



STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Communication and Engagement Strategy

2008 - 2011



Stafford  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



## OUR VISION

is to lead a Community  
and Borough which is  
**PROSPEROUS**  
**SAFE**  
**HEALTHY**  
**CLEAN AND GREEN**



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## **Introduction**

1. Communication is a process that allows us to exchange information by several methods and happens at many different levels. It is a two way process and an integral part of what we do all the time. Good communication leads to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Stafford Borough in demonstrating its commitment to this has signed up to the Local Government Association Reputations Campaign.
2. Stafford Borough Council understands that effective communications is a key driver in how the public perceives our services. Research suggests that keeping residents informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions, has a significant impact on the satisfaction with the Council and its services. The strategy takes internal and external communications into account and proposes that, given resources, the Council must be realistic in its aspirations.

## **Why do we need a Strategy?**

3. The purpose of this document is to set out Stafford Borough Council's approach to communication, engagement and consultation over the next three years. It has been re-written to incorporate elements of the Local Government White Paper 2006; Stronger and Prosperous Communities, with regards to consultation and engagement, and the results of the Communications Audit conducted during 2007.
4. The adoption of this strategy will ensure that we build a strong and effective communications infrastructure throughout the whole Council and the Borough of Stafford. It will enable us to assess our performance and to judge if we are delivering best value in terms of policymaking and service delivery through engagement and consultation with our stakeholders. The Leader of the Council; Cabinet Members and the Leadership Team will ensure this strategy is successfully implemented throughout the Council.

## **The need for effective internal and external Communications**

5. It is recognised that all facets of communication are equally important in raising our profile and indeed, improving communications and the perception of the authority both inside and out. We understand that if staff and members are well informed about the 'bigger picture' and about what the council is trying to achieve, then they can become true ambassadors for the council.
6. Communications is seen as a priority within the Council and it is recognised that a good communications infrastructure is essential in supporting the delivery of our key priorities. It touches every service and every interaction with the public; from the way it presents itself visually to the way our customers are treated, from its public advertising to its leaflets and forms, from its information to staff, to its consultation with user groups.
7. We want to communicate better with our stakeholders – the people we serve, our staff, partners and audiences beyond our borough boundaries. As a Council, we are committed to improving the way we communicate, engage and consult with our stakeholders, building upon work already being done within some of our services.

## The need to engage and consult

8. The Council recognise that in order to develop policies and provide services that our local communities actually benefit from we need to be able to understand their needs, views and expectations. The Local Government White Paper 2006; Stronger and Prosperous Communities sets out a range of proposals that are designed to strengthen local communities and to expand their opportunities for local decision making. It also gives local authorities and their partners the flexibility to draw up a comprehensive community engagement strategy to combine activity, improve the coordination of engagement across LSP partners, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector as per the Stafford Borough Compact, and reduce the risk of ‘consultation overload’. This Council feels that engagement and consultation are fundamental to our whole communications infrastructure and as such, feel that it is more appropriate to sit all these facets together in one strategy.
9. The White paper does however, set out guidance regarding the importance for us to secure a co-ordinated approach for engagement and consultation across three main areas, which are: Sustainable Community Strategy; Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework. As a result, we will need to work with our partners to ensure that we capture all planned engagement requirements and, wherever possible, combined activity. This has been endorsed further by the Local Government and Public involvement in Health Bill that has changed our statutory duty to consult to one of a duty to inform, consult **and** involve.
10. In doing so we want to ensure that:
  - A wide variety of viewpoints are considered that enable us to make effective decisions about the services we offer to our communities; and
  - We have a transparent process that can increase public trust
11. All parts of the council need to share this commitment to enable us to achieve our objectives to improve the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors and underline our priorities for the next three years.

## What we have done so far

12. Within the council, progress has been made towards the creation of an effective communications infrastructure with the bringing together of Communications, Consultation and Web Management into one team. During April of last year a comprehensive communications audit was carried out which highlighted a number of recommendations, which have now been included in the action plans contained in appendix one. Although there has been a considerable amount of work carried out in terms of communications in the last nine months, it is still recognised that there is still significant progress to be made, especially in terms of effective engagement activities. To date, some of these elements have been relatively functional in that they perform the necessary basics. However, there is a determined wish to take it to a higher level both by the political leadership and executive management of the council.
13. The table contained on page 5 outlines our progress so far. This information has been used to determine what our aims are going to be over the next three years and how we are going to achieve those aims.

## What our communications audit said

13.

