

Chesterfield Borough Council

Internal Communications Strategy

April 2014 - April 2017.



Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1 Chesterfield Borough Council's single biggest asset is its employees.
- 1.2 It is vital that effective two-way communications exist within the council if it is to get the best out of its staff and meet their desire for a fulfilling and rewarding career.
- 1.3 This communication needs to happen both up and down the hierarchy of the organisation but also across services to prevent 'silos' from existing.
- 1.4 The same principles apply to councillors, who need effective communications to enable them to carry out their role effectively.
- 1.5 This strategy will guide how we achieve effective internal communications.
- 1.6 The council is facing a number of external factors that impact on both internal and external communications.
- 1.7 Like all public sector organisations, Chesterfield Borough Council is going through a period of huge change as it reshapes the way it does things to ensure it continues to deliver high quality services.
- 1.8 Between 2010/11 and 2016/17 the council will have seen its Government grant cut from £8.7 million to £4.3 million. This inevitably has a high potential to affect staff morale as many changes are made to cope with this budget reduction.
- 1.9 At the same time the demand from customers for services is increasing and expectations of receiving good quality customer service have never been higher. Changes to the demographic make-up of the Chesterfield population are also occurring and public policy changes are placing new responsibilities on the council.
- 1.10 All of these factors place greater pressures on council staff delivering services. As a consequence it is vitally important they are kept well informed of changes that directly impact on them and the wider council.
- 1.11 In response to this the council has launched the Great Place, Great Service programme. This seeks to:
 - Deliver services that meet customer needs
 - Introduce more agile working through better use of IT
 - Make more effective use of our buildings and
 - Give staff the learning and development skills they need to cope with this change.

- 1.12 To succeed Great Place, Great Service will need to be driven by excellent communications, particularly from the leadership and line managers.
- 1.13 In turn these changes will also deliver the savings needed through greater income generation and more effective and cost efficient services.
- 1.14 Alongside this is the need to embed the council's new Corporate Plan including the corporate values, which were approved in February 2014 to sit alongside the existing council vision of 'putting our communities first'.
- 1.15 To ensure successful delivery of the Corporate Plan it is crucial that all employees are aware of the contribution their job makes to the success of the council and how the council expects them to behave while delivering services. It is also important for them to understand the direction the council is taking and the reasons why.
- 1.16 A challenge to achieving this will be the fact that around half of the council's employees are not able to receive email or intranet based communications at the current time. Investment in IT will improve this situation over the coming years. However, this fact reinforces the need for face-to-face communication to remain a key way of informing staff of issues and engaging with them.

Section 2: Where are we

- 2.1.1 In recent years the direction of internal communications work within Chesterfield Borough Council has been guided by the Workforce Strategy Group ¹ in response to feedback from staff given as part of the council's Investors in People accreditation.
- 2.1.2 This has included initiatives such as providing template agendas and minutes that managers can use to make team meetings more effective.
- 2.1.3 However, the group has identified that we need more up-to-date data to make informed decisions about internal communications needs.
- 2.1.4 To update our understanding of these issues an employee survey will be carried out as part of the Great Place, Great Service programme.
- 2.1.5 The Workforce Strategy Group, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Regeneration, will use the data from this survey to amend the proposed action plan that accompanies this strategy.
- 2.1.6 The survey data will be used to create baseline figures which will enable the council to set targets to achieve. The employee survey will then be repeated each year to monitor progress against these targets.
- 2.1.7 While internal communications and staff engagement are two different things, good engagement will not happen without good communication. So we also intend to use some wider measures of staff engagement to supplement the data that will be gained from a staff survey.
- 2.1.8 For example, the average number of sick days taken by employees in the council can be influenced, in part, by how engaged people feel with the organisation and how well they understand their role.

¹ The Workforce Strategy Group consists of representatives of different services, unions, HR and the Executive Member for Governance and Organisational Development. It was set up to oversee work the council was doing to respond to areas for improvement identified as part of its Investors in People accreditation. It has now been established as the way to deliver the workforce elements of the Great Place, Great Service transformation programme.

