in, working in and visiting Denbighshire have information to access the Council's wealth of services and information, but also have channels to provide feedback to the Council.
3. Councillors and officers communicate effectively with each other, with partner agencies and local communities.
4. We introduce robust measures to make sure that Denbighshire's brand and identity is promoted and protected, with the brand being instantly recognisable as belonging to Denbighshire.

An overview of the key actions to deliver these outcomes is provided later in this document.

Outcome 1: We make the best use of resources to keep our staff well informed about the issues that matter to them.

Staff are our greatest asset - they should also be our greatest ambassadors. We must ensure that staff are kept well informed about matters about the Council and how this relates to them and their work. We must also make sure that robust communications systems are in place to deliver communications activities.

There should be a consistency of key messages agreed at the highest level in the organisation and are cascaded through the most appropriate methods to staff. We recognise the diverse audiences within the Council and messages may need to be tailored to meet differing needs. We must also look at improving access to online information where staff currently do not have access to PCs and laptops. We will also encourage effective two way communications with our staff.

The Staff Council is very much a recent development and it is making good progress, with representatives from services contributing on a regular basis. We need to ensure that this continues to be a useful medium for discussing ideas. By seeing actions being implemented from meetings, staff will become far more engaged and this in turn should have a positive impact on the Council's internal communications.

Key actions to improve internal communications will include:

- Developing the intranet to further engage staff on corporate issues.
- Identify key marketing campaigns for internal communications purposes.
- Production of electronic information pack for staff (with corporate information, key facts and figures)
- Share departmental best practice with colleagues.
- Communications awareness training
- Greater communications input in the induction programme.
- Careful Communication Strategy around corporate priorities that impact on staff.

Delivering Our Key Outcomes

Key actions include:

- Development of Customer Charter standards so that customers know what kind of service they can expect from the Council. The Communication Strategy will support this.
- Workstreams emerging from the corporate priorities.
- Targeted marketing campaigns that will be agreed by the Council
- Regular feedback to customers through the press and County Voice on what issues matter to them through You Said We Did features.
- Implementation of the social media strategy.
- Revamp of the corporate website that has sections specifically designated for residents, businesses and visitors.
- Production of an A-Z Guide to Services.
- Having a clear marketing strategy in place, promoting Denbighshire County Council and its services, but also as a destination.
- Create an Events Strategy that will assist efforts to regenerate the county.

Delivering Our Key Outcomes

Outcome 3: We provide the information, the best technology and the training available to ensure that Councillors communicate effectively with each other, with partner agencies and local communities.

One of the key challenges facing the Council is the need to improve communication with councillors. We must identify ways of providing timely and accurate information to councillors, responding to their enquiries professionally and within agreed timescales and generally improving the links between officers and Councillors.

The Council includes a number of special interest groups. As a result there will be a greater need for information. We must therefore consider this fact and look at how to progress this from a communications perspective.

We must make far greater use of the local intelligence gathered by local Members through forums such as the Member Area Groups and act on issues raised. These should be seen as important opportunities for two way communications and all members must use these opportunities to flag up local issues.

We must also strengthen links with bodies such as Welsh Government and WLCA to provide greater opportunities for lobbying.

We must also provide members with the correct tools, technology and training to enhance the relationship between them and their constituents. Our councillors can act as ambassadors for the organisation, but need to be kept informed, so that they can articulate timely and relevant information to local residents and to manage communication channels effectively.

Key actions include:

- Communications awareness training for Members.
- Information briefing packs with key facts and figures.
- Clear links with Member Area Groups to assist in addressing local issues, with communications being a standing item.
- Improve the communications and marketing function to provide better co-ordinated support for Corporate Executive Team, Senior Leadership Team and Members.

- Raise the profile of the work of Members and the various committees within Denbighshire
- Media training and social media awareness for Cabinet Members.

Outcome 4: We introduce robust measures to make sure that Denbighshire's brand and identity is promoted and protected, with the brand being instantly recognisable as belonging to Denbighshire.

Denbighshire has guidelines in place to secure a strong and recognisable brand for the authority but as a modernising Council we must have clear aspirations to use the brand creatively.

We must embrace opportunities to use our creativity in terms of delivering our messages, being clear about who are the key audience and the most appropriate method of communicating that message.

We want Denbighshire to be recognised as a modern thinking Council, with modern methods of working but also a modern image and identity that people can relate to.

Key actions include:

- Revision of the Corporate Identity guidelines
- Training and awareness sessions for staff
- New council branding and design.
- Separate piece of work around a unique brand for marketing Denbighshire as a destination
- Clear suite of templates to be created for corporate literature, presentations, council papers.
- More targeted input from Corporate Communications throughout the procurement process.
- Annual monitoring of the guidelines to ensure compliance in literature, uniforms, vehicle livery etc.

Measures of success

To gauge whether the strategy is a success, the following measures of success will be agreed:

- An increase in the take-up of press releases printed in the media
- Greater satisfaction levels with communications (measured through the residents survey)
- Improvement in staff satisfaction levels (through the staff survey)
- Increase in the number of hits to the intranet
- Increase in the number of hits to the corporate website.
- Less complaints coming into the authority.

* These are illustrations only and will be confirmed after consultation

Managing Performance

We recognise that to improve communications, it is important to monitor our performance and manage the overall key outcomes and actions.

The monitoring of the Strategy will take place using the council's corporate performance management framework. Once developed, the indicators and actions will be included in the Communications, Marketing and Leisure business plan.

The day to day management of the Strategy will lie with the Corporate Communications and Marketing Team, reporting to the Head of Communications, Marketing and Leisure. Quarterly reports will also be provided to the Corporate Executive Team, with progress reports provided on the delivery of the action plan.

An annual review of the action plan will take place. We will also report to Scrutiny on an annual basis, to demonstrate the steps we have taken to improve communication.



Communication Strategy



For further information on any aspect of this strategy, please call the Corporate Communications and Marketing Team on 01824 706222.