

Argyll and Bute Council

Communications Strategy and Action Plan

Author Communications Team
Department Chief Executive's
Date July 2012
Version 1.0



CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **Where we are**
 - 2.1 Who we are and what we do
 - 2.2 Where we are now and the challenges ahead
 - 2.3 Where we are now – customer feedback
3. **Where we want to be**
 - 3.1 External communications objectives
 - 3.2 Internal communications objectives
 - 3.3 Communications principles
4. **How we get there**
 - 4.1 Target audiences
 - 4.2 Key messages
 - 4.3 Communications methods and channels
 - 4.4 Communications responsibilities
 - 4.5 Communications budget
5. **Are we getting there/how did we do?**
 - 5.1 Monitoring
 - 5.2 Evaluation
 - 5.3 Review

1. Introduction

This strategy sets out how Argyll and Bute Council will keep people and organisations with an interest in what we do informed about the services we deliver, our progress and performance.

We explain how we will communicate with our many stakeholders and what methods people can use to access information and advice about council services. Overall, we make clear our commitment to:

- be open, transparent, accessible, accountable and responsive in any engagement with customer and others when using social media
- use plain, clear and straightforward language
- adjust our communication methods to meet the needs of many different individuals and groups; and
- treat everyone fairly

What we mean by the terms we use:

Communication – providing relevant and useful information in the right place, at the right time and in various formats according to the needs of those using the information.

Consultation – sharing our options and/or intentions with those likely to be affected and using feedback from them to make our plans fit the needs of the people affected by our work.

Involvement – our employees working actively with others to design, develop, test, deliver and monitor what we do.

Stakeholders – people and organisations who are involved in, or take a close interest in the work of the council, for example - residents, parents, businesses, other public sector organisations and agencies, government, elected representatives, interest groups, voluntary organisations, visitors etc.

2. Where we are now

In establishing the most effective way to communicate with our stakeholders, it is important to consider the current environmental context in which we communicate.

2.1 Who we are and what we do

Argyll and Bute is an area of outstanding natural beauty with mountains, lochs, islands. The population of around 89,590 is scattered across an area of 2700 square miles and is made up of 6 main towns and many smaller communities, some of which are very remote. 17% of Argyll and Bute's population live on islands, with the majority (55%) living in settlements smaller than 3000 people or outside settlements altogether.

There are just over 41,600 households. People of working age account for 62% of the population and of these, 78% are economically active. Children under the age of 16 years account for 16% of the population. The 75+ population is set to increase more rapidly than the national average – by 28% by 2020.

Argyll and Bute – Vision and Values

Our Vision

Argyll and Bute - Realising our Potential Together

Our Values

We involve and listen to our customers and communities

We take pride in delivering best value services

We are open, honest, fair and inclusive

Argyll and Bute Council delivers a wide range of public services throughout Argyll and its 25 inhabited islands including education, roads and transport, planning and development, recreation and sport, libraries, culture and heritage, children and families' care, adult and older people care, waste management, environmental services and housing support services.

Our annual operating budget is around £260 million and we employ around 5000 people. The scale and range of services delivered by Argyll and Bute council is large and complex. For example, we organise and look after:

- 73 primary schools, five secondary schools, three 3-18 schools, two joint campuses and one learning centre
- Three children's homes and seven care homes for older people
- 62 parks and play areas

- Four swimming pools, seven public halls, 10 libraries and museums
- 1406 miles of roads, 954 bridges and 138 car parks
- 176 cemeteries and 74 public toilets
- Refuse collection from more than 50,000 homes and businesses

In addition, the council is hugely involved in coordinating community planning and economic development for the area and works extensively with other national and local organisations to actively promote the benefits of living and working in Argyll and Bute.

2.2 Where we are now and the challenges ahead

We face some significant challenges that affect our capacity to do everything we would like to do. They are:

The cost of delivering services in this area

Argyll and Bute's unique geography and widely spread communities means that it costs more to deliver many services here than in many parts of Scotland. We've already taken steps to become as efficient as possible and will keep improving how we do things in order to achieve the best value for money, but will continue to argue for recognition of Argyll and Bute's unique requirements.

The economic downturn and reduction in public spending

Efforts by the UK and Scottish Government to reduce public spending mean we will have much less money to spend on delivering local services. Council tax funds only 17% of our spending, with 83% of our income coming from Scottish Government grants. Grants for all councils are being cut and this means we have to find ways to deliver quality services by spending less.

We know we won't be able to continue providing all of the services we do now and that we'll have to find different ways of doing some things. Over the next few years, we will continue to have to make some very difficult decisions. We are committed to consulting with and involving the people and communities likely to be affected by changes to services and to feeding their views into service design and clearly communicating our decisions and the reasons for them.

Economic analysts predict that the financial pressures on public spending will be with us for several years to come.