About External Communications	Progress	Status
<p>1. <b>Press and Media:</b> Relationships between the media and the press office are positive and constructive; however there is no media protocol in place.</p>	<p>Press and Media protocol written and agreed by Cabinet that sets out guidance for all Members and officers of Stafford Borough Council when dealing with media relations.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>
<p>2. <b>Press Coverage:</b> Generally press coverage is good but there is a need to be more proactive in terms of the planning of publicity.</p>	<p>It has been agreed that press releases relating to major projects are edited and agreed by the Press and Media Officer prior to printing.</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>
<p>3. <b>Civic Newspaper:</b> At the time of the audit (April, 2007) the Council was producing a twice-yearly civic newspaper called 'Spotlight'. Since this audit the Council have signed up to the Local Government Reputation Campaign and states the Council's should produce a 'regular' newspaper/magazine and recommendations have been put forward to do this.</p>	<p>Resources Task and Finish have recommended that the Council re-produce a regular residents magazine. This has been agreed by Cabinet and the first edition of Stafford Borough News will be published in December 2008.</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>
<p>4. <b>Website:</b> The audit recognised that the website is one of our major key communication tools and in it's current form is not easy to navigate around. Work is currently underway to redesign the website with a view to launch April 2008.</p>	<p>Redesigned website has been launched and further work is continuing to redevelop the Local Government list/categories that sit behind the front page.</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>
<p>5. <b>Promotional Literature:</b> In order to promote the Council's image promotional material needs to have a corporate brand. Since this audit work has been carried out highlighting those publications and highlighting those publications that could be incorporated into a regular magazine.</p>	<p>Resources Task and Finish have recommended that the Council look at all their promotional material with a view to standardising branding and consolidating some of the publications in to a resident's magazine. This is currently under consideration by the Cabinet Member.</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>
<p>6. <b>CRM Centre:</b> The Customer Contact Centre has all the ingredients of becoming a centre of excellence. Proposals are underway to develop a 'one-stop shop' by consolidating all the reception areas in order to improve customer service</p>	<p>Work currently underway to complete Phase 1 which is incorporates a planning reception and customer waiting area on the ground floor. Proposals for Phase 2 (to incorporate Revenues and Benefits/Homelessness to ground floor to be considered 2009/10</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>
Internal Communications		
<p>7. <b>Staff Magazine:</b> The quality of internal publications was highlighted as an issue in the audit. It has been recognised that although there are a number of publications currently circulated within the Council the information within them is either too sparse or too bulky.</p>	<p>Internal magazine 'In house' produced in April. Second edition will be published during August 2008. Work will continue to look at the quality and effectiveness of all internal communications.</p>	<p><b>In Progress</b></p>

## Our Aims

14. As demonstrated in the Communications Audit there are a number of initiatives that are making good progress. It is our aim to continue to build upon this which is why over the next three years we will:

- **Ensure we are seen as a ‘customer first’ organisation by:**  
Ensuring that everyone who lives in; works in; and visits Stafford Borough is kept well informed; and by raising our profile by actively promoting our services and celebrating success
- **Improve the level and quality of engagement with our community by:**  
Engaging and consulting with the whole community in order to continuously improve and shape the services we offer

## How will we achieve our aims?

### 15. Through effective Internal and External Communication

We will Improve the way we communicate with our stakeholders, and

- Ensure that the Council develops its branding and that it is used consistently in all publications; advertising; promotion material
- Manage the media effectively and innovatively in order to promote the Council to the public and to protect its image and reputation.
- Improve internal and external communications so that staff and members become advocates for the council
- Ensure that we use plain English and clear print in all our publications

### 16. Through effective Engagement and Consultation

We will Improve the level and quality of [engagement](#) with our community, and

- Set up a residents panel
- Ensure that we listen to the views, needs and aspirations of our residents
- Ensure that we engage with as many sectors of the community as possible regarding our policies and plans, in particular the Sustainable Community Strategy; Local Area Agreement; Local Development Framework.
- Actively use this information to inform and influence our decision making
- Ensure that we give timely feedback regarding the results and impact of our engagement and consultation

## Roles and Responsibilities

17. This strategy recognises that everyone<sup>1</sup> has an important part to play in communicating what the council’s vision is and the services they provide. It also recognises that all employees within their own service areas are responsible for promoting a strong, consistent and professional image that is wholly representative of the Council they work for at Stafford. It is the responsibility of our Communications team to ensure that this is effective by providing support and working with all teams/services to ensure that consistent messages are communicated to all stakeholders. This also includes

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<sup>1</sup> Everyone includes Elected Members; Corporate Management Group; All Employees

communicating those messages via the website and ensuring that all publications are published on the website if appropriate.

