

# The Moray Council

## COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

### Introduction

This communications strategy is intended to provide a consistent approach to what we say, how and when we say it. In addition, it helps us to set a clear direction for communications and highlights the importance we place on good communication. At the same time it aims to:

- Protect and enhance the Council's reputation and ensure high quality communications are an integral part of the work of all staff.
- Identify communication as a priority activity for the Council and ensure it is reflected in service and project plans throughout the organisation.
- Provide a focus and sense of direction for all Council communication activity in line with our core values.
- Prevent confusion and help ensure the Council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity.
- Ensure effective two-way communication with all our key stakeholders.
- Improve access to and information about the Council's services – including hard to reach groups.

Communication is not an afterthought - it plays a vital role in everything we do.

This approach to our communication will help ensure the people we want to communicate with are better informed and have a clear understanding of what the Council does, which has a direct benefit both for the audience and for the Council. This strategy establishes a framework for our communication activities across the Council, ensuring we get the right messages to the right people in the right way at the right time while ensuring we are proactive in encouraging feedback that can help shape future service planning, delivery and improvement.

The Council sets out that we have to change the way we work which includes finding ways to do more with less, doing things quicker and making better use of technology to modernise the way we work and how we communicate and work together. This communications strategy addressed these ambitions by changing the way we communicate with our stakeholders through the use of efficient and modern communication methods.

### Aims:

- External communications – to create a better understanding between the authority and the people it serves.
- Internal communications – to support communication on corporate issues as required.
- Consultation/Engagement – to support opportunities to effectively engage the public, our partners and staff to inform and direct the way we deliver services in our communities.

## **Objectives**

Our plan supports the ‘three Rs of communication:

1. Foster improved **R**elationships by:
  - Making our work more responsive to the interests of the public.
  - Supporting staff to communicate collaboratively with our stakeholders
  - Supporting the development of Elected Members, so that they can fulfil their role in promoting our profile with external stakeholders.
  - Identifying, establishing and fostering relationships with new stakeholder groups for our mutual benefit.
  - Managing relationships with existing stakeholders so that they feel valued excited and involved in our work.
2. Increased **R**ecognition: firmly establishing our distinctive identity to support our values of delivering
  - Accessible, high quality, reliable, timely and customer friendly information; pre-planning and publishing our consultations, publications and events.
  - Preparing for and managing high-profile or sensitive issues that are likely to attract considerable public and media interest.
  - Using quality standards to deliver external communications to many stakeholders by effectively making increased use of electronic communications.
3. Considered use of our **R**esources: mobilising our limited resources by fostering a culture where good communications becomes integral to everything we all do. In our communications we will do the following:
  - Demonstrate good use of public funds to deliver high quality communications.
  - Develop, maintain and clearly communicate consistent standards for external communications.

## **Principles**

We aim to give accurate information to our audiences in a timely fashion, using all our communications channels. We can do so by ensuring that our communications are a true reflection of our values. We aim to be:

- Open, transparent, accountable and honest: about our decision-making and activities and will never knowingly mislead.
- Accessible and timely: we strive to be friendly, polite, quick and helpful in our dealing with stakeholders.
- Equality and Diversity: our work will be based on our equality and diversity principles.
- Clearly branded: all communications will conform to our corporate brand guidelines.
- Excellent, consistent, influential, and proportionate: we will develop our project planning tools so that engagement is accessible for a diverse network of people.

- **Engaging:** we plan to capture the attention and imagination of external audiences when developing content for our publications, social media and publicity material, making the content exciting and accessible to all target audiences.

### **We achieve these principles by:**

- Thinking of the needs of our stakeholders.
- Keeping our internal stakeholders informed of developments before going public: we ensure that information is available to Elected Members and staff on our plans prior to publishing information in the public domain.
- Responding to media enquiries within agreed and negotiated deadlines: we deliver appropriate and helpful information to media enquiries, negotiating reasonable deadlines and taking steps to be transparent about our work.
- Planning proactive media management early: we plan our projects by taking publicity into account in the early planning stages, thereby identifying proactive media opportunities to develop our approach with targeted media contacts.
- Effectively communicating what we do to encourage interest and involvement: pre-planning helps us to publish forthcoming consultations, publications and events to achieve maximum engagement.
- Using 'plain English' in all our communications and developing accessible summaries of our documents for non-expert audiences.
- Enabling third party suppliers to reflect our values: our corporate brand/logo guidelines are sent to suppliers to ensure their compliance with our logo and formats.

### **Responsibilities for managing the communications strategy**

The success of our communications strategy is dependent on making it a living culture. All our Elected Members and staff have a responsibility to communicate in a way which supports the aims within this communications strategy.

Additionally, on occasions staff and Elected Members may be required to represent the Council as spokespersons on specialist subjects. Our responsibilities are to identify and support our spokespersons, providing them with the skills and capacity to represent the Council externally. We do this by:

- Assisting the spokesperson as required to enable better handling of media interviews, speeches and public speaking.
- Providing tools, expertise and technical systems that support good communications including media management, social media mechanisms and electronic and print publishing facilities.
- Providing centrally coordinated communications support, including professional communications advice when required, together with systems and processes that streamline our communications.