Managing expectations

Although our customers know that public spending is reducing and the pace of change is quickening, there is little evidence of change in the expectations of individual users of services and some interest groups. This, coupled with meeting demanding statutory requirements in many areas of our work and demographic changes, means that expectations are increasingly exceeding what we as a council can reasonably deliver with the resources available.

At the very heart of our organisational values is the commitment to be open, honest,

fair and inclusive, so we will be candid and clear about explaining things when we cannot meet expectations and seek dialogue with those involved or affected.

Unlocking the potential of Argyll and Bute

At this time of profound change in the economy, we must remain ambitious about doing the best for this part of Scotland and its economic development. Argyll and Bute has abundant natural resources and potential, especially in renewable energy, quality food and drink and leisure and tourism, placing it at the heart of Scotland's economic future.

We have a strong Economic Development Action Plan in place to help us deliver future jobs and prosperity. We also have a Renewable Energy Action Plan, developed by the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP), aimed at helping Argyll and Bute realise its vision for the development of the renewable energy sector.

We will continue to pursue private and public investment opportunities, working with our many partners and to support local businesses through the Business Gateway.

2.3 Where we are now – customer feedback

The Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP) was set up in 1999 and includes most of the public agencies and third sector partners who deliver services in the area. It has a duty to consult the public in order to inform local decision making. To this end a Citizens' Panel was set up in 2001 to research the views of local people on a range of issues. The panel currently has 1,253 resident members. Overall, the characteristics of the panel closely reflect those of the Argyll and Bute population as a whole. We can therefore be confident that feedback from panel members is both reliable and representative.

The last independent Citizen Panel Survey was done late in 2011 when 72% of panel members responded. The most recent findings relevant for this communications strategy are set out below. The findings are disappointing because we are strongly committed to keeping our stakeholders well informed and involved. We will therefore set stretching targets for improvement across all these indicators and make sure that our external communications help improve awareness and accessibility of council services and the decision making process.

	2009	2010	2011
Treated with respect by the council all or most of the time	69%	65%	71%
Feel well informed about local public services	34%	32%	34%
Feel well informed about how local public services are performing	25%	28%	29%
Satisfied with information about council meetings	19%	22%	24%
Informed about how to get involved in local decision making	36%	30%	40%
The council provides value for money	18%	24%	25%

Quote from 2011 report: “There was a generally negative response from respondents in relation to perception of the council providing value for money and how well informed they felt about services. A more even view was recorded on how well the council was running things, with similar proportions satisfied and dissatisfied. However, the most positive view was found in terms of the council treating the public with respect and consideration.” *Hexagon Research and Consulting*

For the first time in such a survey, the 2011 survey included questions about communications, particularly in relation to:

- The type of media which members of the panel used
- The channels through which they get information about the council and its activities
- How much the panellists trust the various information sources
- Panellists' preferred methods of getting information about the council.

The medium most commonly used and preferred by respondents is local papers, with 90% of panellists saying that they used local newspapers

89% of respondents said that local newspapers were their preferred method of getting information about council decisions.

42% of respondents said that they always trust information from local papers, and an additional 47% said that they sometimes trusted such information.

By contrast, 47% of respondents said that they used the council's website

55% of respondents said that the council's website would be their preferred source of information about the council's decisions

34% of respondents said that they 'always trusted' information from the website.

So although a lower proportion of panellists use the council website than use local papers, those respondents who do use the website attach a higher level of trust to the information it provides.

Only a small proportion of panellists expressed an interest in getting information about the council from social media (Twitter; Facebook).

We also have some information from monitoring local media coverage. This shows continuing press interest in the services and projects the council delivers. In 2011, there were 1987 articles mentioning Argyll and Bute Council in the local newspapers. Some 45% of this coverage was neutral, with 31% positive or very positive and 23% negative or very negative. 1% of the coverage was not rated.

Just over 92% of this coverage was in local newspapers, with a further 6% in regional or national publications. Just under 1.5% was on the internet.

3. Where do we want to be?

Our Corporate Plan is published on our website and sets out our vision, values and corporate objectives as follows:

Our vision - Realising our potential together

Our values

We involve and listen to our customers and communities

We take pride in delivering best value services

We are open, honest, fair and inclusive

We respect and value everyone

Our corporate objectives

1. Working together to improve the potential of our **people**
2. Working together to improve the potential of our **communities**
3. Working together to improve the potential of our **area**
4. Working together to improve the potential of our **organisation**

Everything in this communications strategy upholds our vision, values and objectives and each of the four objectives is further linked to an ambitious list of results (or outcomes) we are hard working to deliver.

3.1 External communications objectives

Our communications objectives need to help us achieve our overall community and corporate vision, objectives, and our values will underpin the ways in which we do achieve all that we aim to achieve.