18. In Stafford Borough we categorise our target audiences into 2 main categories:

- **Internal – Employees, Elected Members, Trade Unions**
- **External – Residents<sup>2</sup>, Businesses<sup>3</sup>, Partners<sup>4</sup>, Visitors<sup>5</sup>, potential employees**

19. It is important that people living in the Borough feel that we as a Council communicate with them in such a way that it encourages them to participate in our engagement activities. It is very important to us that they feel they are able to influence and shape the things that we do, not only in Stafford Borough but also in their own communities.

## Where do we go from here?

20. This 3-year strategy has an action plan attached to it, which will be reviewed every 12 months. The action plan mirrors our aims set out in paragraph 14 and contains objectives that are directly linked to our Corporate Priorities. It also includes the items that are detailed as being 'In Progress' in the table on page 5.

21. All activities contained within this strategy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are effective; fit for purpose and good value for money.

22. This strategy has been produced by the Policy and Improvement Service. Contact Officers for further information are:

- Mr. Norman Jones – Head of Policy and Improvement  
Telephone: 01785 619199  
E mail: [npjones@staffordbc.gov.u](mailto:npjones@staffordbc.gov.u)
- Tracy Redpath – Policy Manager  
Telephone: 01785 619195  
E mail: [tredpath@staffordbc.gov.uk](mailto:tredpath@staffordbc.gov.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> Residents includes **Our Council Tax Payers; registered voters; users of our services**

<sup>3</sup> Businesses includes **Potential, new and existing businesses**

<sup>4</sup> Partners - **The public, private, third sector and environmental agencies**

<sup>5</sup> Visitors – Any person visiting the Borough of Stafford

## Action Plan Internal and External Communications

### Objective:

Improve the way in which we communicate with our stakeholders

### Please specify links to Corporate Plan and to other plans or initiatives:

Leading and Delivering for our Community - To be considered a high performing council, which champions the needs and aspirations of its community in a local, regional and national setting.

### Performance measurement

SMART Indicator		Responsible Officer	Baseline	Targets 2008 - 2011:		
			2008-09	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
No of staff trained in Customer Charter		Norman Jones	To be developed during 2008			
NI 14 – Reducing avoidable contact		Norman Jones	To be developed during 2008			
% increase in number of web transactions		Norman Jones	34.6%	5%	7.5%	10%
% customer satisfaction with Civic Newspaper		Norman Jones	0	40%	50%	60%
Ref	Area of Focus	Links to other plans		Timescales/Milestones		
IEC1	Develop Council branding and use consistently in advertising; publication and promotion material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support a member Task and Finish Group investigating engagement with the public (LD0302)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All literature and promotional material edited and agreed by Communications team prior to printing – April 2009</li> <li>Corporate House-style revised – April 2009</li> </ul>		
IEC2	Manage the media effectively and innovately to promote and protect the Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with our partners to improve and extend the range of services that our customers can access (LD0401)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Team proactively recognising media opportunities.</li> <li>Press releases for all major projects edited and agreed by Communications team prior to printing - December 2008</li> </ul>		
IEC3	Improve internal and external communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the Council's Website further to enable users to access and complete more of their transactions and service requests on line (LD0402)</li> <li>Provide core training and development opportunities for all employees in respect of customer care (LD0404)</li> <li>Integrate CRM and reception services from an operations point of view (LD0405)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website and intranet launched May 2008</li> <li>In-House magazine launched April 2008</li> <li>Customer Charter rolled out – March 2009</li> <li>Phase 1 of Reception completed – December 2008</li> </ul>		

IEC4	Use plain English and clear print for all publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with our partners to improve and extend the range of services that our customers can access (LD0401)</li> <li>• Develop the Council's Website further to enable users to access and complete more of their transactions and service requests on line (LD0402)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website and intranet launched May 2008</li> <li>• Strap line used on all external publications – April 2009</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring:</b> How will the action plan be monitored?			
All priorities contained within this action plan will be monitored monthly through the performance management system, Inphase, and Resources Scrutiny through 'In Pursuit of Success'.			
<b>Evaluation:</b> How will areas of success and improvement be communicated?			
All priorities contained within this action plan will be evaluated through Resources Scrutiny. All Areas of success will be communicated through team meetings, management meetings, websites, newsletters, Annual Plan. Areas of improvement will be communicated via: PDR's, Service Plans, Annual Plan			

