



# Communication Strategy

2011-2014

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## Introduction

Harborough District Council's vision is:

*To put our residents first - maintaining Harborough's position as one of the best loved UK districts to live, work and visit.*

*To make the best and most effective use of our resources, ensuring efficient services and providing good value.*

## Our Values

- Putting residents and frontline services first
- Listening, informing and consulting local people and promoting greater community involvement within our urban and rural communities
- Being open and accountable in the way we make Decisions
- Embracing innovation and partnership as a way of bringing about efficiency, cost effectiveness and improvement in our services
- Working in partnership with the voluntary, community and business sector
- Endeavouring to achieve lowest council tax rises, to cover inflation and the targeted investment required for our priorities
- Ensuring services are accessible to all
- Promoting equality of opportunity, with particular attention to the needs of those less accessible or vulnerable residents, located within our diverse community
- Valuing, supporting and developing our employees

The purpose of the Communication Strategy is to demonstrate how our corporate values will be translated into clear principles and standards for effective communication to support community engagement and involvement.

## Effective communication

### Our Aims

We want to ensure that:

- Local people know about Harborough District Council and our services
- We share information with others in ways that they can understand
- Our message is one that people will want to listen to
- We listen to and understand what other people are saying
- People understand the reasons for the actions we take
- People have access to information irrespective of their race, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexuality, belief or religion
- Our services respond to the needs and views of service users.

### Our stakeholders and audience

We communicate with many people and organisations, these include:

People	Organisations
People living and/or working in the District	The local business community/ organisations
Visitors to the District	County, District and parish councils
People who use council services	Trade unions representing staff
People who don't use council services	The media
People at risk of social exclusion	The third sector
Councillors	Other public agencies and partner organisations that we work with
Staff	

### Our Performance

Our commitment to communicating with local people to understand their issues, and help them make informed choices, is demonstrated in areas of work such as the communication and consultation on the Local Development Framework, council tax levels, the impact of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and service delivery.

We communicate with the local community in various ways, which include:

- Face to Face through our one stop service shops in both Lutterworth and Market Harborough
- Giving access to all council services through a single telephone number
- Ensuring information about all council services accessible electronically, through [www.harborough.gov.uk](http://www.harborough.gov.uk)
- Using local media such as radio and newspapers and also regionally/nationally through newspapers, specialist magazines/journals.
- Community Forums – working in partnership with the County Council, the Police and Primary Care Trust by attending community-led meetings
- Talk Back – district-wide newsletter distributed to all households

In a recent access to services consultation carried out by the Council in February 2011, respondents said they had used a variety of methods to communicate with the Council, but most preferred telephone or face to face. When asked how people obtained information about the Council and its services, their preferred method was the local press followed by website.

## **Principles supporting effective communication**

The principles set out below demonstrate how they fit with the Council's Core Values to ensure effective communication.

### **Putting residents and frontline services first**

Actively inform the public about the Council's role and the services provided.  
Use clear, simple and user friendly forms of communication with residents.  
Give equal attention and support to people living in all geographical areas covered by the council.

### **Ensuring services are accessible to all**

Methods of communications, where possible, must comply with the Council's Branding Guidelines which ensures communication can be understood and written in plain English.  
Recognise and value the diversity of young people and the contribution they can make.  
Ensure electronic information is easy to access and meets the needs of the user.  
Ensure flexible forms of communication to meet the needs of the target audience, including where necessary a translation service, audio recording and large print documents.

### **Promoting equality of opportunity, with particular attention to the needs of those less accessible or vulnerable residents, located within our diverse community**

Ensure greater involvement of people in decision making, especially people from minority groups, young people, those who have a disability and the vulnerable.

### **Listening, informing and consulting local people and promoting greater community involvement within our urban and rural communities:**

The Council recognises the value of good relationships with the media and will always be open, honest and proactive in our dealings with them. Contacts with the media will be made through our Media and Communications Officer, and must adhere to our Media Protocol.

All internal and external information will be checked for clarity, consistency and accuracy, and will follow the Council's Branding Guidelines.

In a crisis or emergency we will meet our duties under the Emergency Plan by communicating in a calm and measured way through the provision of clear, consistent and accurate information by designated spokespeople.

