



Charnwood Borough Council

**CONSULTATION AND
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

Reviewed: Spring 2006

Consultation and Communications Strategy

1. Background

- 1.1. This strategy describes how Charnwood Borough Council can achieve its commitment to, 'open, honest, effective communication with our staff, local and national media, our stakeholders and partner organisations and crucially the communities we serve.'
- 1.2. The strategy is now termed the 'Consultation and Communications Strategy' to ensure that customer engagement and participation are placed high on the agenda.
- 1.3. The term "local" in the Strategy refers to the whole of the Charnwood as a geographical area and/or to communities within the Charnwood boundaries.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This Strategy sets out the case for improving communications by the Borough Council. It looks at how robust our communications are currently and how improvement will be achieved.
- 2.2. The strategy takes internal and external communications into account and proposes that, given resources, the Council must be realistic in its aspirations.
- 2.3. The strategy continues to state how the Consultation, Communications & Partnerships Team will improve communications by Charnwood Borough Council by actioning the tactics and seeking to continue increase resident satisfaction figures across the Borough.
- 2.4. The strategy further demonstrates CBC's commitment and sign-up to the LGA's Reputation Project, going above and beyond in some areas and seeking to communicate well with residents and stakeholders, moreover being seen to do so.
- 2.5. The strategy maintains that is not the full solution to communications at Charnwood, and details the top-level objectives which are further explored at operational levels through the CC&P Team and across the Authority.

3. Charnwood Together – A Well-Managed Council

- 3.1.1. We will provide community leadership for the Borough.
- 3.1.2. We will put good communication at the heart of everything we do.
- 3.1.3. We will work to make dealing with the Council easier for all.
- 3.1.4. We will ensure that resources are concentrated on our services to the public and that essential services are provided to the highest achievable standard.
- 3.1.5. We aim to increase from 60.8% (2000/1) to 70% by 2005/6 the percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council.

(Charnwood Together)

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- 3.2. Effective and timely communication is essential if we are to achieve these priorities. And through successful partnership working, CBC will be able to achieve these objectives.

4. The Business Case for Communications & Consultation

- 4.1. “Good communication improves residents’ satisfaction... research found that in those councils rated as relatively poor communicators, residents’ satisfaction with the council was consistently lower than might be expected, given their overall satisfaction with the area as a place to live. And in many cases, good performance on service delivery wasn’t matched by satisfaction ratings. In other words, many Councils have a better story than the one they are telling.”

(‘Connecting with Communities’ Audit Commission / ODPM)

- 4.2. The suggestion is, that assuming a decent standard of service delivery, then the better the communication the better the perception/reputation of the Council. There are few, if any, other ‘front line services’ that can positively affect the Council’s approval ratings across all services.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 “Consultation is important because listening and responding to the public, as citizens and service users, is fundamental to the work of councils. Without it, councils cannot be sure that their services are the right ones or that they are democratically accountable for their actions”.

- 5.2 “Linking consultation to wider communication strategies is vital. Too many local communities aren’t even aware of the fact that their council is consulting. Most people in Britain know very little at all about their local council and many see their council as remote and impersonal. If the council is seen as uninteresting or irrelevant, there is less reason for local people to take part in consultation.”

‘Connecting with Communities’ - Audit Commission / ODPM

- 5.3 CBC is committed to reporting back to residents on a ‘you said, we did’ basis to justify the need and usefulness of consultation. This is support both pre and post-consultation by relevant communications strategies.

- 5.4 The ‘you said, we did’ approach to communications and consultation will also provide residents with a reference to how effective the consultation has been and moreover understand how it can and does contribute to Council services.

