

## **Introduction**

South Kesteven District Council is committed to continuously improving the quality of both its internal and external communications and this Communications Strategy has been produced to help us achieve this.

The Council is committed to improving and adapting its services to reflect the needs of its residents and customers, and has a vision and set of values and priorities to reflect this.

To ensure our success, we must communicate clearly and openly; firstly so that our residents and customers know what the Council is aspiring to provide for them, and secondly, so that our staff and partners have a clear understanding of the Council's vision so they can contribute towards delivery.

This will enable us to speak with one voice to our public, partners and employees about our aims and achievements.

## **Purpose**

This strategy seeks to:

- Help the council achieve its priorities
- Continuously develop and strengthen the council's reputation with residents, partners, employees and opinion formers
- Be the strong voice that informs residents and listens to their opinions and concerns
- Help the council to encourage residents to become involved in local democracy, decision making and improving their communities
- Encourage individuals and communities to play a part in improving and developing services

## **The way we do things**

We are committed to improving our services to reflect the needs of our residents and customers. Our vision, values and priorities reflect this and focus the attention of everyone at SKDC, forming the cornerstone for the development of our ambitions, corporate priorities, service delivery plans and actions.

In terms of this strategy, our vision and values are the blueprint of all our communications: from the information material we produce, the way we talk to our colleagues and our customers, to the many ways in which we show our commitment to clear, friendly and open communication.

When communicating we are always mindful that the needs of people in our district are diverse. As well as selecting as many communication channels as possible, we will also consider which channel is most appropriate.

We are keen to ensure that as many people as possible have access to information regardless of age, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation or gender.

We recognise that the traditional media (newspapers, radio and television) are vital communications channels for us and we will strive to build excellent working relationships with Editors and provide a timely and professional service.

However, we also recognise the growing importance of electric communication and will make full use of websites and social media – particularly Twitter and Facebook.

We have also recently run a successful trial using advertising hoardings on roadsides, filling stations and in other public areas to promote specific messages. The trial was a huge success and we will certainly consider it again for other campaigns.

Our priorities

The Council's priorities until 2015 have been established and all our communications will reflect them.

Our priorities are to create the conditions which will allow us to:

- Grow the economy
- Support the arts, leisure and culture
- Keep the district clean, green and healthy
- Provide good housing for all

Our stakeholders

South Kesteven has a number of key stakeholders and each stakeholder group has different requirements in terms of information, context, presentation and timeliness and we need to know what these are so that we can map out our communications activities.

Our stakeholders are:

- Residents
- Service users
- Staff
- Councillors
- Trade unions
- Town and parish councillors
- The media – local, regional, national, specialist and minority
- Partners – voluntary and community groups, religious groups etc
- Other councils
- Public sector agencies
- Business sector

- Government departments and agencies
- National opinion formers – civil servants, ministers, MPs

### **Internal communication**

Our intranet has the potential to be a powerful tool for internal communication but is currently under-used because it is not up to date or exciting. The Communications Team will conduct an urgent review of the intranet.

The weekly staff newsletter, Insight, is well received but is also due for a refresh.

### **Why communication is important**

Excellent communication, both externally with our residents, customers and partners and internally with elected members and officers, is crucial for the council to deliver services that meet the needs and expectations of our residents.

We rely on accurate consultation with our residents and views of members so that we can shape and improve our services for the future. It is important that residents can fully appreciate the wide range of services that we provide via signage and corporate branding and that they are aware of the quality and quantity of service that they can expect.

We must, therefore, listen, learn and deliver for our residents consistently and in doing so they will gain confidence in their council.

### **How to communicate well**

For our communications to be effective, the function must be led by the Communications Team but it must also be owned and supported by all staff and members: members of staff and councillors have responsibility for communications in the way they answer the phone, write a letter or deal with a member of the public.

Each leaflet or newsletter we produce, every letter we send out and our overall manner and tone of voice say something about our organisation and influence our reputation. Communication may be verbal, non-verbal, written or signed, but should always be clear, appropriate and timely.

For this strategy to be effective, we must realise that this is a corporate strategy: each and every one of us has a role to play.

However, the Communications Team are the experts and for that reason all communications should come through the Team to ensure they on message and are correctly branded.

### **Aims of the Strategy**

The aims of the Strategy are:

- To ensure all our communications are fit for purpose
- To promote the Council's brand and corporate identity
- To improve our reputation
- To improve internal communications with staff and members

## **How to communicate well**

Communication can be described as 'the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing, or signs.'

Good communication is necessary to support our service delivery and promote good working relations.

When communicating we should consider:

- What.....we are trying to achieve and why we are trying to achieve it; do we need action or understanding
- Who.....is the recipient, and what are their needs and understanding
- Why.....do we need to communicate
- Where.....do we need to send it
- When.....timing
- How..... the most appropriate format – letter, email, website, telephone, in person?

## **Our reputation**

Our reputation in the community we serve is important to us. MORI's research consistently shows that councils with the highest service satisfaction ratings amongst their communities are the ones that best demonstrate they provide value for money in the services they deliver, communicate well and listen to their communities. These findings are backed up by other national surveys which show that there is an increasing demand for better information and consultation from councils.

This is done by consistently delivering good services and by effectively informing and communicating.

Activities to improve SKDC's reputation

- Manage the media effectively to promote and defend SKDC
- Keep the A-Z guide to council services up to date
- Publish a quarterly magazine (SKtoday) to inform residents in an entertaining way
- Ensure the SKDC brand is consistently linked to services
- Communicate well with staff so they become advocates for the Council

- Fully utilise social media so that we reach our maximum audience

## **Our brand**

The SKDC brand should be synonymous with the vision and values that we have. Residents' perception of our brand and what it means to them will often have to be based on their first impression of us and the way we deliver our services.

By building a brand, residents will be clearer about which services we deliver.

The introduction of central control for buying advertising and print will result in our brand always being correctly applied.

The sale of promotional space on our assets including car parks and leisure centres is currently being explored. If this comes to fruition it will result in more consistency in corporate branding.

## **The guidelines**

- All letters, brochures, leaflets, posters, promotional items and presentations should carry the corporate branding. The Communications Team will advise on the application of the corporate identity and help with any transition.
- All subsidiary brands should be brought into the corporate brand.
- Buildings and assets where there is no signage should undertake to introduce signs in the corporate identity

## **Conclusion and success measures**

The Communications Team monitors and records media coverage as a measure of success. Local coverage has always been monitored and we are now recording national coverage too in line with our project to raise awareness of South Kesteven throughout the country as a place to employ, enjoy and explore.

The Communications Team is also committed to helping the council make efficiency savings by making sure the authority receives best value for advertising and print services.