



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Communications Strategy and Implementation Plan

June 2007

DRAFT

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

Produced by The SCDC Inspire Communications Workstream Group (with the support of Mike McCabe, IDeA Local Government Improvement Programme).

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1. Introduction

The Council has responded to The State of the Nation report and Audit Commission Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) by putting in place the Inspire Improvement Plan. This plan is designed to deliver changes in process, performance and conduct – its aim is to focus on providing services that meet the needs of the district, and on delivering the aims of the Community Strategy.

The Improvement Plan has eight workstreams, one of which is communications. The communications workstream will contribute to delivery of change by:

Building a positive image of the council in the local community, and clear communication with our staff and partners

In the period since publication of the CGI report significant changes and developments have been made to important 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. This strategy will build on these improvements and bring planned and managed change and improvement to all areas of council communication.

Required outcomes

Three over-arching outcomes have been developed to address the needs of stakeholders as expressed in the consultation. These outcomes drive all strategy implementation, together with the high level measures against which success can be evaluated.

1. 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

2. Internal communication

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

3. External communication

By April 2009 the council is valued by residents and 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

Defining communication

Communication is often seen in terms of 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.

In practice, communication encompasses far more; it is (or 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.

Thus 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.

Effective communication is planned and structured, and is measured to ensure it achieves the required business outcomes.

2. Scope and methodology

Scope

This strategy is required to support delivery of effective change and improvement - initially by autumn 2007 (the Audit Commission set milestone) and subsequently by 2009. With resources currently stretched it is recommended that initial communication efforts are focussed on improving performance in the five key areas:

- internal communication
- news media
- public relations
- corporate identity and brand
- communication styles, behaviours and actions

The strategy will also set the future direction for broader stakeholder communication and engagement activities:

- marketing
- consultation
- research

As excellent performance becomes the norm in the five key areas then the work can be broadened to encompass marketing, consultation and research. Development of new consultation and marketing strategies should be programmed for year three of the action plan (see section 10.5 and the table of actions).

Methodology

This strategy is based upon stakeholder consultation conducted during March and April 2007 using a range of methodologies including:

Workshop sessions and/or interviews

Workshop sessions with Member and staff groups	4
Face to face interviews with external stakeholders and officers	3
Face to face discussions with communications staff	2

A note of the individuals and organisations consulted with is recorded in the appendix.

Desktop research

Desktop research included reviews of the Audit Commission CGI report, the SCDC State of the Nation Report, SCDC review of external communication, the staff survey results, the work of the staff communications group, service area feedback on internal communication and the three yearly Best Value residents survey headline results. Additional research was conducted amongst published research papers from Ipsos MORI about resident perceptions of council reputation and impacts on reputation and satisfaction of communication activity.

3. Stakeholders

Given the time and resource constraints that the council is working to, the main communication actions should be aimed at high priority stakeholder groups. These are identified within the CGI and State of the Nation reports, the consultation work conducted for this strategy, and those seen as key to achieving the improvement outcomes. Staff and external stakeholder groups will, include within them some harder to reach sub-groups or those with special and diverse needs, such as newly recruited/potential staff and those people who are disabled or from ethnic minorities. The council will need to ensure its communications reaches these.

The proposed priority stakeholders are:

Internal

- members
- all staff

External

- residents
- identified hard to reach groups
- regional and local partnership bodies
- Parish councils
- local businesses/representative organisations
- Go East
- The Audit Commission/Government
- IDeA and LGA
- the news media
- local neighbouring councils

	actions	cost	who	when	evaluation/ critical success factor (csf)	evaluation by
3.1	Approve the list of key stakeholders and ensure that communication plans and actions recognise and address their needs	nil	Cabinet	July 07	n/a	
3.2	Conduct an annual survey of stakeholders to assess how well their communication needs are being met	tba Est £5K	Comms team	Jan. 08	Survey results Stakeholders are satisfied with the style, content and frequency of Council communication and information	Communicati ons PFH

4. Required outcomes

Using the results of the research and consultation a set of three overarching outcomes have been developed to reflect stakeholder needs and expectations. These will drive strategy implementation, as well as the high level measures against which success will be evaluated.

1. 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

2. Internal communication

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

3. External communication

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Action

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
4.1	Agree the above as the three over - arching outcomes required of this strategy	n/a	Cabinet	July 07	N/a	

5. Communication style(s)

During the consultation process, stakeholders described the style(s) of communication they wanted to see being used by SCDC in the future. The feedback requested that communication is more:

- open
- inclusive
- listening
- honest
- positive
- in Plain English/language

The consultation highlighted that historically much of the Council's communication with stakeholders has not been viewed positively. Words used by stakeholders to describe SCDC past communication included:

- directive
- inconsistent
- defensive
- unclear

Recent developments, including team brief training and member training programmes, are already delivering change and improvements. Embedding this early improvement and delivering long term change will require concerted and long term effort from senior managers and Members in adopting and demonstrating the behaviours, styles of communication and language that reflect the culture desired.