6. Ownership

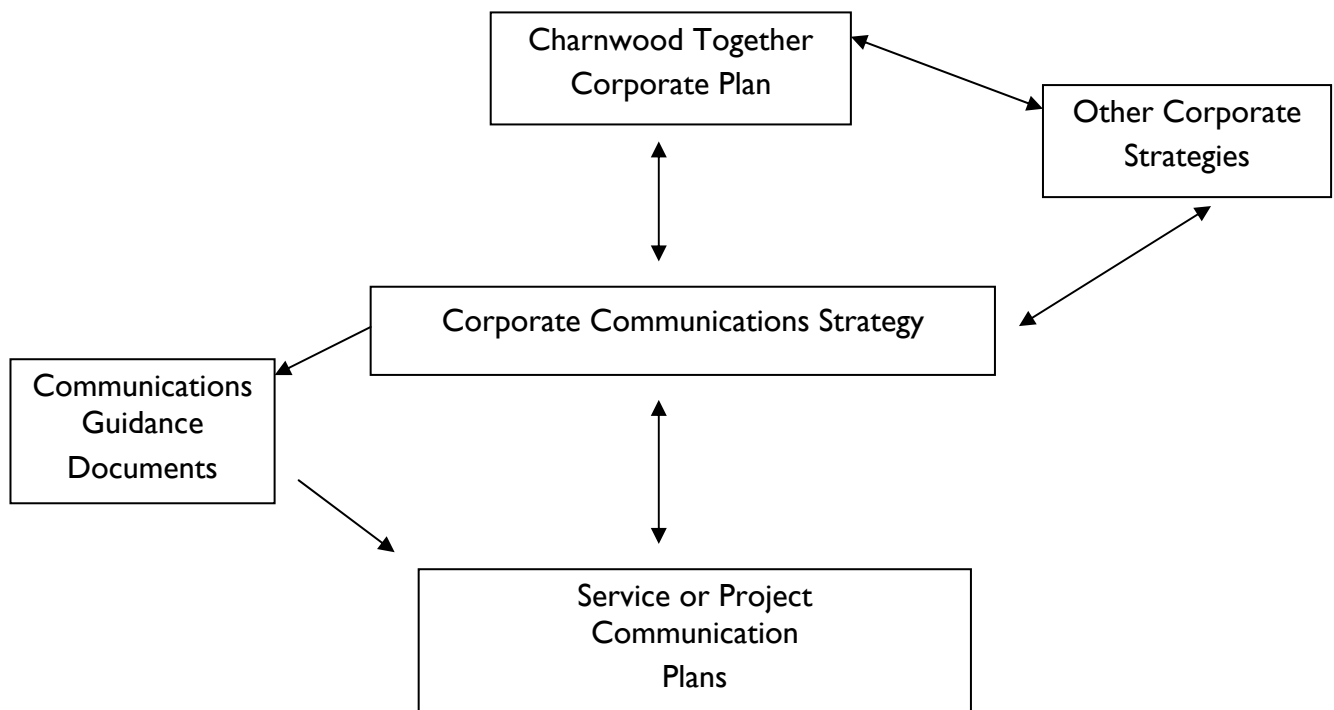
- 6.1. This strategy must be a living document that influences all aspects of the Council’s work. However in order to be successful strategy must ‘live’ and not exist as a ‘shelf-filler’.

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6.2. This strategy will succeed only if effective communication and consultation are at the heart of the Council's approach:

- 6.2.1. The Council adopts and actively supports implementation.
- 6.2.2. The Executive 'own it' and are seen to own it.
- 6.2.3. Scrutiny monitors its implementation as an integral part of the Council's performance, both corporately and at service level.
- 6.2.4. Senior management continue to ensure effective implementation within the resources available.

6.3. Further, and most importantly, the strategy must join up with other key Council strategies to ensure that it does not become just a 'wish list'.



6.4. In short there is a process by which the case for communications will be embedded at Charnwood and the cultural change must continue to occur across CBC so officers and individuals connected to CBC understand that communications is a responsibility shared by all.

6.5. The aim of this Communications Strategy is:

6.5.1. To enable Charnwood Borough Council to realise its aim of “open, honest, effective communication with our staff, local and national media, our stakeholders and partner organisations and crucially the communities we serve.”

6.6. Progress will be measured by:

- 6.6.1. Number of key staff trained
- 6.6.2. Effectiveness, in terms of response rates, to consultation
- 6.6.3. Percentage of press releases used and the messages communicated

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- 6.6.4. Annual Staff satisfaction surveys
- 6.6.5. BVPI user satisfaction ratings
- 6.6.6. Audit of local, regional, specialist and national media linked to CBC
- 6.6.7. Local Government Equality Standard
- 6.6.8. Plain English Award

7. How do we do it?

7.1. LGA's Reputation Project seeks to nationally improve the reputation of Local Authorities by investing resources in a positive and targeted manner. CBC has signed up to this ethos and registered as a supporter.

