Mid Devon District Council

Communication Strategy

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Communication Strategy

Version Control Sheet

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	Management Team
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This document obtained the following approvals.

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Cabinet*		
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*- Delete if not applicable

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1 Introduction

Good communication helps an organisation function effectively and, when used strategically, can help it achieve its strategic objectives. At its best, communication is a two-way process, rather than purely a one-way dissemination of information.

1.1 Principles of effective communication

The council is committed to communicating effectively with all our stakeholders, both internal and external. All our communications should:

- be honest and open

- be timely, clear and easily understood

- use Plain English and be kept up-to-date

- support our corporate objectives

- be targeted to and accessible by relevant audiences (rarely does 'one size fit all' but there should also be consistency of messages).

1.2 Internal and external communication

Internal communication ensures that staff have the right information to do their job properly, have sufficient opportunities to communicate their views and can help them feel involved and valued by their employer. Well informed and engaged staff are more likely to provide excellent customer service in terms of their attitude and knowledge. All staff should operate according to the Officer Code of Conduct. Elected Members need to be well informed about the council, particularly regarding issues that affect their own wards. All Elected Members should operate according to the Member Code of Conduct.

External communication ensures that all stakeholders (including residents, businesses, visitors, town and parish councils and other partner organisations) have the right information about council services and sufficient opportunities to communicate their views to the council.

However, there is an overlap between internal and external communication Staff and elected Members may also be Mid Devon council tax payers, customers (for example of leisure centres) and will read and see coverage about the council in mainstream media. New technologies have blurred the boundaries between 'internal' and 'external' communication and this is likely to accelerate with the increasing use of social media.

1.3 Financial climate

With continuing reductions in government grant and pressure on council finances, there is a need to make year-on-year savings and possibly, in future, to reduce the level of service provision or stop providing some non-statutory services altogether.

This means that the organisational structure will continue to be modified and this is likely to happen more frequently than in the past. This has implications for staff and staff communication.

In terms of external communication, the challenges are likely to be in: consulting with the public on priorities and explaining any reduced level of service or why we may have to discontinue providing some services.

1.4 Measuring impact and demonstrating value

For communication to fulfil a strategic role, it needs to have impact, to effect change and to have demonstrable value.

We will use feedback, monitoring and evaluation when possible to measure the effectiveness of communications and demonstrate the value of internal and external communication to the council. The keys to measuring the effectiveness of communication are to:

- move away from simply measuring 'outputs' (such as number of internal newsletters issued or amount of media coverage generated) but rather to measuring 'outcomes'

- assess whether communication has succeeded in converting information into awareness, then understanding and then action.

Impact assessment of communication, based on the extent to which desired outcomes are achieved, is a relatively new area for the council. We will need to be clear about desired outcomes and to invest time and effort into developing meaningful measures.

Measuring impact and demonstrating value is covered in 2.3.2 (for staff communication), 2.4.2 (for communication with Members) and should be integral when writing service-specific communication strategies and communications plans (see 3.1.1).

2 Internal communication

A key purpose of internal communication is to support the organisation in achieving its corporate objectives, particularly the Corporate Plan, the Workforce Plan / Human Resources Strategy and the digital transformation agenda. The two main stakeholder groups for internal communication are staff and elected Members.

2.1 Specific communication objectives

Our aim is to develop and maintain effective two-way communication between and for staff and elected Members to encourage trust, loyalty, understanding and a 'one council' approach to our work.

We will do this by:

- sharing information widely, but targeting it to avoid 'information overload'
- letting Members and staff know about issues and developments that affect them or the council as soon as possible and listen to their responses
- using a variety of channels and formats to reach Members and staff
- consulting with Members and staff, through formal and informal channels, on important issues that affect them
- encouraging Members and staff to take individual and collective responsibility for improving communication.

Internal communication should:

- contribute to an 'open' and free-flowing communication climate (as opposed to a 'closed' communications climate or 'organisational silence')
- keep staff well informed about the future direction of the council and about issues that affect them
- encourage staff to contribute to meeting the council's objectives
- share information, knowledge, expertise and good practice
- help overcome 'silo' working and contribute to all services working as 'one council'
- boost staff morale, satisfaction, commitment, motivation and identification with the council
- encourage staff identification with the council, making it more likely that they will act as positive ambassadors

- give staff plenty of opportunities to express opinions, voice complaints and make suggestions for improvement

- promote and support learning and development, innovation and creativity

- demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity in the way we communicate with staff

- demonstrate our commitment to adequate, reliable, trustworthy and timely communication.