## **Key communications responsibilities**

Convener or Committee Chairs are our key ambassadors and promote our reputation. These Elected Members will perform duties as our spokesperson at events and conferences and will be called upon to speak to the media.

### Policy & Resources Committee:

- Approve our communications strategy and associated action plans.
- Scrutinise progress and performance against action plans.

### Chief Executive/Corporate Directors:

- Review our communications strategy and associated action plans.
- Approve policies, principles and quality standards of communications.
- Are our key spokespersons and public representatives in consultation with the appropriate Committee Chair, speaking to the media and other stakeholders, giving interviews, briefings and chairing events and meetings.
- Contribute to and approve press releases and statements.
- Raise our profile, outlining our unique selling propositions with MPs, MSPs, Scottish Government, Elected Members and other influential partners through effective influencing and networking.

### Heads of Service

- Incorporate the communications strategy and associated action plans into strategy and project development
- Ensure that planning projects includes consideration of a resourced communications plan at the outset.
- Promote the use of communications policies, guidelines and templates for improved communications as per our corporate brand

## **Objectives and Tasks**

Developing a customer-focused approach to communication will help achieve a joined-up, consistent and best value service for the Council. To achieve this, we need to undertake a programme of detailed activity based on the following objectives:

- Develop a proactive, planned, resourced and managed approach to communication activities across the Council.
- Maximise positive media coverage and identify opportunities for this.
- Improve the Council's direct communications with all stakeholders, including mechanisms for public performance reporting.
- Ensure Elected Members are fully supported in carrying out their roles.
- Deliver planned, resourced, managed and cost-effective communications that will help staff promote the Council and contribute to improved morale, productivity and performance.
- Ensure the Council 'brand' is consistently linked to Council services and projects to help build trust, support and reputation.
- Maximise use of technology and new media in communicating with different audiences.

- Ensure a consistent approach to equality and diversity, including the use of plain English.

### **Target Audiences**

This strategy is based on the targeting of relevant groups including those we do not have ready access to. In establishing a targeted approach to communications, the Council has to consider a wide and varied group of audiences. Who we communicate with will determine how we communicate with them, so having a clear understanding of our audience groups is of vital importance.

### **Forms of Communication**

The Council uses a number of different ways to communicate with stakeholders. The platform used depends on how many people will be reached, how quickly the message needs to get to the audience, cost-effectiveness and accessibility. There is no 'one size fits all' solution and a mixed approach will generally be required to achieve the most effective results.

### **Responsibilities for managing communications**

The success of our communications strategy is dependent on making it a living culture. All staff have a responsibility to communicate according to the standards outlined in our corporate brand/logo guidelines.

All media enquiries made to an officer in their professional capacity would be referred to the Council's communications office. The only exception is when the answer to the question is contained in factual published information which would normally be available to the press and public.

The decision to issue a comment, press release, statement or grant an interview with staff member will be taken by the communications office after consulting the relevant Corporate Director and Head of Service and/or Elected Member.

Officers of the Council should not agree to speak to the media, or as a representative of the Council in public meetings, without the approval of the appropriate senior officer. The exception to this rule applies to officers who, as members of professional bodies, are asked to speak at meetings or conferences on technical issues associated with their profession.

### **Measurement and Evaluation**

A key element of any communications strategy is to establish a framework for measurement and evaluation. Effective measurement will help us understand our audiences and provide the flexibility to adapt our communications accordingly - tailoring and fine tuning messages and mechanisms to ensure we continue to achieve our aims.

The aims of the communications strategy focus on outcomes rather than input or output, so it is vital this is what we measure to assess if the strategy is working as intended.

We will have achieved success if customers, partners and employees have a clear understanding of what the Council does and adapt behaviours and opinions accordingly to reflect this. So we need to measure residents' awareness, opinions and understanding of the Council's messages. Other measurements will include analysis of media coverage and analysis of feedback such as opinion surveys.

### **Key targets to measure communications success**

The broad aims and objectives of this communications strategy have been translated into measurable targets in individual action plans. All our communications should help to deliver one or more of these targets:

1. To measure and increase Elected Members, senior managers, external partners and staff satisfaction with our communication.
2. To increase awareness levels among the public and positive coverage in media.
3. To deliver measurable improvements in the quality of communications over all channels, year on year.
4. To increase recognition of our brand with our partners, regionally and nationally.
5. To deliver communications to all our stakeholders, monitoring our reach in various mechanisms.

### **Monitoring and evaluation of the communications plan**

We will measure the effectiveness of our plan through:

- Feedback at events, seminars, and on our website.
- Monitoring of 'hits' on our website.
- Social media analysis.
- Reviewing our media coverage.
- Events successfully delivered.
- Publications successfully delivered.

The strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose and will be updated to reflect progress.