7.2. Our core actions will focus on:

- 7.2.1. Effective media management – continuing to develop and enhance our relationship with the local and regional media and contacts on specialist and national press.
- 7.2.2. Providing an A-Z Guide – this has already been actioned and in order to continue this the above 'A-Z of Customer Access Campaign' has been formulated and a supporting Consultation and Communications Strategy will be produced.
- 7.2.3. Publish a regular council magazine/newspaper – an action already tasked to the CC&P Team and further prioritised through the commitment to increase frequency.
- 7.2.4. Branding – effective and consistent linkage of council brand to community services – an action maintained through the CC&P Team as the 'branding police' ensuring efficient and effective use of CBCs branding, corporate image and identity.
- 7.2.5. Good internal communications – further committed to and detailed in an annual Internal Communications Strategy.

7.3. Embedding Charnwood's Identity

7.3.1. Most theorists and practitioners would agree that an organisation's corporate identity lies in its physical manifestation: its logo, corporate colours, house style, uniform, décor and so on (Harrison, '99).

7.3.2. The corporate identity is the focus of the Charnwood Borough Council's brand, coupled with the 'Leading in Leicestershire' strap line staff and stakeholders alike have begun to articulate and deliver on the clear goal of the Council.

7.3.3. Having proved a success since its implementation in 2004, the next stage is a formal audit of sub-brands including the Town Hall, Economic Regeneration, Recycling, Farmers Market etc.

Objective 1: Continue to implement and manage the corporate identity and embed the 'Leading in Leicestershire' strap line and formalise an audit of all Council sub-brands.

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7.4. Building a communications culture

7.4.1. We, as an Authority, are beginning to recognise the need for a positive attitude and approach towards communications.

7.4.2. This is highlighted in tangible form through our 8-Values:

- Customer focused
- Ambitious
- Diverse
- Accountable
- Develops talent
- Innovative
- Adds value
- Open

7.4.3. Through training and development (see below) we will seek to make the point that effective consultation and communications with service users before the planning process has started can save and enrich the whole process.

7.4.4. Getting our own house in order is key and the same principles will apply to the way the Council manages internal communications. We must therefore keep the task of effective internal communication as a priority.

Objective 2: That planning across the Council takes into account the views of local people gathered through consultations and the need to communicate those plans effectively both internally and externally. Communication and consultation to continue to be integral considerations embedded in project and service planning.

Objective 3: The CC&P Team to be directly involved in the planning and implementation of all major initiatives.

Objective 4: The CC&P Team will support fellow officers in the creation and delivery of their Consultation and Communication plans and activities.

Objective 5: To continue our efforts to communicate and consult with staff on key issues and ensure they are informed and invested in the Council's priorities and plans.

Objective 6: Adapt and review internal communication channels in response to user feedback.

7.5. Making sure that consultations are appropriate

7.5.1. We acknowledge consultation fatigue and its negative affects.

7.5.2. We will not over load residents with consultation exercises. When we consult we will do so because we need new information to inform our decisions.

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7.5.3. We will report back to all consultees on a 'you said, we did' basis to ensure the effectiveness and usefulness of the consultation process is acknowledged.

Objective 7: A consultation database will be constructed to track what information is known to the Council to prevent any waste of time / resources spent asking residents what we already know.

Objective 8: Common data will be shared with services and partner organisations so that the sum total of consultation knowledge benefits the Council and our partners, contributing to our commitment to best value and benchmarking.

Objective 9: When planning to consult we will seek the help of partners when appropriate to share resource and to ensure that we don't wear out the welcome.

7.6. Equipping Officers with the necessary skills

7.6.1. We will continue to develop the communications skills of officers and members.

Objective 10: Key council staff – Consultation and Communications Champions – will have the opportunity to develop their communication, consultation and media relations skills as part of an ongoing programme of formal training, coaching and mentoring.

7.7. Positive Media Relations

7.7.1. Through training and support, the backing of the executive and clear performance management, the CC&P Team will encourage services to seek out good news stories and communicate them to residents, partner organisations, colleagues and the media.

Objective 11: To develop and deliver appropriate training and work to develop appropriate performance management arrangements.

7.8. Making best use of Council-owned Media (Web, Charnwood News, Housing News etc)

7.8.1. Research has shown that Council 'owned' media can be an effective way of sharing information and news with the Borough.

7.8.2. Charnwood News will continue to develop and reflect the big issues for the Borough and the Council and inline with the Reputation Project will be increased in frequency and produced in-house to ensure best value.

Objective 12: Refresh Charnwood News and increase frequency.

Objective 13: Undertake regular reader research of Charnwood News.

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7.9. The Council's web presence could become an even greater asset for the Borough and the Council. There is continued potential for the site to dramatically increase our contact with residents as long as we deliver on easy to access, informative and useful.