2.2 Staff

Even if aimed at all staff, we need to consider the way messages are delivered to and understood by different 'groups' of staff (for example, staff based at different locations, part-time staff, those staff not on email).

Communication should be a combination of one-way (disseminating information) and two-way (so staff can express their views, feed ideas to management and contribute towards shaping the future direction of the council).

2.2.1 Channels of internal corporate communication with staff:

Channel	For	Distribution	Responsibility
The Link	Corporate issues, HR, news from services, 'burning questions', events, achievements, 'human interest' stories	Weekly (Monday) Posted on SharePoint plus email link; hard copies on noticeboards for non-email staff	Exec Assistant
SOF	More complex topics that benefit from explanation, discussion and feedback (also supports line management communication)	Monthly	MT / SOF / Comms Manager to contribute content Exec Assistant to coordinate
Core Brief	Summary of presentations and discussion at SOF Aide-memoire for managers to tailor and deliver to their teams	Monthly Issued within 3 days of SOF Posted on SharePoint and email link sent to all SOF	Exec Assistant / Comms Manager
All-staff briefings	CEx, Leader and/or MT face-to-face briefings on	As required	Exec Assistant to coordinate

All-officer emails	major issues and questions/discussions Only to be used for urgent or time-sensitive messages	As required	MT / Exec Assistant / Comms Manager and designated staff
SharePoint	Information resource: corporate and for each service area	Accessible to all staff	ICT / Exec Assistant to coordinate front page Services update as relevant
Have Your Say online forum	Two-way communication: discussion, Q+As	Accessible to all staff	Comms Manager / Exec Assistant to monitor
Noticeboards	Key information, events etc	Particularly useful where staff don't access ICT	Site managers, supervisors etc
Learning & Development newsletter	Training courses and other information relating to staff development	Monthly	HR

In addition to internal corporate communication outlined above, managers and team leaders are also responsible for direct communication with staff including day-to-day line management, team meetings and team briefings.

2.2.2 Measuring impact and demonstrating value

We will work to develop meaningful ways of measuring the impact of internal communication, including (but not limited to) the following methods:

Activity	*Carried out by*
Staff survey on internal communications (whether a specific communication survey or part of a broader staff survey), asking a mix of closed and open-ended questions, plus opportunity for comments and suggestions	Comms Manager / HR
Review meetings to evaluate progress and identify any improvements	Comms Manager / HR
Assessing the impact of internal communications around a particular campaign, new policy or other key initiatives – for example, measuring before and after awareness and behaviour, correlations between communications and desired outcomes	Comms Manager / HR

2.3 Elected Members

We will consider the needs of different 'groups' of Members (for example, Members representing rural wards). It is particularly important that Ward Members are kept informed of issues in their own wards. Likewise, Ward Members are encouraged to keep the Communications & Reputation Manager informed of local projects activities and initiatives that they are involved in.

2.3.1 Channels of internal corporate communication with Members

Channel	For	Distribution	Responsibility
WIS (Weekly Information Sheet)	Meeting dates, news, updates, events	Weekly (Thursdays)	Member Services
All-Member emails	Only to be used for urgent or time-sensitive messages	As required	Leader / MT / Member Services / Comms Manager / Exec Assistant and other designated staff
Member briefings	Face-to-face sessions for more complex topics that benefit from explanation, discussion and feedback	As required (Tuesday and Thursday evenings)	Member Services
Notices/documents in Members Room	Key information, events etc	As required	Member Services

2.3.2 Measuring impact and demonstrating value

The following methods may be used:

Activity	Carried out by
Members survey on internal communications, asking a mix of closed and open-ended questions, plus opportunity for comments and suggestions	Comms Manager / Member Services
Reviews meetings to evaluate progress and identify any improvements	Comms Manager / Member Services
Assessing the impact of internal communications around a particular campaign, new policy or other key initiatives	Comms Manager / Member Services

2.4 Developing new channels

The Communications & Reputation Manager, the Executive Assistant and Principal Member Services Officer will keep abreast of new developments (for example in social media) and introduce new channels of internal corporate communication if there are clear advantages for the council.

3 External communication

3.1 Objectives

External communication will be a mixture of one-way and two-way communication.

The aim of one-way communication is to ensure the public and other key stakeholders (including council tax payers, tenants, businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations, town and parish councils and other partner organisations) get the information they need about the services they require in a way that suits them. We will use a number of communications tools and channels to help us get our messages out to our external audiences.