We will:

- 3.1.1 improve awareness and understanding of Argyll and Bute Council and the services it delivers
- 3.1.2 place customer focus at the heart of everything we do
- 3.1.3 inform our customers of decisions which are likely to affect them in advance
- 3.1.4 make our communications accessible to all, including minority and traditionally hard-to-reach groups
- 3.1.5 use different ways to actively inform, consult with and involve people – according to their needs
- 3.1.6 be clear with everyone about what we can and cannot do
- 3.1.7 work with our community planning partners to improve awareness of public services and understanding of decision making processes
- 3.1.8 inform people how to make a complaint if they have a concern
- 3.1.9 promote Argyll and Bute as an attractive destination for residents, visitors, businesses and investors
- 3.1.10 invest in improving our employees' communication skills

3.2 Internal communications objectives

We will:

- 3.2.1 keep employees informed about council decisions, news, events and plans, and particularly about major announcements
- 3.2.2 support line managers and their teams to become good ambassadors for council services and initiatives
- 3.2.3 improve communications awareness and skills among elected members, line managers and their teams
- 3.2.4 encourage two-way communication, feedback and suggestions
- 3.2.5 be a responsible and communicative employer

3.3 Communications principles

In line with our values, our communications will be:

- **Honest, open and transparent** - in any engagement with customers and others when using social media
- **Accessible** – we will use a variety of communications methods to make sure as many people as possible have access to the information they need.
- **Simple** – we will use plain English and clear design to make sure people understand the information we give them. We will endeavour to provide information in a language and format suitable for the needs of our customers.
- **Timely** – we'll make sure people receive the information they need in good time, to enable them to take action if necessary.
- **Easily recognisable as coming from Argyll and Bute Council** – we'll use a consistent design so our customers can easily recognise genuine council publications, staff and information.
- **Value for money** – we will make sure we explore all possible methods of communications to find the most cost-effective way of sharing information with our customers.

4. How do we get there?

The communications action plan can be found at the end of the strategy and it outlines how we achieve our objectives. This section provides some contextual information about how we get there. In order to achieve our objectives, we need to know our audiences and target them effectively. We need to establish what our key messages are and what do we need to communicate to people. We need to outline what channels of communication are most effective, who is responsible for communicating what and with what resources.

4.1 Target Audiences

Our target audiences can be grouped as follows:

Customers - Council tax payers, voters, service users and potential service users, special interest groups, hard to engage groups, council employees

Businesses - Businesses already in the area, potential investors, networking and professional associations representing business.

Partners - Community Planning Partnership partners, other councils, third sector organisations, regional and national government.

Opinion formers and influencers - Scottish Government, elected representatives, and the media.

Visitors/potential visitors – Target groups who may have an interest in visiting Argyll and Bute.

Funders - Scottish Government, UK Government, European Commission and other relevant funders.

This list is not exhaustive and there will be many others who need information from the council.

4.2 Key Messages

About our key messages

The tables that follow set out the key messages we will convey to our target audiences under each of the corporate plan objectives. However this is not a rigid process: we hope it's helpful to see the messages as they apply to the main areas of our work but, in practice, they will be woven through all of our communications as appropriate.

SIX CORE MESSAGES

There are six core messages we would like everyone to know and understand about Argyll and Bute Council:

1. We are ambitious for the people and communities of Argyll and Bute and work hard to help ensure that people have a good standard of living and business can thrive.
2. We want to deliver the best services for our many customers and to do this we will continuously develop our systems, processes and skills to focus on customer needs.
3. We are an improving and increasingly efficient organisation. Achieving good value for money is a high priority and we will be creative and resourceful about working with others who can help us to deliver good quality services cost effectively.
4. We will continue to use technology innovatively, particularly in our customer contact centre, via our website, and by an increasing use of social media and other platforms
5. The financial resources available for public services are under increasing pressure. If we can't provide a service in the way that customers would like it to be delivered, we will always explain clearly why not and be fully accountable to the communities we serve for our decisions.
6. We aim to be one of the top performing councils in Scotland by listening closely to our customers and communities and being open and accountable.

Objective 1 - working together to improve the potential of our people

Key Messages

Argyll and Bute is an excellent location for new businesses and creating jobs. The infrastructure is in place to ensure people have the right skills and attitudes to seize opportunities.

We strive continuously to improve the quality of education for all in Argyll and Bute and to equip our children and young people with the skills and knowledge they need.

We support older people to live more active, healthier and independent lives.

We support and protect vulnerable children and families in sustainable ways within their communities.

We target our support to the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Objective 2 - working together to improve the potential of our communities

Key Messages

There are long distances between the places where we live, work and visit. We need

to find innovative ways of delivering services to make sure our communities are strong, resilient and open to opportunities.

We have a skilled and capable workforce capable of attracting employment to Argyll and Bute.

