



COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
September 2024

Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Comhairle's Communications Strategy for 2024-2028. The strategy covers all the Comhairle's external and internal communications including social media, the Comhairle's website and press relations.

Executive Summary

2.1 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Communications Strategy sets out the organisations approach to external and internal communications with stakeholders including employees, members of the public and the media.

2.2 To communicate effectively with the public and other key stakeholders the Comhairle makes use of social media platforms, the website and engages directly with media organisations.

2.3 The 2024-2027 policy builds on the previous document to ensure that the Comhairle's communications make use of modern techniques and make information more accessible to the public.

Introduction

3.1 Good communication is essential for every organisation. Effective communication helps organisations to manage, motivate, influence, explain and inform, and for the Comhairle, good communication helps strengthen democracy and allows for participation with and by the Comhairle's key stakeholders, including the public and the Comhairle's employees.

3.2 *Stakeholders* can best be defined as: A person, group or organization that has an interest or concern in an organisation. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives and policies.)

The Comhairle's stakeholders in terms of communication are:

Internal: Members, Employees, Trade Unions

External: Public, Media, Scottish and UK Governments, Partner Organisations

3.3 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar communicates with the public using social media, (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube) the Comhairle's Website and through engagement with local and national media organisations.

Objectives

4.1 The key aim of the strategy is to promote better understanding of the Comhairle's role in the community and its contribution to the life of those who live in the Outer Hebrides and other stakeholders. 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.

4.2 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 a cornerstone of responsible, effective and professional organisations. We should aim to be proactive in all our communications although we are also required to react and rebut where appropriate.

4.3 The Communications Policy will set out to meet the following key objectives.

1. To support the achievement of the aims of the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy
2. To deliver regular and accurate updates on the work of the Comhairle and promote good relationships with local and national media
3. To provide employees with regular information.
4. To take consideration of the Comhairle's Gaelic Policy and ensure that Gaelic language is promoted and is prevalent throughout Comhairle communications.
5. To develop a consistent and recognisable identity for the Comhairle across all communications.
6. To make effective use of social media to engage directly with the public.
7. To assist in the development of the Comhairle's new website and utilise it to support public communications.
8. To work closely with departments across the Comhairle to communicate their work to the public.
9. To work closely with Elected Members to ensure that they are well informed and allowed to play an active role in communicating to the public.
10. To ensure that the language used in communications is in line with the Comhairle's corporate aims and is easily understood by all.
11. To provide suitable media training to relevant employees and members.
12. To ensure timely and accurate emergency communications.

13. To provide Comhairle departments with feedback and usable statistics.
14. To provide the public with an insight into the democratic process of the Outer Hebrides.
15. To engage with the public, answer their questions and address their concerns.

Achieving the Objectives

To support the achievement of the aims of the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy

5.1 The Communications Team will support progress towards achieving the aims of the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy.

5.2 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's communications across all platforms should support progress towards the aims set out by the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy.

5.3 The overarching aim and ambition of the Corporate Strategy is to retain and increase the population of the Outer Hebrides. Communications should support this aim and ambition as well as the 4 Corporate Strategic Aims:

- Deliver Community Leadership
- Strengthen the Local Economy
- Support Children, Families and Young People
- Support Caring and Resilient Communities and Quality of Life

To deliver regular and accurate updates on the work of the Comhairle and promote good relationships with local and national media.

6.1 The Communications Team will deliver regular and accurate updates on the work of the Comhairle and promote good relationships with local and national media.

6.2 The Western Isles has a strong media sector that plays a vital role in communicating information to the public. It is important that the Comhairle maintains a good relationship with the media to ensure that the public are provided with information of the Comhairle's work through these channels.

6.3 It is essential that all interactions with the media by Comhairle officer are made through the communications team. Adherence to this procedure will ensure accuracy and consistency of messaging.

6.4 The Communications Team will issue press releases to local and national media contacts ensuring a flow of positive and informational news stories.

6.5 The Comhairle's communications should be proactive. Communications should reflect the good work of Comhairle departments and where appropriate highlight the challenges faced by them.

6.6 The Comhairle's Communications Team will respond to all press enquiries from local and national publications. There is an expectation on relevant officers to support in responses to these inquiries in a timely manner.

6.7 The Comhairle's Communications Team will respond to media bids for interview with Comhairle Officers and Members and prepare interview briefs where appropriate.

6.8 The Communication Team will invite the local media to Comhairle events and photo opportunities.

6.9 Where necessary the Communications Team will defend the council by rebuttal of inaccurate coverage.

To provide employees with regular information.

7.1 The communications team will provide employees with regular information.

7.2 To ensure employee awareness of important information and create a connection between employees and the authority it is important that employees are provided with regular updates.

7.3 Comhairle employees will be sent a weekly summary of news stories and relevant information.

7.4 The Communications Team will work closely with Human Resources to update the Comhairle's Intranet with relevant and up to date information.