Objective 14: Drive development of website use by increasing the opportunities for residents to carry out transactions via the site. Exploit every opportunity to adapt E-gov initiatives to benefit local users and seek to promote and push the e-Gov take-up across the Borough.

Objective 15: Monitor user statistics, conduct visitor research, monitor quality of the 'editorial' and incorporate the site address into all the Council's printed material.

8. Communicating with the whole Borough

8.1. There are parts of the Borough that may be excluded or feel excluded from Council communications for many reasons including race, access to technology, income etc.

Objective 16: Aim to reach all communities and interests and actively ask local communities how we can best reach them. We will pay particular attention to communities that may feel less affinity to Loughborough.

Objective 17: To develop clear guidance to ensure communication and consultations follow best practice in terms of accessibility to all, including completion of an Equalities Impact Assessment on each relevant strategy and campaign.

8.2. Linking our assets and building on them

8.2.1. The CC&P Team will aim to ensure a cross-cutting approach to all tactics, focusing on the bigger picture and not the smaller runnings of individual services. It is ineffective if a department issues a leaflet, for example, without linking, or seeking to link, with potentially connected services and identifying with the CC&P Team the best available tactics.

Objective 18: the CC&P Team will aim to 'join up' the communications efforts of individual services (and the individuals within those services) in an attempt to ensure that the Council's key messages and key policies are understood and articulated, not contradicted.

8.3. Monitoring

8.3.1 By monitoring local media we can assess the coverage received, whether positive, negative or neutral – allowing the CC&P Team to monitor effectiveness and target resources.

Objective 19: The CC&P Team will monitor all media coverage and report that in the local print medium.

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8.4. Communications and Consultation Plans

8.4.1. Consultation and Communication yearly plans will underpin this strategy. This will enable the CC&P Team, Management and Cabinet / Scrutiny to monitor the delivery of this strategy.

Objective 20: To deliver this Strategy through the approved Consultation and Communication Plans – to be reviewed and revised annually in light of progress made.

8.5. Resource / Finance

8.5.1. With the establishment of the CC&P Team the opportunity has been taken to review the Council's expenditure on marketing and publications generally. This ensures value for money and appropriateness of tactics to aid the effectiveness and usefulness of the service.

Objective 21: To utilise the newly centralised communications budget to support priority objectives identified in the CC&P Plan.

8.6. Your Charnwood; Your Council; Your Say

8.6.1. This 'brand' will be the CC&P Teams approach to all work – our own internal mission statement.

8.6.2. This strategy acknowledges that it cannot be the only outlet for progressing the work of community engagement and plans to identify initial channels for communication and consultation and offer advice to all who will connect with the community on varying levels, when appropriate and relevant.

Objective 22: To increase community engagement in terms of the services required, delivered and available and develop/embed a toolkit to promote this.

9. Where next?

9.1. Outcomes and targets

9.1.1. When the strategy is fully implemented we expect to see:

9.1.1.1. An improved reputation in line with the Reputation Project – identified through the Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

9.1.1.2. Residents and employees being more aware of what the Council's services and why it is 'Leading in Leicestershire'.

9.1.1.3. Clear, timely and consistent two-way communication with residents, employees and all stakeholders, along with a better understanding of our role.

9.1.1.4. Good internal communication resulting in improved employee morale, better performance and an ability to treat change as an opportunity.

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9.1.2. The CC&P Team have further set some ambitious targets, using existing baseline data, in some cases.

9.1.2.1. Residents

9.1.2.1.1. Target: 30% of residents say they read the headlines and some articles in *Charnwood News* by 2007.

9.1.2.1.2. Target: 65% of residents satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council. (Baseline data: in January 2006, some 56% of residents said that overall they were satisfied with the way the Council runs things).

9.1.2.2. Employees

9.1.2.2.1. Target: 45% of employees are satisfied with communications within the Council by 2007. (Baseline data: in 2005 some 28% of employees felt satisfied).

9.1.2.2.2. Target: 90% of employees to be aware of the 8-Values by August 2006.

Appendices:

It is planned that the following (plus others yet to be defined) will be amended and created as appendices in due course in line with the agreed implementation plans:

Communications Implementation Plan
Consultation Implementation Plan
Consultation Protocol
Media Protocol
Equality and Accessibility Guidance
Press Release Guidance
Media Enquiries Guidance
Corporate Image Guidance