



# Communication Strategy

2011-2014

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Date approved	

## **Introduction**

Our mission is to provide, through partnership and consultation, innovative, accessible and responsive services that ensure the district of Harborough is a healthy and happy place to live, work and visit.

## **Our Objectives**

Our Core Values set out below underpin the services we provide and how we consult and communicate with the public and all our partners:

<b>Putting the needs of the public first.</b>	<i>Courteous and fair treatment of the public and the delivery of services that are responsive to changing needs.</i>
<b>Ensuring equality of opportunity for everyone in the district.</b>	<i>Delivery of services which do not discriminate and which recognise different needs within the community.</i>
<b>Fighting poverty and inequality across the district.</b>	<i>Target resources to communities and individuals in greatest need.</i>
<b>Being open and honest with the public at all times.</b>	<i>Transparent decision making, public consultation and involvement.</i>
<b>Developing new and exciting ideas which will benefit the district over a long period of time.</b>	<i>Continuous improvement through partnership and consultation</i>
<b>Giving the best value possible within our means and resources.</b>	<i>Securing the most appropriate means of service delivery to meet the needs of the community.</i>
<b>Working with other organisations to improve the quality of life for residents.</b>	<i>Tackling the major issues confronting the district in partnership with other public, voluntary and private organisations.</i>
<b>Making sure Harborough District Council employs the best people.</b>	<i>A commitment to high standards of employment practice.</i>

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 our commitment to community engagement & involvement.

## Effective communication

### Our Aims

We want to ensure that:

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

### Our stakeholders & audience

We communicate with many people and organisations. They include:

People	Organisations
People living and/or working in the District	The local business community/organisations
Visitors to the District	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 voluntary sector
Council-tax payers	Other public agencies & partner organisations that we work with
Businesses	
Councillors	
Staff	

### Our Performance

Our commitment to community engagement and capacity building, helping local people to understand the issues, and make informed choices about the future is demonstrated in areas such as the communication & consultation of the Local Development

Framework, council tax levels, the impact of the Government's Comprehensive Spend Review and service delivery.

We interact with the local community in various ways, including:

- Accessible one stop service shops in both Lutterworth and Market Harborough
- Access to all council services through a single telephone number
- All services accessible electronically, through [www.harborough.gov.uk](http://www.harborough.gov.uk)
- Internal communication through the intranet, email, newsletters for staff and notice-boards
- 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 had a varied experience in communication 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 local press followed by website.

The following pages describe the principles and standards set out in the Communication Strategy and how they fit with our corporate values, together with sources of information on good practice on communication and consultation.

## **Principles supporting effective communication and consultation**

### **Putting the needs of the public first:**

Actively inform the public about our role and the services we provide.

Clear, simple and user friendly forms of communication and consultation.

Flexible forms of communication, including electronic communication, to meet the needs of the target audience including where necessary; translation facilities, braille, audio tape and large print documents.

Give equal attention and support to people living in all geographical areas covered by the council.

### **Ensuring equality of opportunity for everyone in the district:**

Convenient timing and choice of communication methods therefore minimising costs.

Communications must comply with the Style Guide which ensures that they can be understood by all and has been 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.

### **Fighting poverty and inequality across the district:**

Greater involvement of people in decision making, especially people from minority groups, young people and those who have a disability.

### **Being open and honest with the public at all times:**

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

We recognise 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 & 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 Style Guide.

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.

We 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.
- Make a commitment to listen to feedback and respond.
- Employ creative approaches to encourage the involvement of all, particularly young people, in local democracy.

**Developing new and exciting ideas which will benefit the district over a long period of time:**

Learn from others and seek out new ideas for change and improvement to benefit the community.

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

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

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

**Giving the best value possible within our means and resources:**

Make realistic assessments of resource requirements for communication and use appropriate approaches.

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

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

Avoid unnecessary duplication.

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



**Working with other organisations to improve the quality of life for residents:**

Ensure effective communication with the local community, councillors and staff about our priorities.

Develop a good working partnership with the media through clear and relevant communication and responding to their requests within their deadlines.

**Making sure Harborough District Council employs the best people\*:**

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

Communicate 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.

Publish a weekly newsletter and hold regular briefings to encourage participation and feedback.

\* The above will also include members

## Communication Strategy Action Plan:

The table below sets out key activities planned for 2011-12 with those service users affected. This Action Plan should be reviewed annually in-line with the Portfolio & Team Plans.

Activity	Service Users	Timescale
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 ie shared services, home 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	Staff / Members	March 2012
Review & monitor internal communications such as Core Brief, Newsletters etc to ensure an effective, aware and motivate 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

## Monitoring & Review

This strategy will be monitored on an annual basis by the Communication and Consultation Manager and the Head of Customer & Community Services.