Section 3: Where we want to be

3.1 Getting the basics right

3.11 Research by MORI for the LG Communications New Reputation Guide shows that a council lives or dies by its reputation. That reputation is built on three things:

1. What you say about yourself
2. How your actions and behaviours reflect what you stand for
3. What people say about you

3.12 In other words there is a direct link between successful internal communications and successful external communications.

3.13 To achieve this as an organisation the council needs to focus on two key issues:

1. Getting staff to be advocates for the council and what it stands for (its brand)
2. Leadership – managers and senior councillors providing clear direction on the way forward and ensuring consistent and regular communication messages are delivered.

3.14 In February 2014 the council confirmed its vision of 'putting our communities first' and agreed a new corporate plan and a set of core values.

3.15 Everyone who works for the council needs to understand what it stands for and the way it expects services to be delivered. This means all staff being able to say what the council's vision and values are and how their jobs help contribute to delivering on the priorities set out in the new corporate plan.

3.16 Employees also need to understand how their behaviour and attitude when doing their job impacts on the council's reputation with the public.

3.17 To achieve this, the council needs to maintain existing internal two-way communication channels and establish new ones. This will enable staff to be informed about, and engaged with, the work of the council.

3.18 Clear and effective leadership is essential to good internal communications and staff engagement.

3.19 So once the strategy is established, we need it reinforced by all managers – but particularly senior managers. They need to be highly visible and deliver consistent key messages face-to-face to their staff.

Section 4: How we will get there (our communications objectives)

The following objectives apply to Chesterfield Borough Council's managers:

4.1 We will work to ensure our employees hear news that affects them, their job or their workplace from us first to prevent gossip or rumours being a main source of information.

4.1.1 If we leave long gaps between communications messages that 'space' will be filled by gossip.

4.1.2 To avoid this, communications messages need to be pre-planned, regular and delivered using a mixture of communications channels.

4.2 We will ensure communication is two-way, regular and consistent, and delivered through a mix of informal and formal methods across the organisation.

4.2.1 Different people respond to messages in different ways. Managers need to reflect this by seeking to deliver the same key messages through multiple communications channels that mix informal (eg one-to-one chat between a manager and a member of staff) with formal (eg briefings, Borough Bulletin).

4.2.2 When planning work we must ensure there are ways for the ideas of staff to be communicated up to senior managers and councillors and that there is a mechanism for acting on them and providing feedback.

4.3 We will develop alternative channels to communicate messages.

4.3.1 Our communication channels are largely traditional ones. We need to develop newer communication methods, particularly through the use of online communication (eg a greatly enhanced intranet, use of text messaging).

4.4 We will ensure all our managers, especially senior managers, are more visible and devote the time needed to deliver good internal communications.

4.4.1 Good internal communications require a commitment from all managers, particularly those at the top of the organisation, to devote the necessary time to being visible, listening to staff and understanding the reality of the jobs that their teams are doing.

4.4.2 This communication is best done face-to-face. Although this has a time commitment this will be rewarded down the line with less need to manage poor performance or deal with grievance issues that arise due to poor communication.

4.4.3 As part of the Great Place, Great Service programme the council will carry out various learning and development sessions to support line managers to develop the skills needed to manage better. As part of this the council will seek to improve their communication skills.

4.5 Our communications will reflect the desire of Great Place, Great Service to create a 'one council' approach that breaks down silos.

4.5.1 To do their jobs effectively employees need to know about a mix of issues specific to their area but also wider activities that impact on the way the organisation operates.

4.5.2 Changes in one service will have knock-on implications for others and early and effective communication across the organisation is essential.

4.5.3 Even if there is nothing fresh to say since a previous communication managers should tell staff that and give them details of when a decision will be made.

4.6 We will close the communication loop by feeding back on action taken following the input of staff into a process or piece of work.