The Council will :

- Monitor quantity and quality of media coverage.
- Clearly identify the purpose of any communication and the timescale involved.
- Be clear about the aims/purpose of communication.
- Provide contact for queries.
- Be realistic and 'manage expectations.'
- Set and share a clear timetable.
- Where necessary consult on best method of communication.
- Employ creative approaches to encourage the involvement of all, particularly young people, in local democracy.

### **Being open and accountable in the way we make Decisions**

Use feedback from consultation, customer complaints and compliments as an important ingredient of our business planning process.

Decisions made by the Council should be in a place and at a time, readily accessible to the public unless there are legal reasons requiring confidentiality.

Share initiatives and results with others through the internet and intranet.

### **Embracing innovation and partnership as a way of bringing about efficiency, cost effectiveness and improvement in our services**

Learn from others and seek out new ideas for change and improvement to our services.

Encourage sharing of ideas and information within the council and with the public and our partner organisations to enable new initiatives to grow.

Embrace electronic communication such as websites and social media (Twitter, Facebook etc) as new channels for communication.

Ensure the appropriate timing and choice of communication methods where possible to minimise costs.

Use existing arrangements and networks wherever appropriate and co-ordinate communication activities with our partners wherever possible.

Avoid unnecessary duplication.

Regularly monitor the effectiveness and value for money of our communication processes including their impact on the environment.

### **Working in partnership with the voluntary, community and business sector:**

Continue to build upon working relationships with the local radio and press organisations to ensure clear and relevant information is being heard and/or seen by residents.

Work with partner organisations to support Community Forms across the district and other forms of community engagement. By attending these forums the Council will ensure it is listening and responding to its residents.

### **Endeavouring to achieve lowest council tax rises, to cover inflation and the targeted investment required for our priorities:**

Seek out new cost effective changes for improvement.

Encourage sharing of ideas within the council to enable greater efficiency.

Embrace the more cost effective electronic communication such as websites and social media.

Ensure the appropriate timing and choice of communication methods to minimise costs.

Avoid unnecessary duplication.

Regularly monitor the value for money of our communication processes.

### **Valuing, supporting and developing our employees**

Keeping all staff and Councillors informed about issues and events affecting Harborough District Council and the impact it will have on them.

Communicating fully through formal and informal channels about changes in policies, practice and procedures and the impact it will have on them and listen to their views.

Publishing a weekly newsletter and hold regular Core Briefings to encourage participation and feedback.

### **Monitoring and Review**

This Strategy and action plan will be monitored on an annual basis by the Communication and Consultation Manager and the Head of Customer and Community Services. A report with any amendments and revised action plan will be shared through Scrutiny and Executive.

## Communication Strategy Action Plan

Due to the changing nature of communications, the action table below sets out the key activities planned up to March 2012. This Action Plan should be reviewed annually in-line with the Portfolio and Team Plans to ensure communication methods are relevant and appropriate.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Service Users</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Update/refresh Council website and develop this as the Council's main communication tool	Public Businesses Staff/Councillors Worldwide Partner organisations	August 2011
Implement a new intranet to support staff and Councillor's through easy, accessible information which meets the needs of new ways of working i.e. shared services, home working and remote working.	Staff / Councillors	December 2011
Undertake a review of social media and develop a protocol to meet the needs of the business and ensures good working relationships with the media	Public Businesses Staff/Councillors Worldwide Partner organisations	August 2011
Promote the use of electronic communication through website and social networking	Public Businesses Staff/Councillors Worldwide Partner organisations	March 2012
Ensure the corporate style and identity for the council is consistent with its mission, values and principles where appropriate.	Staff / Members	March 2012
Review and monitor internal communications such as Core Brief, Newsletters etc to ensure an effective, aware and motivated workforce through good internal communications	Staff / Members	October 2011
Monitor the effectiveness of the Council's public facing newsletter (Talkback)	Public Businesses Staff/Councillors	January 2012
Review the effectiveness of all public facing communication by exploring and exploiting new channels for communication to help enhance the economic, efficient and effective operation of the council and reach the target audience in ways they want.	Public Businesses Staff/Councillors	March 2012