We actively encourage local communities to get involved in the way our services are delivered.

We are working with our community planning partners to reduce the impact of alcohol and drugs on our communities.

Objective 3 – working together to improve the potential of our area

Key Messages

Argyll and Bute is an area of great natural beauty and diversity. We have huge natural potential for renewable energy generation, food and drink, leisure and tourism.

Existing and new businesses can thrive here and there are strong business networks in the area. Business support is available from the Business Gateway with input from Argyll and Bute Council and other enterprise organisations.

Our planning teams work closely with householders and businesses to ensure the places where we live, work and visit are well planned and developed.

Daily life here is heavily dependent on good roads and transport. Argyll and Bute Council is not responsible for the trunk roads, but invests heavily to ensure that all other main routes are kept clear and well maintained.

Argyll and Bute Council has reduced its carbon footprint and encourages all communities to reduce, reuse and recycle more.

Objective 4 – working together to improve the potential of our organisation

Key Messages

We actively listen to and engage with our customers, communities and partners to deliver best value services.

We invest in personal development and training to ensure our employees have the right skills, tools and attitudes to deliver efficient and effective services.

We will always try to provide our customers with the right information at the right time in the format that best meets their needs.

We need to make the most of our resources by working with partners to deliver services in different ways.

4.3 Communication Methods and Channels

This communications strategy applies to the work of all Argyll and Bute Council employees and relies upon everyone's commitment to make it happen.

The chief executive, directors, members, heads of service, managers and team leaders - working with the small communications team - all have an important role to play in supporting and interpreting the strategy for staff, partners and customers.

Working together, they will apply the principles of this framework and develop effective communication action plans for each service, initiative and project as required, using a mix of the following approved communication methods and channels.

The communications team will provide advice and support and should be involved as early as possible in the planning of communications and consultation activities. The team has expert knowledge on how to make the most of these methods and can advise on what is likely to work best for specific projects.

Face to face communication (employees, members and partners)

Our 5000 employees deliver important public services all across Argyll and Bute and represent the council to customers and stakeholders as they go about their work, so we must make sure they are well informed. Our senior managers, organisational development and communication teams will help make this happen, but all employees must appreciate that they are ambassadors for the work of the council and be prepared to speak about what we do and why. We are committed to continuously improve internal communications through the use of a number of mechanisms including regular cascade briefings, the Hub intranet, staff emails, the Chief Executive's blog and internal newsletters.

We also have important working relationships with many partner organisations, associations, elected representatives and others with an interest in Argyll and Bute. We ask our senior managers and members to help us manage our relationships with these people and organisations and be a point of contact if they need information. This is an important part of our work because we want people to value what we do and to help improve the quality of local services. To do this we must be known as a reliable and efficient council with a skilled workforce and a strong reputation for delivery and expertise.

Internally, the chief officer and senior officer (COSO) event for managers will be developed further incorporating feedback from participants and a programme of Strategic Management Team road shows will be established for employees at all levels to attend and feed into. Team briefings will be arranged to take place on a regular basis (no less than once per month) either in person or by VC with an opportunity to cascade corporate and council-wide information provided by the communications team to managers and to feedback to management to facilitate a two way process.

Media relations

Argyll and Bute has several weekly local newspapers with regular readers amongst our many customers and stakeholders. We know the media plays an important role in reporting the news and keeping the public well informed, so we offer them a fast, responsive service to deal with their enquiries.

We will continue to actively generate informative news stories and features about the work of the council. We will also offer press, radio and television interviews with members and senior personnel on issues of public interest wherever possible and provide media training and support to those involved. We will also hold Press Conferences as and when required. We want the local and national media to know that Argyll and Bute Council is always accessible on issues of public interest and we will strive to meet their on-going need for information on council services.

The media protocol requires that all calls from the media are directed to the communications team so that a rapid, consistent and appropriate response can be ensured. All of our media releases and proactive media statements will be published on our website in the news section.

Website

Our website at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk has become one of our main communication channels and has the potential to reach increasing numbers of our customers as more and more people in Argyll and Bute go online. It:

- is an important source of information for people who are interested in council services
- gets over 30,000 visitors every month, a figure which is steadily increasing
- lists all the services the council provides, helpful contact details and links for extra information
- offers self-serve transactions for several council services including the payment of council tax, school meals cashless catering and invoices

We will continue to develop and improve the website as a source of information to make sure that it:

- continues to be seen as the most reliable source of accurate and timely information available about council services and the work that we do
- becomes the first information channel of choice about council services for the majority of our customers
- is accessible and appealing
- easy to navigate, clear, friendly, fresh and up-to-date
- interactive and innovative
- quickly increases the number and range of financial transactions that can be done online
- captures (via online registration) customer email contact details, so that we can in future offer more electronic information updates to residents

- takes full advantage of internet-based applications such as Twitter, Facebook and You Tube to provide real time information updates and low cost opportunities to interact with our customers.
- Ensure that the website is promoted on all of our communications and literature in order to further encourage channel shift.

