

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Leader and Cabinet 9 July 2007  
**AUTHOR/S:** Inspire Work stream E - Communications / Corporate Manager  
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### COMMUNICATION STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

#### Purpose

1. To seek Cabinet's approval of the attached Corporate Communications Strategy, subject to consultation responses being received.

#### Background

2. One of the major areas of improvement identified within the Council's Inspire project was surrounding communications. Effective communications underpins the whole change agenda and is vital if sustained change/improvement is to be achieved.
3. Communication is not just information provision. In local government, when people hear the word 'communications', the things that spring to mind are the council website, magazine or leaflets providing information to residents about specific local services. It is however more than this. It should be a two-way process, where people are able to provide ideas, views, and feedback on services, changes, and developments in their community, whilst being kept fully informed of the latest news.
4. Local government communication is a set of activities that ensure regular contact with groups of people (stakeholders) wider than service users and residents. It is also about engaging with and keeping staff up-to-date and involved in changes and developments. It builds and maintains effective relationships with the news media, develops a community identity, promotes a sense of place, and communicates and joins up with partners.
5. Effective communication is planned and structured, and is measured to ensure it achieves the required business outcomes.
6. The attached corporate communication strategy has been drafted via appropriate consultation and research by the Inspire communication work stream group using experienced expert advice. The scope and methodology employed is further detailed in section 2 of the strategy. It will replace the existing 2004 – 2007 South Cambridgeshire District council communication strategy.

#### Considerations

7. Since publication of the CGI report the Council has made significant and important developments in areas of council communication. These include improvements in relationships with key news media, delivery of team brief training for all managers and the launch of a programme of member training, staff briefings and feedback mechanisms to name but a few. This longer term strategy looks to build on these improvements.
8. The strategy concentrates on improving performance in five key areas:

- (a) Internal communication
  - (b) News media
  - (c) Public relations
  - (d) Corporate identity and brand
  - (e) Communication styles, behaviours and actions.
9. It also sets the future direction for, but does not detail, broader communication and engagement activities surrounding marketing, consultation and research. These issues are out of the current scope of the work stream.
10. The implementation plan suggested is designed to achieve the desired outcomes below as explained in section 4 of the strategy.

### **Overall outcome**

*By April 2009 the council is held in high repute by all stakeholders for its services and the leadership it gives to all South Cambridgeshire communities*

### **Internal communication**

*By April 2009 Members and staff feel valued and well informed, and act as advocates for the council with all stakeholder groups*

### **External communication**

*By April 2009 the council is valued by residents and all stakeholders for the quality of the services it delivers and its successes in championing the needs of South Cambridgeshire at the local, regional and national level*

11. Some of the actions required to deliver these outcomes are better developed than others, especially where the evidence/experience is already available to know what is required. Some will need to be investigated therefore the strategy and it's action will develop further as implementation proceeds.
12. Many of the actions can be taken within existing resources (both staff and financial). As members are aware recruitment is ongoing to employ an additional communications officer on a short-term contract to assist with delivery. Other actions require the buying in of services. A further 10 days of expert adviser time has been requested to IDeA, who will bid for this to be funded via BCE, to assist in the strategy's implementation. There may well be additional funding requirements, the amounts of which will need to be identified but are not anticipated to be large over the three-year implementation timeframe.

### **Options**

13. It is necessary for the Council to have a corporate communications strategy for the reasons already stated. However Cabinet has the option to amend the strategy attached in particular in ways that will enhance the possibility of the required outcomes being achieved.

## Implications

14. Financial	As detailed in paragraph 12 of this covering report and the strategy itself.
Legal	As contained in the strategy
Staffing	As detailed in paragraph 12 of this covering report.
Risk Management	Communications is key to effective change and to achieving the Council's improvement journey. The risk of failure to achieve the Council's overall improvements detailed in Inspire project plan would be increased if the Council has no corporate communication strategy.
Equal Opportunities	As detailed within the strategy.

## Consultations

15. In order to achieve this cabinet date it has been necessary to undertake the consultation process in three phases;
- (a) Phase 1 – Information gathering to inform the strategy's production via workshops and interviews as detailed on page 5 of the strategy.
- (b) Phase 2 - Internal consultation with
- (i) Executive Members (including Cllr Mrs Ellington work stream E champion)
  - (ii) Leader of the opposition, independent group convenor
  - (iii) Chairman and Vice-chairman of Council
  - (iv) Chairman and Vice-chairman of Scrutiny
  - (v) Senior management team
  - (vi) Executive management team
  - (vii) IT section via Head of IT services
  - (viii) Staff and external partners involved in the workshops and interview held in phase one above, which included Cambridge City Council and the County Council.
- This phase of the process will be completed on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Accordingly the results of this consultation phase will be reported to Cabinet verbally.
- (c) Phase 3 – External consultation with
- (i) Cambridgeshire Constabulary
  - (ii) Cambridgeshire primary Care Trust
  - (iii) Huntingdonshire District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council.
  - (iv) Inspire Improvement Board
  - (v) Business stakeholders i.e. Chamber of commerce
  - (vi) Media contacts i.e. CEN editor, managing editors of Q103, StarFM and BBC radio Cambridgeshire
  - (vii) BME community
  - (viii) Audit commission relationship manager.

## Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

16. Affordable Homes	Effective communications is vital to the delivery of all of the Council's annual priorities and corporate objectives.
Customer Service	
Northstowe and other growth areas	
Quality, Accessible Services	
Village Life	
Sustainability	
Partnership	

## **Conclusions/Summary**

17. The corporate communication strategy and implementation plan is vital to achieving successful and sustained change and the improvements looked for. It is still work in progress given the timeframes of the consultation phases detailed above. However it is important that the Council moves on in making further improvements in the way it communicates. Therefore Cabinet is asked to review the strategy as it currently stands and give delegated authority to the Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder to approve the strategy subject to the consultation responses received from both the internal and external consultees.

## **Recommendations**

18. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (a) considers the internal consultation response received,
  - (b) reviews the attached strategy indicating any areas of amendment, and
  - (c) gives delegated authority to the Staffing and Communications Portfolio Holder to approve the final strategy following the completion of the external consultation process.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Audit Commission CGI Report; SCDC State of the Nation report; SCDC review of external communication; SCDC staff survey results; Ipsos MORI research papers.

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