4.6.1 A basic principle of all our communication will be that – at all levels of management - we will complete the communication circle by providing feedback on staff ideas we receive.

4.6.2 Where we can act on ideas we will do so and publicly acknowledge that so that the staff concerned and others can see the value in being better engaged with the council's work.

4.6.3 If we are unable to adopt an idea put forward by staff then we will tell them why.

4.7 The council will produce an annual communications plan to take the actions necessary to improve its performance against the key indicators (once the baseline has been set).

4.7.1 If communications is not viewed as a priority in the organisation then we will struggle to achieve improvements to internal communications satisfaction levels.

4.7.2 By producing annual communications plans the council can ensure it is putting in place actions to deliver the wider aims of the strategy.

Section 5: Communications channels we will use or investigate using

5.1 Existing

5.11 Two way communications

- Face-to-face (individual conversations)
- Team meetings
- Manager breakfast forums
- Joint consultative committees with trade unions
- Chief executive/council leader sessions

5.12 One/two way communications (depending on circumstances)

- Email

5.13 One way communications

- Borough Bulletin staff newsletter
- CBC Portal intranet (temporary intranet site)
- Staff notice boards
- Online consultations
- Key messages from corporate management team meetings

5.2 Other communication tools to investigate for future use

5.2.1 Two way communications

- Job shadowing 'Back to the Floor' events for heads of service and service managers of bigger teams
- Core brief/manager's talking points (assuming feedback from staff is reported back to senior managers)
- In the Hot Seat or Ask the Boss features on the intranet and face-to-face – enabling staff to ask questions of managers about issues
- Electronic voting on issues in team meetings/workshops/roadshows

5.2.2 One way communications

- Videos and video blogs
- Weekly update briefing on intranet content
- Posters on walls about staff success in delivering council priorities
- Summaries of major decisions made at cabinet/council and other key executive member meetings/planning committee

Section 6: Responsibilities

All staff and councillors have a role to play in improving internal communications and delivering this strategy.

6.1 All employees

- 6.1.1 Every member of staff has a responsibility to engage positively and constructively with their immediate colleagues, colleagues in other teams, managers and councillors.
- 6.1.2 It is vital that each employee buys into the delivery of the council's corporate vision and priorities and does their job by 'living' the values of the organisation.
- 6.1.3 In return the council's managers and councillors need to provide staff with timely and accurate information, and the opportunity to feedback their ideas and suggestions and then act on them.
- 6.1.4 By achieving this employees will become advocates for the council, both internally and with other public and partner organisations.

6.2 Trade unions

- 6.2.1 As employee representatives it is important that trade unions are provided with timely and accurate information that enables them to consult with their members and give feedback to senior managers.
- 6.2.2 Corporate issues will be raised through the Transformation Group ², while service specific issues can be communicated through monthly joint consultative committees and informal discussions within each service area.

6.3 Team leaders/service managers

- 6.3.1 Employee surveys regularly show that the ability of line managers to deliver good communications will largely dictate how satisfied a member of staff is with their job.
- 6.3.2 So in addition to the above they will be responsible for:
 - Holding regular and effective team meetings
 - Ensuring effective two-way communications within teams by passing up to senior managers any ideas or feedback from their teams

² The Transformation Group is a fortnightly meeting between senior officers, senior members and trade union representatives to discuss corporate issues that have an impact on staff.

- Ensuring all employees understand the role their job plays in delivering their team plan and in turn their service plan and the council's corporate plan – a process often called the 'golden thread'
- Ensuring all employees are delivering the council's values when doing their job
- Ensuring staff receive regular feedback about key items from service management teams, the corporate management team and key cabinet and council decisions. This should be delivered in a jargon free way and related as far as possible to the jobs of the people in the team meeting.

6.4 Corporate management team

6.4.1 As the leaders of the organisation the corporate management team play a key role in demonstrating the importance of internal communication to the wider organisation. By demonstrating the way they want their staff to communicate they will get the best out of their teams and ensure internal communications is considered an important corporate issue that needs time devoted to it, rather than being an afterthought.

