

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL CABINET REPORT

Date of meeting:	16 June 2009
Report of:	Head of Policy and Performance
Title:	Communications Strategy for Cheshire East Council

1.0 Purpose of Report

To set out a Communications approach for Cheshire East Council that will ensure that the reputation of the Council is protected and enhanced and provides advice and guidance on dealing with the media.

2.0 Decision Required

The Cabinet is recommended to decide to adopt the communications strategy outlined

3.0 Introduction

- 3.1 Excellent Councils keep good control of their communications. Good control ensures consistent, targeted and measurable communications that will enhance and protect the reputation of Cheshire East Council and its services.
- 3.2 The ultimate aim is that staff, residents, customers, partners and other organisations are assured they are experiencing value for money from the Council and have a clear understanding and a positive perspective of our
- aims
 - values
 - services
 - achievements

4.0 Approach

4.1 To enable the Communications team to co-ordinate and monitor communications in Cheshire East, a number of different channels and processes will be used.

- Communications Planning
- Marketing
- Branding
- Design and Print
- Media Relations
- Internal Communications
- Events

4.1 Communications planning

Working with Cabinet Members, Directors and Senior Officers, Communications will lead a planning process to identify communications goals and outcomes. These will be assessed to ensure that they contribute to achieving the Councils vision as set out in the Corporate Plan . These will then be developed into an approved list of campaigns and projects that the Council will commit to deliver. Appendix A sets out a flow chart that illustrates this communications planning process.

4.2 Marketing

Delivering the right message to the right target audience at the right time is the mantra of any Communications Team. Delivering the Councils messages through effective and efficient channels is key to this. It includes researching innovative solutions but also communicating complex and sometimes unpopular messages. Campaigns to deliver these messages will be identified through discussions with Cabinet Members, Directors and Senior Officers. In all cases Communications Plans will be produced setting out target audience, outcomes, timings, responsibilities and channels. An example of this is in Appendix B. The channels of communication could include;

- Web
- Press
- Posters/leaflets
- Promotional material e.g. mugs, pens, mouse mats
- Radio
- Advertising – bus, press, magazines
- Events e.g. trailer in town centres, conferences
- Cheshire East News
- Competitions

4.3 Branding

Consistent branding across the Council is critical. The Branding guidelines have been approved and are published on the intranet. It is a requirement that these are followed so that the council branded under one visual identity that is instantly recognisable. These include guidelines for stationery, vehicles, clothing and signage. The Communications team will work with services to help them to work within these guidelines and offer advice on how to implement them.

4.4 Design and Print

High quality and professional information and material is also critical for the image of the Council. The Communications team operates a service that delivers effective, eye-catching and value for money design and print solutions. Design will be delivered in house, but there will also be occasions where we will procure these services on behalf of the client. This could be due to volume of work or where there are specialist or technical needs. There is a print buying function within the team who will also procure on behalf of the client.

This service is driven by the agreed outcome that the communications team has identified with the service. Outputs could include items such as booklets, posters, adverts, banners, exhibition material and design for other materials such as pens, mugs or bags. The service can also resource more complex design solutions such as bespoke conference folders or items that have intricate folding requirements.

4.6 Media Relations

The Communications Team provides a comprehensive Media Relations service to CEC. The Media Relations Protocol outlining this is attached as Appendix C. The focus of this team is to work with the local, regional and national media to enhance and protect the reputation of the Council, communicating its key information and messages in a professional and timely manner.

Working with the wider Communications Team and services, the team will co-ordinate and produce relevant news releases and will provide professional advice and guidance about engaging with the Media. The will monitor all media activity in relation to CEC and provide regular updates to Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team.

It is critical that the team is able to control the media activity for the Council so that they can react to situations in an informed manner but also so that they are able to identify the wider reaching implications for the Council. As well as sending out news releases and statements this will also involve dealing with

inbound press enquiries both negative and positive. It is therefore imperative where the view of or a statement from CEC is being sought, no Member or employee engages with the media without contacting the Media Relations Team first.

4.7 Internal Communications

It is essential to ensure that staff feel part of Cheshire East Council and understand the vision and values and the culture that the Council is aiming to achieve. To help achieve this, the Communications team will work closely with HR to look at how and when we engage with staff for example the Top 300 Managers conferences. Channels that already exist are

- Team Talk - weekly
- Talking East - monthly
- CENtranet - ongoing
- Staff survey - bi-annual

It is just as important that internal communications are presented in a professional and engaging format and Communications will again work with HR to maintain this approach. This will also include staff events where the look and feel is as important as the content. We will review internal communications as part of the Corporate Communications Plan.

4.8 Events

Already mentioned as a channel, events can be an excellent way of engaging face to face with the desired target audience. Communications will identify events that can be used to raise the profile of CEC locally and nationally for example the LGA conference and other key opportunities. They will also develop and support bespoke events where it is identified as the most effective means of engaging with the target audience for example the Business Breakfast.

5.0 Financial Implications

The Communications Team has a small internal budget which is largely committed to delivering two of the key publications of the Council – Talking East and Cheshire East News.

Currently, where communications activities are identified as a priority through the communications planning process, services will fund these activities. The Team will work with the relevant service to identify the necessary budget to deliver the activity. During the year 09/10 this will be reviewed to explore the benefits of centralising all marketing and communications spend.

A further piece of work will be undertaken to review the print and media buying strategy across the authority will to ensure efficiency savings are achieved.

6.0 Risks

The Council's reputation will be harmed by poor quality, disparate and unplanned communications activities. A significant risk uncoordinated and poorly thought out media messages. If this strategy is adhered to it will significantly mitigate this risk.

Good staff communication will also be essential to achieving the Council's objectives.

For further information:

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