The aim of two-way communication between the council and our key stakeholders is to provide opportunities for them to communicate their views with the council and thereby influence our policies, services and decisions.

We will do this by:

- sharing information widely, but targeting it to avoid 'information overload'

- using a variety of channels and formats to reach different stakeholders

- seeking the views of the public and other stakeholders on important issues that affect them.

External communication should:

- encourage understanding and contribute to transparency and openness

- keep stakeholders well informed about the future direction of the council and about issues that affect them

- encourage behaviour change and reduce demand in expensive areas of service provision

- give the public and other stakeholders opportunities to express opinions, contribute to decision making and voice complaints

- demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity in the way it communicates with all sectors of society

- demonstrate our commitment to adequate, reliable, trustworthy and timely communication

- be 'joined up' and present the organisation as 'one council'.

3.1.1 Service-specific communication strategies

In addition to this broad over-arching communication strategy, each service should consider how best to communicate with their stakeholders (customers, residents, businesses, partners etc) and may also want to create specific communications strategies and plans to support business plans or promote a particular project or activity. Advice can be sought from the Communications & Reputation Manager. When writing a communication strategy or communications plan, consideration should be given to: aims and objectives: stakeholders / target audiences; key messages; most appropriate channels; available resources; and measuring impact.

3.2 Digital media

In line with our digital transformation strategy, increasingly the focus will be on developing and promoting digital communication (online, mobile, social media etc) while recognising that a significant proportion of Mid Devon residents either cannot or choose not to use digital channels, and so we need to continue to use traditional methods (print, radio etc) as well.

3.2.1 Website

The website is our virtual one-stop shop and the objective is to provide as far as possible the same level of service to our customers online as they would get face to face or over the telephone. A new, mobile-friendly website is currently being launched in phases with the final phase targeted for end of May 2015. There will also be continual improvement to the website as well as making more services fully available online so that customers can complete their transactions with us online. The Communications & Reputation Manager acts as Web Content Manager and will provide support, guidance and training to web contributors and will write a new Web Content Management Protocol for the new website.

3.2.2 Newscentre

We will publish all our press releases digitally on the Mid Devon Newscentre www.middevonnewscentre.info and send email links to all journalists on our media list. See Media and Social Media Protocol.

3.2.2 Social media

We will continue to develop use of social media, as both a PR channel and a customer service channel. In addition to the corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts, managed by the Communications & Reputation Manager and Customer

First team, a number of other services also use social media. Where there is clear business case for setting up a new social media presence, services may seek advice from the Communications & Reputation Manager who, together with Customer First, will need 'administrator' access so that posts can be responded to quickly if no-one in the service is available. See Media and Social Media Protocol.

3.3 Supporting specific corporate projects

Key corporate priority projects which can benefit from dedicated and focused communication support from the Communications & Reputation Manager are agreed for each financial year and reviewed as and when required through the year. Priority projects for 2015/16 are shown in the Action Plan (5.2.2).

3.4 Consultation

See Community Engagement Strategy for information on two-way communication including Citizens Panel, Mid Devon Connect, surveys, focus groups, petitions, road shows and exhibitions.

3.5 External stakeholders and channels

Stakeholders	*Channels*	*Key responsibilities*
Residents / council tax payers (and will also reach some other specific stakeholders)	Website	Web Content Manager, Customer First
	Facebook / Twitter – corporate accounts	Comms Manager, Customer First for corporate accounts; plus other services
	Mid Devon Talk	Comms Manager, Executive Assistant
	Newscentre	Comms Manager, Customer First
	Public consultation	Community Development team
	Citizens Panel	Community Development team
	Recycling and rubbish collection calendars	Waste Management team with input from Comms Manager
	Council tax bills annual financial information (now online)	Comms Manager, Executive Assistant
Council tenants	Website – Council Housing pages Housing News for U Facebook and Twitter Tenant involvement activities	Housing Services Tenant Involvement team

Leisure centre users	Mid Devon Leisure website Facebook accounts – three leisure centres	Leisure Services Marketing Officer
Businesses	Website – Business & Licensing pages Business Forum Mid Devon Website – Planning & Building Control pages	Community Development / Licensing teams Development Management team
Town and parish councils	Website – Town & Parish Councils Parish Matters Annual clerks meeting	Community Development team
Voluntary and community sector organisations		Community Development team
Other partner organisations (DCC, police, health etc)		Chief Executive, various services
Media	Press releases on Newscentre Press briefings, photo opportunities, negotiation features etc	Comms Manager, Customer First

3.6 Developing new channels

The Communications & Reputation Manager will keep abreast of new developments (for example in social media) and introduce new channels of external corporate communication if there are clear advantages for the council.