<b>Action Plan Engagement and Consultation</b>					
<b>Objective:</b> Improve the level and quality of engagement with our community					
<b>Please specify links to Corporate Plan and to other plans or initiatives:</b> Leading and Delivering for our Community - To be considered a high performing council, which champions the needs and aspirations of its community in a local, regional and national setting.					
<b>Performance measurement</b>					
<b>SMART Indicator</b>		<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Targets 2008 - 2011:</b>	
			<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b> <b>2010-11</b>
% increase and maintenance of no of people on peoples panel		Norman Jones	0	500	600   700
% increase in public satisfaction		Norman Jones	To be developed during 2008		
NI 14 – Reducing avoidable contact		Norman Jones	To be developed during 2008		
% increase in number of web transactions		Norman Jones	34.6%	5%	7.5%   10%
% customer satisfaction with Civic Newspaper		Norman Jones	0	40%	50%   60%
<b>Ref</b>	<b>Area of Focus</b>	<b>Links to other plans</b>		<b>Timescales/Milestones</b>	
EC1	Set up a residents panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop proposals for a people's panel (LD0301)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A peoples panel for obtaining customer views and expectations is established – June 2008</li> </ul>	
EC2	Engage with our residents; businesses and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support a member Task and Finish Group investigating engagement with the public (LD0302)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have identified other methods of engagement with the public – June 2008</li> </ul>	
EC3	Listen to the views, needs and aspirations of our residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with our stakeholders and residents in relation to our published financial information and annual report (LD0307)</li> <li>Work with our partners to improve and extend the range of services that our customers can access (LD0401)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website launched May 2008 and number of transactions increased – June 2009</li> <li>Biennial place survey undertaken</li> </ul>	

EC4	Use information to inform, influence our decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with our stakeholders and residents in relation to our published financial information and annual report (LD0307)</li> <li>• Work with our partners to improve and extend the range of services that our customers can access (LD0401)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies and plans contain integrated consultation/engagement information – June 2009</li> <li>• Increase in the number of web transactions – June 2009</li> </ul>
EC5	Give timely feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with our stakeholders and residents in relation to our published financial information and annual report (LD0307)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of residents satisfied with our services has increased – June 2009</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring:</b> How will the action plan be monitored?			
All priorities contained within this action plan will be monitored monthly through the performance management system, Inphase, and Resources Scrutiny through 'In Pursuit of Success'.			
<b>Evaluation:</b> How will areas of success and improvement be communicated?			
All priorities contained within this action plan will be evaluated through Resources Scrutiny. All Areas of success will be communicated through team meetings, management meetings, websites, newsletters, Annual Plan. Areas of improvement will be communicated via: PDR's, Service Plans, Annual Plan			

## Appendix 1

### Target Audiences

	Public meetings	Partnership Working	Customer Contact Centre	People's Panel	Comments/Compliments and Complaints	Engagement and Consultation	Reception Information	Media	Press Releases	Training	Induction	Notice Boards	Intranet	Website	In House' magazine	Team Briefings
<b>Employees</b>			●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<b>Elected Members</b>			●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<b>Trade Unions</b>			●		●	●	●	●	●						●	●
<b>Potential employees</b>			●		●	●	●	●	●					●		
<b>Residents</b>	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●		
<b>Partners</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●		
<b>Businesses</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					●		
<b>Potential inward investors</b>	●	●	●			●		●	●					●		
<b>Visitors</b>			●			●		●	●					●		

## Appendix 2

# Protocol for Media Relations

### Purpose

This protocol provides guidance for all Members and Officers of Stafford Borough Council on media relations.

### Overview

Positive relationships with the media, based on mutual respect and a professional working relationship is important in taking communications forward for Stafford Borough Council. The Leader and Cabinet will take the lead in communicating political decisions, policies and opinions to the media. Officers will generally comment on specific technical issues.

### Principles

- 1 All media enquiries must be handled through the Press and Public Relations Officer to ensure a consistent approach.
- 2 Under normal circumstances, the Leader and Cabinet Members will offer the Council's policy or view on matters affecting the Borough that fall within their area of responsibility. However, media enquiries to Members of a political nature may be handled directly by them. However, Members may wish to seek advice and guidance of the Press and Public Relations Officer relating to matters of a technical and non-political nature.
- 3 The Leader and relevant Cabinet Members will make the Press and Public Relations Officer aware of media contact. This should enable the Authority to maximise the publicity potential of any situation.
- 4 The Press and Public Relations Officer will give advice and support to the Leader, Cabinet Members, Members and Officers on all media related issues.
- 5 The Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Heads of Service and other designated Officers should normally:-
  - Comment only to give technical explanation, factual expansion or contextual information on Council policy or on announcements made by politicians.
  - Act in supporting role to the relevant Elected Member.
  - Only take a lead role with the media; (a) when requested to do so by the relevant Elected Member; (b) or if acting on their own initiative, if that role has been agreed with the relevant Elected Member, and the need for a media response is urgent. Officers and the Press and Public Relations Officer should be alert to cross-cutting issues and brief the appropriate Elected Members where areas of responsibility may overlap or be affected.
  - Be alert to good media opportunities and take full, proactive advantage of such opportunities with the relevant Elected Members and in consultation with the Press and Public Relations Officer.