Customer Service Centre and telephone help lines

Our customer service centre is the first point of contact for many of our customers. We work hard to promote the six easy access telephone numbers people can use to call. Experienced colleagues answer the calls and will resolve the enquiry or refer it to another colleague or organisation if they need to. Our current opening hours are 9am – 5pm from Monday to Friday.

Publications, newsletters and direct mail

In common with many other organisations and businesses we find that the demand for hard copy publications is decreasing as more customers look first to our website when they need information. Most households (more than 70%) in Scotland now have access to the internet. But we know that large numbers of people, particularly older people, do not have access to a computer. For this reason we will not rely too heavily on the internet as a way to communicate with all our target audiences, but we will continue to offer some leaflets and brochures as necessary.

We will continuously review how we design and produce our publications and the type of paper we use for them. Our aim is to reduce the impact we have on the environment (our carbon footprint) when we produce printed materials, ensure that all publications are properly distributed and quickly reach the people who need them. We actively avoid holding any large and expensive stocks of printed material.

All Argyll and Bute publications will uphold the corporate identity by meeting the branding protocol and style guide formats, which are designed to ensure consistency, avoid customer confusion and keep costs down.

– Newsletters

Some of our services produce short newsletters to keep specific interest groups and contacts well informed. The authors will review their effectiveness regularly and only continue with those we know are well received and read with interest. Working with the web team, as far as possible, we will try to convert most of these to electronic mail versions because the costs are much lower

– Regular council newsletter for all households

Because none of our other communication channels can reach everyone in Argyll and Bute, and the Citizens Panel survey strongly suggests the majority of residents don't currently feel sufficiently well informed about public services, we will explore the possibility of introducing a regular hard copy council newsletter for delivery to all households. This would provide a much needed reliable, regular and accurate source of information on council services and plans for Argyll and Bute's residents. It would also be the appropriate vehicle for communicating our annual report. Over time, we anticipate that the majority of council news and information will be published either on our website, via press

releases or in the council newsletter, therefore reducing the amount of other publications we have to issue.

– **Direct mail**

Some of the customers and organisations we work with say they would like us to keep them informed by email if possible. Over the period of this strategy we will try to build up our database of customer email addresses and issue more news and information in this way. We will continue to send letters to those people and organisations that don't have access to a computer.

– **Notice Boards**

Notice Boards can be used to provide high priority corporate information, as well as service specific communication. Notice Boards can be divided into sections (consistent across all offices) so that people get used to where on the board they can find a particular type of information. Sections should incorporate areas for: promotional/bigger picture information (like the corporate vision/topical key messages depending on the building, resource information (functional or service specific) and involvement opportunities.

– **Imagery**

Images can be used to help employees and customers visualise the corporate vision and goals and the relevant topical key message should accompany the appropriate image. These can be displayed consistently online and on canvas around office areas to promote the council's messages amongst employees and customers.

Events

We will continue to organise and host council events across Argyll and Bute. We hold these events to encourage people to access services or get involved in our work, consult on issues on which we are seeking people's views, and to launch new initiatives and projects.

We also attend some conferences, exhibitions and events that are relevant to our work so we can continue to make people aware of what we do. To help us decide which events to attend, we consider whether they will help us meet one of our corporate objectives or if large numbers of our target audiences will be going along.

Public speaking opportunities

We encourage and will authorise our senior employees and members to speak at relevant conferences and events throughout Scotland as appropriate to their work and our corporate plan objectives. All public speaking will be carried out in accordance with the Employee Code of Conduct.

Advertising

We limit the number of adverts we buy due to budget constraints. We use them mainly to tell people about specific events, public meetings and statutory information and for recruitment. We need to maximise our use of the public information portal to

secure best value in advertising in the longer term whilst being sensitive to local media and the revenue it gains through advertising expenditure.

Campaigns

We are not funded to run major public campaigns. We actively support campaigns run by national organisations and other agencies when appropriate. Campaigns will be managed by the communications team in conjunction with the relevant council service/s for major council priority areas. The requirement for campaign management should be outlined in the ICE plans within the service planning process.

Social media and web-based networking tools

We will continue and expand our use of web-based networking tools to provide a low cost way of contacting our customers, to take advantage of the opportunities these methods give us for communicating with customers who are out and about in Argyll. We will set out our expectations on the use of web based networking/social media in the social media policy and in the updated Acceptable Use Agreement and specific guidance will be developed for use in schools. We will also investigate the provision of webcasting equipment and a number of other digital communication solutions which will allow us to improve and expand engagement opportunities with our communities.