4 Resources

Effective communication is the responsibility of all officers and Members, with certain key tasks carried out by specific individuals, groups and services.

4.1 Management Team

The Chief Executive and the Management Team are responsible for driving effective communications.

4.2 Service managers, team leaders and supervisors

Service managers, team leaders and supervisors are responsible for effective internal communication in terms of day-to-day management and in helping to ensure that information flows easily around the organisation. They will support formal and informal channels of communication, enabling staff to be kept up-to-date, to make suggestions for service improvement and to express their views and opinions.

They are also responsible for ensuring effective external communication, including providing information for up-to-date web pages, generating press releases for release and responding to media enquiries.

Team meetings, service meetings and line-management meetings all contribute to keeping staff informed.

4.3 Communications & Reputation Manager

The Communications & Reputation Manager's role includes:

- providing strategic communication support in relation to key corporate projects and activities in order to help the council achieve its strategic objectives

- advising officers and Members on communication-related issues

- web content management and continuous improvement of website

- overseeing the media relations and digital communications activities of the Customer First team

- overseeing publications including Mid Devon Talk and Parish Matters

- keeping abreast of new developments including new channels of communication, particularly in relation to digital transformation and introducing at the council when appropriate

- developing and supporting staff and Members in various aspects of communication through training, coaching and providing guidance documents.

4.4 Customer First team

The Customer First team, guided by the Communications & Reputation Manager:

- publishes press releases on Newscentre

- acts as the first point of contact for media enquiries, logs enquiries, forwards requests on to services, chases up and sends responses to the media

- involves the Communications & Reputation Manager in any media enquiries that are complex or contentious.

- posts updates to the website on behalf of all services.

See also: Media and Social Media Protocol.

4.5   Community Development team

The Community Development team:

- champions effective two-way communication through stakeholder consultations

- maintains a representative Citizens Panel as a consultative tool for the council

- undertakes corporate consultations

- advises on and supports service consultations.

See also: Community Engagement Strategy.

4.6 Other service teams

- ICT Services provide the platforms for digital communication including SharePoint and website and administers FOI requests from the media

- Human Resources – staff communication (pay and conditions, consultation and negotiation with Unions and other staff, learning and development)

- Member Services – taking the lead on communication with elected Members

- Each individual service plays an important role in undertaking effective external communications in their areas of expertise.

4.7 Members

Members are encouraged to put forward ideas for proactive communication in relation to items of interest within their wards.

4.8 Devon County Council

In a reciprocal arrangement, Devon County Council (DCC) maintains our digital online news resource Newscentre in return for space each month in *Mid Devon Talk*.

Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Internal communication

The following activities will be undertaken during the period April 2015 to March 2016 to improve internal communication:

Activity	To be carried out by	To be completed by
Develop feedback, monitoring and evaluation methods to measure the impact and value of staff communication (as outlined in 2.2.2)	Comms Manager HR Executive Assistant	September 2015
Develop feedback, monitoring and evaluation methods to measure the impact and value of communication with elected members (as outlined in 2.3.2)	Comms Manager Principal Member Services Officer	March 2016

External communication

Activities

The following activities will be undertaken during the period January 2015 to March 2016 to improve external communication:

Area of work	Activity	To be carried out by	To be completed by
Website	Final phase of launch new website	Comms Manager / ICT	May 2015
	Make specific web content improvements prior to SOCITM 2016 evaluation with aim to achieve 4-star rating	Comms Manager	October 2015
	Make best possible use of Google Analytics and other web metrics to support continual improvement of website and contribute to digital transformation	Comms Manager / ICT	Ongoing
Social media	Review current use of social media and make recommendations for how we can	Comms Manager	December 2015

	use this more effectively as both a communications and customer service channel social media		
Mid Devon Show	Strengthen our presence at 2015 Show to be more focused and cohesive	Comms Manager / Executive Assistant	July 2015

Corporate priority projects

Strategic objectives that will be supported by dedicated strategic communication efforts in 2015 have been identified as:

Project	Service area
New Local Plan	Planning & Regeneration
Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension / master planning	
NW extension of Cullompton	
BID / Retail Masterplan for Tiverton	Housing & Property Services
St Andrews Street development	
Changes to waste collection arrangements – Oct 2015	Waste Management
Digital transformation	Customer Services / ICT Services
Potential public consultation on service provision from 2015/16 onwards	Financial Services