To take consideration of the Comhairle's Gaelic Policy and ensure that Gaelic language is promoted and is prevalent throughout Comhairle communications.

8.1 The Communication Team will take consideration of the Comhairle's Gaelic Policy and ensure that the Gaelic language is promoted and is prevalent throughout Comhairle communications.

8.2 The Communications Team will work to ensure that Gaelic is present throughout communications on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's social media platforms and website.

8.3 Where possible press releases will be distributed in Gaelic and English.

8.4 Where possible headings of press releases and a paragraph summary will be posted to social media in Gaelic. To support the use of Gaelic on social media the Communications team will work with Sgioba na Gàidhlig to create a bank of frequently shared posts/ phrases to allow for Gaelic to be included naturally in posts to social media.

8.5 Where possible video interviews posted to the Comhairle's social media will be recorded in Gaelic and English.

8.6 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's communications channels will be used to support the promotion of the Gaelic language and encourage its use.

8.7 In collaboration with Sgioba na Gàidhlig the Communications Officer will produce a timetable of Gaelic media content for the period 2024/25 which will be shared with all members.

8.8 The Comhairle will continue to run the only bilingual coverage of local and national elections via social media.

To develop a consistent and recognisable identity for the Comhairle across all communications.

9.1 The Communications Team will develop a consistent and recognisable identity for the Comhairle across all communications.

9.2 It is important that the Comhairle maintains an easily recognisable and consistent brand across all communications.

9.3 To support this the communications team will produce Brand Guidelines to be distributed to all employees and members.

9.4 To support the recognisability of Comhairle communications templates for social media graphics, report covers, email sign offs, Teams Backgrounds etc. will be circulated to all employees and members in line with the approved brand guidelines.

9.5 The brand guidelines will include recommended fonts, colours, logos and give advice to employees.

To make effective use of social media to engage directly with the public.

10.1 The communications Team will use social media to engage directly with the public.

10.2 It is important that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar makes use of social media to communicate directly with the public. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a high number of followers across social media platforms. Social media is the default source of information for many across the Western Isles.

10.3 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has corporate social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. These accounts are all managed by the Comhairle's Communications Team.

10.4 The Comhairle's social media accounts should be regularly updated and used to share the work of the Comhairle to the public.

10.5 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will make use of video content and social media graphics to encourage increased engagement and present information in alternative and accessible formats.

10.6 Departments, Teams and Facilities within the Comhairle have separate social media accounts. These accounts are useful to deliver information on specific aspects of the Comhairle's work for example school accounts.

10.7 It is important that these accounts are not used as the sole method of communication for any department in the Comhairle and where appropriate messages should be fed through the Comhairle's communications team. Comhairle communication team will have administration rights on all social media accounts to ensure they are consistent with the Comhairle's corporate communications.

10.8 The Communications Team will undertake a review of all social media accounts and issue guidance to all staff.

To assist in the development of the Comhairle's new website and utilise it to support public communications.

11.1 The Communications Team will assist in the development of the Comhairle's new website and utilise it to support public communications.

11.2 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's website was impacted by the cyber-attack on 7 November 2023. Since this date the Comhairle has used a temporary website which has allowed for the continued communication of key information to the public.

11.3 The Comhairle is in the process of developing a new website which will allow for improved provision of information and delivery of online services.

11.4 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Communications Officer will work closely with the Customer Services Team and IT Department to ensure that the website is shaped around the communications needs of the authority. The design of the website will be in keeping with the Comhairle's brand guidelines.

11.5 The Communications Team will use the website to inform the public of the work of the Comhairle by posting regular stories. All press releases will be shared to the Comhairle's website before distribution to the press and posting to social media.

11.6 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's website is the primary method for communicating messages to the public. While social media and other communications methods are useful the Comhairle's website allow members of the public to access information alongside materials and processes that allows access to further information and provide answers to public queries. These resources include:

- The Comhairle's complaints process

- The Comhairle's enquiries form

- Member and officer contact information

- Background information on the work of departments

11.7 The Comhairle's website has the capacity to translate the Comhairle's information into any language which will greatly increase the accessibility of information.

11.8 All Comhairle social media posts should include a link to a relevant page of the Comhairle website and a link to the Comhairle's enquiries form should be included in the comment section of each post.

11.9 All public enquiries received by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on social media should be directed to the Comhairle's enquiries form.

To work closely with departments across the Comhairle to communicate their work and priorities to the public.

12.1 The communications team will work closely with departments across the Comhairle to communicate their work to the public.

12.2 Teams within the Comhairle should be able to contact the Communications Team to deliver communications on their work to the public.

12.3 Teams within the Comhairle should use the Communications Team to inform the public of the good work they are carrying out on their behalf.