The hub, link, sharepoint and newsflash

The hub is our intranet which is the primary form of communication and information provision for employees. We also use facilities such as Link for day to day team communication and this is a helpful way keeping in touch with our employees in remote locations. Sharepoint is used primarily for project teams to keep in touch and share project information. We will continue to use newsflash to issue important information to all employees with access to emails. All of these tools are particularly useful in assisting the rollout of our workforce deployment project.

Reward and recognition mechanisms

Our culture should encourage everyone in the organisation to appreciate the help and support they receive from colleagues. In addition, we should not be reluctant to say well done where appropriate.

Awards

The Council's Excellence Awards and Education Awards provide an opportunity for the sharing of best practice internally and a high profile channel for recognition and reward for exceptional work. In addition, staff who have performed well or offered a great deal to the organisation and our customers, should be put forward for external awards. External awards schemes such as the COSLA awards and other service specific awards are an excellent way to develop our reputation in a positive way.

4.4 Communication Responsibilities

Responsibility for the successful implementation of this strategy rests with the leader of the council, the chief executive, elected members and all staff.

The communications team will carry out the day-to-day management of the strategy but communications must be a priority for members, the strategic management team, heads of service and key communicators, based in all service areas.

The strategy is backed by an action plan for the communications team, which incorporates tactics for delivering specific objectives and timescales for their delivery.

The strategy recognises that all staff have a vital role to play in effectively communicating the council's vision. It recognises that all services have their own areas of expertise, and are ultimately responsible for driving their own service plans. All service plans have associated ICE plans that set out clearly the service's intentions to for **Inform, Consult and Engage** throughout the year. This is the basis for all service communications.

One of the communication team's key roles is to provide valuable support to these services, working with them on their promotional activity to ensure their messages are effectively communicated to external audiences.

It is suggested that the earlier communications liaison group should be re-established in a format that functions in a similar way to the web steering group – using best practice to engage council services. There should be clear linkages with the newly established Customer Management Board when this is operational. The community planning partnership communications group provides a way for us to share best practice and resources for generic campaigns with our communications colleagues within partner organisations across Strathclyde and Highland areas.

- **Elected Members** Are the main representatives of the council in our communities and in the media for proactive messages.
- **Strategic Management Team** is responsible for overseeing the strategy and applying its principles.
- **Heads of Service** play a key role in implementing the strategy and ensuring it's embedded in the day-to-day activity of their teams. They also play a key role as spokespersons for reactive media responses on operational issues.
- **All employees** recognise that good communication is key to their every-day work and that they play important roles as ambassadors for the council.

All these groups require effective training at the appropriate level to enable them to fulfil their obligations to the council in carrying out their specific communications role. We will carry out appropriate training for all groups to ensure that the service we provide meets the expectations of this strategy.

5. How are we doing and how did we do?

5.1 Monitoring and evaluation

We monitor and report our progress in different ways, including:

- analysing our coverage in newspapers, on radio and television
 - participating in the annual Citizens Panel survey
 - considering feedback from the website, questionnaires, surveys on specific issues, key contacts and opinion formers regularly reporting the impact of consulting with and involving customers
 - evaluating events we run and producing summary reports
 - carrying out internal audits and service reviews
- Improvements required as a result of this monitoring will be identified and implemented as appropriate.
- In light of the rise of social media channels, it would be helpful for us to embrace the informal feedback received via social media as this is the tool that our many of our customers like to use on an increasing basis and social media is a specific two-way communications vehicle that helps us to engage with customers. When used proactively, it can help to develop trust between an organisation and its stakeholders.

It is essential that an outcomes based approach is taken to performance managing our communications so that we improve based on outcomes rather than inputs and therefore we need to ensure that we set appropriate performance indicators that help us establish whether or not we are meeting our communications objectives.

Progress implementing this strategy will also be regularly reported to the council's Strategic Management Team and to Council Members through the Chief Executive's scorecard and the Improvement and HR scorecard.

5.2 Review

The communications strategy should be continually monitored and evaluated on an annual basis and 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 we use, we must be open and flexible enough to change them in order to improve. Such experience will help us to better develop our communications in the future.

Associated documentation

Council policy and plans associated with this communications strategy include the social media strategy, the communications team plan, the media protocol, the critical

activity and response plan, the out of hours media rota, the employee engagement strategy, the PPR framework and the consultation toolkit.