6.4.2 So in addition to the above they will be responsible for:

- Being highly visible and approachable to their teams, and able to demonstrate to those staff that they understand the day-to-day reality of their jobs and the impacts of corporate decisions on those staff eg through back to the floor sessions.
- Creating a culture of open communication and demonstrating this by their own actions
- Ensuring there is an effective communication framework in place that allows staff to be informed and have the opportunity to comment on corporate and service issues and plans
- Assessing and monitoring the communications abilities of managers within their service and ensuring a consistency in the delivery of team meetings
- Ensuring all employees feel able to comment on any issue and are confident they will be listened to. When staff are asked for comments they need to ensure feedback is provided explaining why something is or isn't being implemented

6.5 Councillors

6.5.1 To perform their roles councillors need an effective flow of relevant and timely information.

6.5.2 Cabinet members hold regular meetings with heads of service to receive and give information on strategic issues. Heads of service have the responsibility to disseminate relevant information from these discussions to their staff.

- 6.5.3 Other councillors require the information needed to do their constituency work, fulfil various committee roles within the organisation and be kept up-to-date on wider developments within the council.
- 6.5.4 Being properly informed on issues will enable councillors to fully represent the authority at a local, regional and national level.
- 6.5.5 In return councillors have a duty to communicate information and feedback they receive from the public and partner organisations to senior managers within the council.

6.6 Corporate communications team

6.6.1 The corporate communications team will advise, guide and lead on implementing the internal communications strategy with the support of managers.

6.6.2 The team will lead on:

- Managing content for the intranet
- Producing the Borough Bulletin staff newsletter
- Providing information to managers to help them deliver effective team meetings
- Issuing corporate information and devising corporate internal communications campaigns
- Considering, trialling and developing new channels of internal communications
- Evaluating overall internal communications activity
- Advising and supporting the delivery of staff roadshow events and the chief executive/leader visits to teams

Section 7: Evaluation

- 7.1.1 Evaluation is a critical part of the communication process but is an area that many local authorities struggle to successfully deliver due to a lack of resources to continually monitor changes in opinion and other outputs and outcomes.
- 7.1.2 So we will adopt the standards and guidance issued by the Government Communication Network in its document Evaluating Government Communication Activity which says: "A pre-planned, but partial, evaluation is better than no evaluation."
- 7.1.3 Our evaluation activities will be split into two levels. Individual campaigns will have evaluation included as part of the accompanying communications plan. This will assess the impact of each individual communications activity.
- 7.1.4 But this strategy sets out longer term evaluation measures. As there is a lack of current data a baseline will need to be established before targets can be set for the following years.
- 7.1.5 Many of the measures outlined below will be affected by a range of activities, of which communications is one. The individual campaigns will identify the incremental changes being made.

7.2 Measures

- 7.2.1 The following measures will be used to evaluate the internal communications strategy. Baseline figures will be collected from the 2014 employee survey.
- 7.2.2 The workforce strategy group, in consultation with the Leader and Executive Member for Regeneration, will then set targets to measure performance against in the remaining years of the strategy.
- 7.2.3 Reputation rating
- Staff understand our vision
 - Staff understand our priorities (as set out in the corporate plan)
 - Staff understand our values
 - Staff feel valued for the work they do
- 7.2.4 Brand
- Staff who are proud to tell others they work for the council
 - Staff who would recommend the organisation as a great place to work

7.2.5 Information and engagement

- Staff who feel well informed
- Staff who understand how their work contributes to delivering the organisation's vision and priorities in the corporate plan
- Staff who believe the intranet keeps them well informed
- Staff who believe the Borough Bulletin keeps them well informed
- Staff who feel their team meetings keep them well informed

7.2.6 Wider measures of staff engagement

- Number of staff sick days per year
- Staff retention rates