

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

APRIL 2010

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4.1 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – Draft Communications Strategy

Introduction

4.3 Good communication should be essential for every organisation. Effective communication can help manage, motivate, influence, explain and inform.

4.4 Good, effective communication also helps strengthen democracy and allows for participation with and by the Comhairle’s key stakeholders including the public and the Comhairle’s employees.

4.5 Stakeholders

The Comhairle’s stakeholders in terms of communication are:

Internal:

Employees

Trade Unions

Elected Members

External

Public

Media

Scottish, UK and European Governments

Community Planning Partners and other agencies

4.6 This strategy is intended to benefit the Comhairle and its internal and external stakeholders. The benefits of implementing the strategy will be

- The Comhairle’s services will be better known and understood by the public and other stakeholders.
- The Comhairle’s achievements will be better known by the public and other stakeholders
- The Comhairle’s aims and aspirations will be better known by the public and other stakeholders.
- The Comhairle’s stakeholders will know more about the organisation and will have the opportunity to contribute views and ideas and contribute to the decision making process.
- Comhairle employees will know more about the organisation and will have the opportunity to give views and ideas and contribute to the decision making process
- The Comhairle can raise awareness of and explain decisions and policies, justify actions and respond to criticism.

- 4.7 There are a range of communication methods from the traditional to the new. Different means of communication may be more effective in reaching different audiences. However, all communication should be clear, concise and well-targeted.
- 4.8 In formulating this strategy, recognition has been taken of the Comhairle's aspirations for the Gaelic language as outlined in the Comhairle's Gaelic Language Plan.
- 4.9 Good communication will help the Comhairle to achieve its strategic, corporate and service objectives. This strategy aims to outline how this will be done.

5.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 5.2 The key aims of the strategy are to promote better understanding of the Comhairle's role in the community and its contribution to the life of the inhabitants of the Outer Hebrides. As well as communicating effectively with the community, the Comhairle must also ensure that communications with the workforce within our organisation are effective and focussed to ensure staff are informed, motivated and understand the vital role of communications at every level.
- 5.3 The communications strategy is a framework with an improvement ethos built into it to ensure that the workforce and the community are at the heart of the process to improve participation in the democratic process and ensure that our communications are clear and consistent: Listening involves valuing input, acting on feedback and changing behaviour. The communications with the community and the workforce in Gaelic or English are based on timely and effective principles, building understanding and trust with individuals, stakeholders, external organisations and the communities we serve. Effective communication at all levels is the cornerstone of most responsible, effective and professional organisations.

5.4 Key Objectives

1. To identify and distribute timely, accurate and relevant information about the Comhairle's services through the most appropriate channels for the audience.
2. To maximise positive media coverage of the Comhairle's work, policies and achievements.
3. To ensure the Comhairle's communications – spoken, written and electronic – are clear, consistent and effective.
4. To develop Comhairle's website in a bilingual format where appropriate as a key channel of communication.
5. To inform and empower all staff and Members to act as ambassadors for the Comhairle.
6. To ensure, by clear and consistent corporate branding, that the Comhairle is recognised and respected as a corporate body.
7. To ensure communications are a fundamental part of corporate thinking, including the adequate allocation of resources.
8. To work with partners, community organisations and stakeholders to publicise joint initiatives.
9. To ensure public understanding and participation in local government and to demonstrate process is increased and maintained.
10. To ensure that the plan for Comhairle communications in any emergency is effective and adequate.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) Media releases	Media Coverage	Media/Public/other stakeholders	As appropriate eg following Committee decision
b) Website - Internet	Internet coverage	Public/other stakeholders	Ongoing
c) Committee Reports	Media coverage/Internet coverage	Public/other stakeholders	As per Committee schedules
d) Public meetings/Consultation	Public Attendance at meetings/feedback	Public	As appropriate eg Service meetings
e) Leaflets/Posters	Leaflet take-up/Service take-up/feedback	Public	Ongoing

6.1 Achieving the Objectives

6.2 Objective 1

To identify and distribute timely, accurate and relevant information about the Comhairle's services through the most appropriate channels for the audience.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

7.1 Objective 2

To maximise positive media coverage of the Comhairle's work, policies and achievements.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) Media Releases	Media coverage	Media/public/other stakeholders	As appropriate/Comm schedule/new developments
b) Website - Internet	Media coverage	Public/media/other stakeholders	As media releases issued
c) Committee Reports/meetings	Media coverage	Public/media/other stakeholders	As per Committee schedule
d) Media briefings/liaison	Media coverage	Media/public	As appropriate
e) Making Gaelic speakers available for interviews etc.	Gaelic interviews	Gaelic speakers	As required/ongoing