Communications Action Plan

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
CS121	To keep employees informed about council decisions, news, events and plans, and particularly about major announcements (3.2.1)	Implement programme of blogs from Chief Executive and Leader of the Council and implement bulletins to targeted groups	Stakeholders feel informed and involved	Ongoing (quarterly bulletins)	Comms team		Not started
CS122		Secure sponsorship for internal newsletter (formerly Work4ce) and create quarterly internal e-magazine (title to be determined)	Employees aware of council news, events and major announcements	Start October 12 and quarterly	Comms team		Not started -budget implications
CS123		Implement newsflash bulletin following each council meeting outlining key decisions taken	Employees aware of council decisions and plans	Monthly except July	Committee services and Comms team		Already underway
CS124		Communications develop monthly presentation tool for managers to teams (formerly Cascade) (title to be determined)	Managers have tools to inform teams	Monthly	Comms team and COSO		Cascade underway needs rebranding
CS125	To improve communications awareness and skills among elected members, line managers and their teams (3.2.3)	Develop a communication / media / social media module into the development plans for senior managers	Managers confident communicators and aware of nature of social and traditional media	Six monthly sessions	Comms team and SMT		Not started
CS126		Develop a communications / media / social media module into the development plans for elected members	Managers confident communicators and aware of nature of social and traditional media	Six monthly sessions	Comms team and SMT		Not started
CS127		Communications team development plan developed from IHR service plan	Comms team afforded opportunity to follow CIPR (or equiv) CPD programme	Dec 12	Head of IHR and Comms team		Not started -budget implications
CS128	To invest in	Ensure that communications team each has	Comms team afforded opportunity	Aug 12	Head of IHR		Assistant

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
	improving our employees' communication skills (3.1.10)	CIPR membership and is working towards becoming CIPR accredited (or CIM in the case of the communications officer specialising in marketing)	to follow CIPR (or equiv) CPD programme	(review progress Aug 13)	and Comms team		registered on CIPR foundation course
CS129		Develop media training – how to spot a good story - programme for senior officers	Senior officers more able to know when to liaise with comms team re media opportunities	Mar 2013	Comms team		Not started
CS1210		Develop effective communications training module as part of induction and PDR process for all employees	Employees confident communicators	Mar 2013	Comms team and HR		Not started
CS1211	To improve awareness and understanding of Argyll and Bute Council and the services it delivers (3.1.1)	Implement annual operational/service-based communications plans (ICE)	Fully implemented plans at the end of each financial year and well informed customers	Nov 12 - Ongoing	Heads of Service		Underway through service planning
CS1212		External Quarterly newsletter (title to be determined) to all households also made available online – review current practice of publishing	Customers informed at their doorstep and online	Mar 2013 and quarterly	Comms manager and external agency		Not started -budget implications
CS1213		Transparent annual report ' The Review ' to incorporate Council Tax information	Customers aware of performance and plans for improvement – best value	Feb 13 and annual	Comms team and Head of customer and support services		Underway (former council tax leaflet)
CS1214		To place customer focus at the heart of everything we do (3.1.2)	Customer Charter – e learning module a standard part of induction and PDR processes Current Comms Team and any new members of staff to complete Jenison online Customer Care module	Employees confident and aware of customer standards	Sept 12 (Current Comms team) / within first 6 weeks of employment	Customer management and HR and OD	

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
				for new employees			
CS1215		Carry out a customer satisfaction and perception survey and feed outcomes into improvement plan (Citizens Panel/Hexagon Consultants)	Council aware of customer perceptions	Nov 12	OD manager		Occurs on an annual basis (last report Jan 2012)
CS1216	To inform our customers of decisions which are likely to affect them in advance (3.1.3)	Introduce direct mail planner to ensure target groups are contacted directly about potential changes to service delivery. Alternative delivery mechanisms to be explored, including direct contact.	Target groups aware of potential service changes direct from the council	Sept 12 and ongoing	Comms team and Heads of service		Not started
CS1217		Effective proactive media plan to incorporate issue of media releases and series of media briefings to work with media partners.	Council plans communicated in a balanced way through media (social and traditional)	Oct 12 and quarterly	Comms team and SMT		Not started
CS1218	-To make our communications accessible to all, including minority and traditionally hard-to-reach groups (3.1.4)	Review translation service provision	Most cost effective and effective translation service sourced	Dec 12	OD manager		Not started
CS1219		Review marketing guidelines to ensure highest DDA standards are incorporated into corporate identity and branding	Council publications and correspondence DDA compliant and accessible	Dec 12	Comms team		Not started
CS1220		Develop targeted distribution lists to account for specialist publications	Council news targeted and covered by specialist publications to reach specific audiences	Dec 12	Comms and OD teams		Not started
CS1221	- To use different ways to actively inform, consult with and involve people	Develop systematic approach to adapting communications methods according to feedback and needs	Flexible approach to customer involvement	Jan 13	Comms and customer management teams		Not started