- Ensure that the Leader and Cabinet Members are aware of events to be covered by the press and media.
- 6 All media releases should be agreed with the Press and Public Relations Officer. Advice will be given on what to include in a press release, photo opportunities and the most appropriate format and style. They can also advise on which media outlets would be best to target.
  - 7 Communications with the media should be made by a named Member or Officer; in most cases the officer will be a Head of Service. This gives clear ownership to the communication. The relevant Cabinet Member will be quoted in press releases with their prior consent and sign off their comment before release.
  - 8 During the run up to an election, Members should not be quoted in corporate press releases issued by Stafford Borough Council or appear in any corporately organised photo calls. This period runs from the date of the notice of the election through to the day of the election itself. Usual practice resumes the day after the election. Named Officers should be quoted in releases and these releases should be factual and informative.
  - 9 The use of the term “Council Spokesman” should be avoided.
  - 10 The response of ‘no comment’ should be avoided. It does not reflect an open and honest authority and raises suspicion. A response, no matter how brief, is always preferable.
  - 11 The Press and Public Relations Officer, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and Officer, will identify agenda items that require publicity. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive.
  - 12 At all times regard must be had to the Department of Communities and Local Government - the “Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity”. Advice on the application of this Code can be found on the following link:  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/coderecommended>

## Appendix 3

### Engagement – Further information

1. Examples of engagement activities include:
  - **Publications** in hard copy or electronic format of materials intended to inform members of the public or specific service users regarding relevant activities of partner organisations.
  - **Surveys**, questionnaires or other format of information gathering designed to illicit responses from citizens, businesses, and voluntary and community organisations.
  - **Events** or meeting held by or with partner organisation for the purposes of dialogue with residents, citizens, businesses, voluntary and community organisations or other stakeholders, such event may focus on strategic issues or on specific services.
  - **Initiatives** to harness public or stakeholder interest in specific projects or services by involving them in overseeing, managing or operating on behalf of one or more partner organisations.
2. Although there are many other forms of interactions between public bodies, their agents and the public, public engagement in the context of this document is about ways of communicating over and above such mechanisms and is focused upon the relationship with citizens and groups and members of the community rather than as just service users.

### The processes involved in Community Engagement

3. The following procedures will require varying degrees of community engagement and how this is incorporated into the process is outlined in the attached flowcharts for these processes.
  - Service Plan issue
  - Strategy and Policy development
  - Community Safety Partnership initiatives
  - The Budget process.
  - Joint LSP consultation
  - LAA compilation/evaluation.
  - The compilation of the Local Development Framework. (LDF)
  - Sustainable Community Strategy
4. Co-ordination of Community Engagement - The communications team will maintain Diary outlining various Community Engagement Exercises called the Consultation Calendar, which will be maintained on the intranet.
5. Publicity - Community Engagement Exercises will receive the appropriate public relations attention.
6. Mechanisms to be used - These methods are complimentary, and are not intended to operate in isolation and should be used to assist community engagement:

- **Peoples Panel** - Once engagement requirements are recognised a number of methods can be used to approach the panel on behalf of SBC and LAA/LSP members. The panel will be surveyed twice a year at least.
- **Area Forums** - Will be used only for issue-based consultation.
- **Business Forums**
- **SIMALTO**
- **SBC Consultation Group** - This group will consist of the key officers involved in consultation throughout the authority and will act to inform and advise the policy section of consultation requirements and act a source of advise and best practice.
- **Publications** - In hard copy or electronic format of materials intended to inform members of the public, employees or specific service users regarding relevant activities of partner organisations and Stafford Council.

## Feedback

7. Part of the final process of community engagement is the provision of feedback. The results and actions should be shared with participants and how it has shaped council policy and decisions, and to encourage involvement in future exercises. Results will be available on the web.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

8. The following must be evaluated when undertaking community engagement:
  - Inputs
  - Outputs
  - Outcomes



Shortcut to Engagement flowcharts.Ink