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

8.1 Objective 3

To ensure the Comhairle's communications – spoken, written and electronic are clear, consistent and effective.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) All Comhairle Media Releases issued through Comms. Section	Media coverage	Media/public/other stakeholders	Ongoing but based around news
b) *Media training	Trained spokespersons	Media/public/other stakeholders	Chairs and Directors offered media training June 2009. Review media training needs June 2010.
c) *Department newsletters etc to be copied to Comms. section	Newsletters etc received by Comms. section	Other stakeholders/public	As newsletters etc produced
d) *Front page of website to be used for key Comhairle messages	Front page of website	Public/other stakeholders	Ongoing but to be regularly reviewed which messages are replaced with new

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

9.1 Objective 4

To develop Comhairle’s website in a bilingual format where appropriate as a key channel of communication.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) *Press releases issued in bi-lingual format as far as possible and posted on website	Bi-lingual press releases	Media/public/other stakeholders	Ongoing
b) Key documents to be published bi-lingually and posted on website	Bi-lingual documents on website	Media/public/other stakeholders	As per publication documents
c) *Appointment of Gaelic Communications Officer	Appointment made	Public	Appointment made

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

10.1 Objective 5

To inform and empower all staff and Members to act as ambassadors for the Comhairle.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) *Dedicated employee section of Intranet	Employee information	Employees	Ongoing
b) Payslips Information	Information on payslips	Employees	As per pay runs
c) Email	Information in e-mails	Employees/Members/other stakeholders	Ongoing
d) *Employee Suggestion Scheme	Suggestions being made	Employees	Ongoing
e) *Employee Survey	Employee responses	Employees	Survey Completed Corporate Improvements plan being drawn up

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
f) Committee Process	Comhairle decisions	Members	As per Committee schedule
g) Information Bulletin	Bulletin Information	Members	At least by monthly
h) *Employee Newsletter 'E-Ceangal'	Production of online newsletter	Employees	Quarterly (Published April 2010)

11.1 Objective 6

To ensure, by clear and consistent corporate branding, that the Comhairle is recognised and respected as a corporate body.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) Use of Corporate Logo and bilingual slogan	Logo on Letterheads, documents etc. Bi-lingual slogan.	Public, employees, other stakeholders	Ongoing
b) Use of Gaelic as per Gaelic Policy	Bi-lingual documents, signage etc	Public, employees, other stakeholders	Ongoing
c) Attainment of IIP status	Award of IIP status	Public/Employees/Members/other stakeholders	By 2012

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

12.1 Objective 7

To ensure communications are a fundamental part of corporate thinking, including the adequate allocation of resources.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) *Ensure monitoring and review of Communications Strategy	Ongoing Review and monitoring	Members, employees	Ongoing with overall review in 2 years
b) *Comhairle Management Team to consider Communications on a regular basis	Minutes of Management team meetings	Members of Management Team	Quarterly
c) Payslip messages to be used to encourage employee participation in e-ceangal and other communication methods	Messages on Payslips	Employees	As appropriate and during pay runs
d) Twitter pilot by Community Planning Partnership to be monitored to gauge effectiveness	Twitter log and feedback	Comms. Section/ CPP employees	Ongoing and end of Twitter pilot
e) *Comhairle blog which can provide up to date information	Publication of Blog	Public/employees/other stakeholders	Ongoing – aim to update 2 to 3 times week.

Channel and Action	Outcome/ Evidence	Audience	Timescale

13.1 Objective 8

To work with partners, community organisations and stakeholders to publicise joint initiatives.

14.1 Objective 9

Change and Actions	Outcome/Evidence	Audience	Timescale
a) * Produce agendas as a priority for the review of the role of the Emergency Response Unit	Production of agendas by the Emergency Response Unit	Emergency Response Unit Other stakeholders/public	Ongoing
b) * Consultation with FPO	Production of electronic agendas	Media/public/other	Ongoing
b) * Ensure effective dissemination of information	Website access out of hours	Public/members/other	Review of procedure as required
c) * Produce emergency agendas and minutes	No of hits to read	Media/public/other	Ongoing
c) * Assist community organisations with Communications advice	Notes on agendas	Public/other/ Members stakeholders	As required
d) * Production of leaflet in English and Gaelic to explain the process to be available on website	Production of leaflet	Public	Within 6 months
d) * Assist partner organisations with advice on Gaelic communication on website	Production of Gaelic Language Plans or other publications or initiatives	Public/other stakeholders	As required
e) * Produce Gaelic website with College and Northern Constabulary on developing Gaelic Language Plan	Posting on web	Public	Within 6 months

To ensure public understanding and participation in local government and to demonstrate process is increased and maintained.

15.1 Objective 10

To ensure that the plan for Comhairle communications in any emergency is effective and adequate.

15.1 **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

15.2 Monitoring and reviewing the Communications Strategy will be an ongoing process to ensure that the strategy is effective and that we are achieving our aims and objectives.

15.3 However, measuring effective communications is not an exact science as there are elements in the equation that are difficult to factor in with any degree of precision.