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
	– according to their needs (3.1.5)						
CS1222	To be clear with everyone about what we can and cannot do (3.1.6)	Produce annual pamphlet ' <i>The Standard</i> ' following budget decision outlining what we can or cannot do and why	Customers clearly informed of council's aims for service delivery	Feb 13	Comms team and strategic finance		Not started
CS1223		Make " The Standard " available online	Customers clearly informed of council's aims for service delivery	Feb 13	Web team		Not started
CS1224	To work with our community planning partners to improve awareness of public services and understanding of decision making processes (3.1.7)	Develop and implement a programme of bulletins and updates from Council Leader to target groups (CPP and Citizens)	External and partner target groups well informed of Council developments and news	Mar 13	Comms manager and IOD manager		Not started
CS1225		Continue to deliver Forward Together events and webinars with partners to communities as part of the budget planning process	Customers and partners involved in setting council priorities	Oct 12	As above		Use 2011 model
CS1226	- To inform people how to make a complaint if they have a concern (3.1.8)	Review customer compliments and complaints procedure and ensure flexibility and accessibility of process	Trend analysis allowing constructive information to feed into service delivery improvement	Jan 13	Customer management team		Not started
CS1227		Regularly promote the compliments and complaints procedure – don't rely on people knowing it's there.	Employees and customers aware of compliments and complaints procedure	Mar 13	Customer management and comms teams		Not started
CS1228		Produce annual feature for external newsletter (title to be determined) to inform customers about how their feedback has changed things	Customers aware of compliments and complaints procedure	Mar 13	Comms team		Not started

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
CS1229	To promote Argyll and Bute as an attractive destination for residents, visitors, businesses and investors (3.1.9)	Produce Argyll and Bute Guide ' The Guide ' to promote the area with partners such as 'Food for Argyll', 'Heart of Argyll', Argyll and Bute Tourism Partnership etc	Increase in number of visitors from outside Argyll and Bute over summer period	May 13	Comms and Economic development managers		Not started (budget implications)
CS1230		Design and carry out campaigns plan in line with council priorities outlined in service-based communications plans (e.g. renewables)	Stakeholders aware of Argyll and Bute's vision through effective campaigns	Feb 13	Comms manager and Heads of service		Not started (budget implications)
CS1231		Further investigate brand Argyll and Bute building on Food from Argyll pilot and working with partners in creative industries	Food from Argyll success shared across other industries	Jul 13	Comms and Economic development managers		Ongoing
CS1232		Further investigate digital TV proposals through working with web team and local businesses	SMT decision made	Jan 13	Comms and web managers		Ongoing
CS1233	To support line managers and their teams to become good ambassadors for council services and initiatives (3.2.2)	Develop communications guidance to be available in bite size chunks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing (and design guide) - Media protocol - Events guidance - Awards guidance 	Consistent literature and reporting from all services resulting in an improved and stronger Council brand	Dec 12	Comms manager		Not started
CS1234		Promote communications guidance and provide introductory session at COSO events	Improved awareness of communications guidance with managers using tools available	Mar 13	Comms manager and COSO		Not started
CS1235	To encourage two-way	Continue to review and deliver programme of Chief and Senior Officer (COSO) meetings	Ongoing involvement and participation of chief and senior	Ongoing 6 monthly	Executive support team		Last COSO event held

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
	communication, feedback and suggestions (3.2.4)		officers in council direction	cycle	and SMT		on 26 June 2012
CS1236		Continue to review and deliver programme of SMT road shows for all employees	Ongoing involvement and participation of all employees in council direction	Feb and Jun annually	Executive support team and SMT		Ongoing
CS1237		Review staff suggestion scheme	Service improvements implemented by a range of employees	Jun 13	OD and HR		Not started
CS1238		Introduce ' The Voice ' feedback forum on the Hub for employees	Employees have a voice via informal channel	Jun 13	Comms and web teams		Not started
CS1239 (linked to earlier separate action reference)	To be a responsible and communicative employer (3.2.5)	Develop, produce and implement suite of publications / dissemination channels internally and externally (e.g. Argyll and Bute: Title TBC – external newsletter to households, Title TBC – internal quarterly e-magazine The Journal - media coverage report, Title TBC – management presentation The Voice – feedback forum on the Hub The Review – annual performance report The Standard – council tax information future service delivery expectations)	Consistently branded suite of publications and communications tools	Jul 13	Comms team		Not started
CS1240		Produce annual feature for The Scoop and The Brief to inform employees about how their suggestions have changed things	Employees aware of how they have influenced planning and decision making	Jan 13 and annual	Comms team		Not started
CS1241		Carry out employee survey every two years and respond to feedback, informing employees of	Improved all scored by 5 percentage points	Jul 12 and every two	HR		Underway

Working together to improve the potential of our people							
Ref	Objective	Actions to achieve outcome	Success measures	Key dates	Lead	Source of outcome/ links	Progress
		resulting changes		years			
CS1242		Develop outcomes focused PIs for scorecard	Communications outcomes est.	Oct 12	Comms team		Not started