12.4 Teams within the Comhairle should use the Communications Team to inform the public of the challenges faced in delivering services.

12.5 Teams within the Comhairle should use the Communications Team to inform the public of service changes.

12.6 A Communications enquiry form will be circulated to departments and added to the Comhairle's intranet. The form will allow departments to request a press release, social media post, media calling notice or for the communications team to attend an event.

To work closely with Elected Members to ensure that they are well informed and allowed to play an active role in communicating to the public.

13.1 The Communications Team will work closely with members to ensure that they are well informed and allowed to play an active role in communicating to the public.

13.2 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's elected members are key to the authority's effective communication with the public, Government and external organisations.

13.3 To allow members to effectively respond to public queries and correspond with external organisations on key issues it is vital that Members are provided with up to date and detailed information on key issues.

13.4 Members will be provided with a fortnightly briefing by the Chief Executive giving key information and circulating useful reading.

13.5 Members will be provided with additional briefings on topics that are likely to spark significant media and public interest.

13.6 Where appropriate FAQ documents will be prepared by the Communications Officer in collaboration with relevant officers to equip Members with the necessary information to respond to public questions.

13.7 Elected members will act as spokespersons for the Comhairle in external communications including TV Interviews, Radio Interviews, Press Release Quotes and Letters to Government.

13.8 All chairs and vice-chairs will be expected to be available for interview on their relevant areas. In line with the increase in video content on social media, this will include availability for interviews to be shared on the Comhairle's social media.

To ensure that the language used in communications is in line with the Comhairle's corporate aims and is easily understood by all.

14.1 The Communications Officer will ensure that the language used in communications is in line with the Comhairle's corporate aims and is easily understood by all.

14.2 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a duty to provide communications that are accessible and easily understood to everyone.

14.3 Where possible all communications to the Comhairle social media and website should use language that can be understood by all.

14.4 All Comhairle communications should use language that promotes the aims of the Corporate Strategy.

14.5 It is important that Comhairle communications reflect the Western Isles as a vibrant area where people can live and work. The use of words such as "remote" should be avoided.

14.6 The Comhairle's communication team will circulate guidance on the appropriate use of language to all employees and members as part of the Comhairle's brand guidelines.

To provide suitable media training to relevant employees and members.

15.1 The Communications Team will provide suitable media training to relevant employees and members.

15.2 It is important that employees and members involved in communications with the public whether direct, through social media or the media are provided with suitable training.

15.3 As part of the review of the Comhairle's social media accounts the Communications Team will provide training via Microsoft Teams to all individuals involved in the management of social media accounts.

15.4 These training sessions will give advice on the effective use of social media and give guidance on the role of the Communications Team in social media communications.

15.5 To support the expectation on members to engage in media interviews. Comhairle members and relevant officers will be provided with training on TV and Radio Interviews.

To Inform the Public of Service Disruption and Emergency Updates

16.1 The Comhairle has a duty to inform the public of disruptions to service and to provide updates on emergency situations.

16.2 The Comhairle's website should be used as the primary location for service updates to be provided. Social media posts will link to the website's service update pages.

16.3 A dedicated emergency communications plan will be developed following the completion of the Comhairle's new website.

To provide Comhairle departments with feedback and usable statistics.

17.1 To provide public feedback to departments and allow for the performance of the Comhairle's communications team to be assessed statistics on the performance of press releases will be recorded and circulated to relevant individuals.

To engage with the public, answer their questions and address their concerns.

18.1 In line with the Comhairle's Customer Service Strategy the Communications Team will support direct engagement with the public.

To provide the public with an insight into the democratic process of the Outer Hebrides.

19.1 It is important that the public is aware of the Comhairle's decision making process.

19.2 The Communications Team will work with Members and the Democratic Services Team to publicise Comhairle Committees and encourage public engagement.

Monitoring and evaluation

20.1 The Communications Strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to internal and external environmental factors. If there is a problem or a gap identified in the way we communicate or in the processes used there must be openness and flexibility to change them and improve.

20.2 Internal communications can be assessed via staff surveys, questionnaires and feedback opportunities.

20.3 The success of external communications will be measured through the level of positive press coverage and an assessment of online reaction via social media and levels of engagement measured in collaboration with the customer service team.

20.4 We monitor our progress in different ways, including:

- Monitoring of our coverage in newspapers, on radio and television. Local coverage is partially reported as a Key Performance Indicator.
- Analysis of feedback from the website.
- Through reporting on Interplan.

Conclusions

21.1 Communications within a local authority reflect a fast changing political and service environment and the Comhairle needs to be flexible enough to recognise and implement new technologies and adapt where appropriate.

21.2 The continued cooperation of Members and Officers is essential to the achievement of the report's objectives and the delivery good communications. Good communications are key to informing the public of the Comhairle's work and ensuring positive relationships with key stakeholders are developed and maintained.