15.4 Internal communications can be assessed via staff surveys, questionnaires and feedback opportunities. The liP process also encourages staff participation and provides valuable information from staff on a variety of issues.

15.5 The success of external communications are not so easy to monitor although public consultations, meetings and surveys help to gauge the effectiveness of the public dimension of communications. The ultimate political measure of success in delivering Comhairle strategies and policies is the democratic process itself as part of the political election cycle.

15.6 Assessing the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy can be done in a number of ways –

1. Employee Survey – asking employees to participate in surveys and then assessing feedback and reacting accordingly;
2. Feedback process – using electronic newsletter, staff discussion for a and J.C.C.
3. Public Consultations Surveys – questioning the public to gauge whether they feel better informed;
4. liP process – staff are encouraged to participate in the liP process;

5. Walking the floor – Directors and Managers talking on an informal level to staff to ascertain their knowledge of corporate issues and staff concerns;
6. External monitoring of Press Releases – develop a system to monitor how effective press releases are in terms of uptake by local/national media;
7. Staff Suggestions Scheme on Communications;
8. External Audit of Communications – employ media consultant on a 5 year basis to undertake external audit; and
9. Stakeholders Consultation – stakeholders, such as Community Planning Partners can be consulted every 3 years to gauge effectiveness of communications strategy in relation to joint working/co-operation.

16.1 **Future Options**

16.2 There are a range of new technologies that the Comhairle could choose to use in its Communications Strategy.

16.3 In this paper it has been suggested that the Twitter pilot of the Community Planning Partnership be monitored by the Comhairle to assess effectiveness.

16.4 It has also been suggested that a blog be set up to impart timely and accurate information.

16.5 There are many social networking systems that could be used by the Comhairle but at this stage we are not recommending the Comhairle implement these. The use of a variety of these methods would require considerable resource in terms of officer time. The experience from other local authorities seems to be to move gradually to avoid some of the pitfalls of using social networking sites although there is considerable scope for future use.

16.6 If the Comhairle was minded to use social networking sites then it is suggested that a separate social networking strategy be drawn up for Committee.

16.7 There are two areas however that Members may feel are worthy of further exploration. Budgetary resources would have to be identified for both of these methods of communication and members are asked whether they wish officers to further explore these options, dependent upon a further report coming back to Committee.

16.8 **Text Messaging**

16.9 Text messaging is now a very common means of communicating. A number of local authorities have set up a system whereby the residents of the area can, if they wish, register their mobile number with the local authority. The system can then send messages (thousands at a time if required) to all those

registered to receive them. Many schools already operate such a system although there is no corporate system. Messages could include notice of consultation meetings, warnings about bogus callers, closed schools etc.

16.10 The average cost for this service is below £5,000 per year which covers the cost of a set number of texts.

17 Televising Meetings of the Comhairle On The Internet

17.1 A number of local authorities, including Highland Council, put at least some of their meetings onto the Internet.

17.2 A variety of means can be used to do this but most local authorities tend to use a standard industry model which provides training and a professional service.

17.3 Providing internet access to viewing Comhairle meetings would

- Increase engagement and participation with the general public.
- Increase accountability & transparency
- Effectively utilise technology in an informative and effective way.
- Increase the profile of the organisation.

17.4 An example of how such a system would look is shown below:

The image shows a screenshot of a webcast player interface for Haringey Council. The interface is divided into several sections, each with a label pointing to it:

- Current agenda point:** Points to the 'Current Agenda Point' section, which displays '1 Apologies For Absence'.
- Meeting name:** Points to the 'Title: Cabinet' field.
- Links:** Points to the 'Links' section, which contains a 'Welcome to our Webcast Player.' message and a list of features: Home, Index Points, Speakers, and Links.
- Current speaker:** Points to the 'Current speaker' section, which displays 'Cllr George Meehan'.
- Video Window:** Points to the video player window showing a live video feed of the meeting.
- Index points:** Points to the 'Index Points' section, which contains a message: 'The webcast should start automatically for you. While the webcast is running you can also use this area for a number of other features listed above.'
- Speaker profiles:** Points to the 'Speaker profiles' section, which is currently empty.
- Contextual information appears here:** Points to the 'Interactive section (opens in a new window)' at the bottom of the page.
- Interactivity:** Points to the 'Feedback', 'Help', and 'Settings' buttons at the bottom left.

The interface also features the Haringey Council logo in the top right corner and the 'Powered by public-i' logo in the bottom right corner.

- 17.5 There is obviously a cost to installing and maintaining such a system. Estimates vary between £15k and £25k per annum including training costs. The variance in costs is largely dependent upon the number of broadcast hours per annum. The higher the number of hours broadcast, the higher the cost.
- 17.6 If Members were minded to pursue this option further a full demonstration can be arranged.
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