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
5.1	Develop an agreed communication standards and style guide for SCDC making explicit to Members, managers and staff the Council's expectation of all who communicate on its behalf. This guide to be made widely available internally	nil	Comms team	Year 1	Sample of communications against standard and design guide	Comms. PFH
5.2	Research options and make recommendations for provision of plain language development and training for all staff and Members	nil	Comms team	Year 1	n/a	Comms/ policy
5.3	Implement a plain language development and training programme for Members and staff	tba est £5k	Comms team/contractor	Year 1	User surveys/staff survey/residents survey	Comms team/comms PFH

6. Managing communication

Strong leadership from the Chief Executive and senior politicians is vital. Councils who are among some of the best communicators demonstrate senior level buy-in to the importance of communications, and have begun to consider the implications on communications at every point in the decision-making process. This helps to mainstream communications within the organisation, as the importance attached to it begins to trickle down to all levels of the organisation – which is very important.

(The Business Case for Communications. DCLG & IDeA, December 2006)

The management role

Section one of this strategy sets out how local government communication is defined as a set of activities that ensure regular contact with groups of people (stakeholders) wider than service users and residents. It is about engaging with and keeping staff up-to-date and involved with changes and developments; building and maintaining effective relations with the news media; developing community identity and promoting a sense of place; communicating and joining up with partners.

For SMT and EMT, communications will be a resource like any other, where work should be prioritised, planned and managed to clear outcomes, and where performance is closely measured and results evaluated. The Improvement Plan workstream that is developing a new corporate and service planning process presents the opportunity to integrate communications into all elements of the council's work.

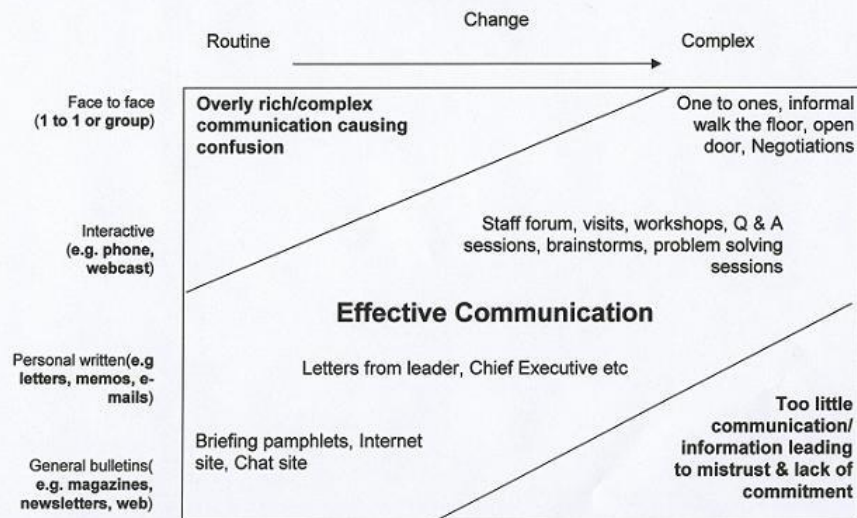
Managing the 'how' of communications, that is, the behaviours, styles, tone and language used by the organisation with stakeholders, is important. To be effective the message being communicated needs to be mirrored by the way it is communicated. Any clash between them will lead to communication that is not trusted, believed or acted upon. This is particularly important for South Cambridgeshire where the development of sets of communication styles and behaviours that reflect and reinforce the new Council vision and values will be particularly important.

Responsibility for communications

Responsibility for communications sits with all Members and employees. Communications will be a priority area for SMT, EMT and service managers, but this strategy can only deliver when all staff understand and take responsibility for managing their communication with stakeholders. Members and employees must all become ambassadors for South Cambridgeshire, and be its greatest advocates.

The diagram below (developed from Lengel & Daft's *selection of communication media as an effective skill*) illustrates the extent to which decisions made about the means of message delivery can determine the effectiveness of management communication in times of change. The type of message, from routine to complex, must be matched with the appropriate delivery mechanism (face to face through to newsletters), for the communication to have the desired impacts. Where there is a mis-match of message and media, staff, at one end of the scale (top left hand quadrant), become confused, and at the other (bottom right hand quadrant) lose trust and commitment. In this model, effective decisions all sit in the zone running from the bottom left quadrant to the top right, where at each point on the scale the chosen media is appropriate for the particular message delivered.

Effective (selection of) communication media



Source: based R H Lengel and R L Daft, *The Selection of Communication Media as an Effective Skill*. The Academy of Management Executive, 1988, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 225-232 (as further developed by Dale Robertson)

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation / csf	evaluation by
6.1	The chief executive and executive director assume ultimate accountability for leading the communications strategy and:	nil	CE/ED	Year 1		SMT
6.1.1	actively and visibly apply its values, principles and actions to all aspects of their work	nil	CE/ED	Year 1	Staff feedback and surveys/S. holder survey	Comms team
6.1.2	communicate their decisions, and thinking behind them, clearly and expeditiously to corporate managers and service managers face to face, and via Team Brief so that the cascade of essential information to staff at all levels is both accurate and timely	nil	CE/ED	Year 1	EMT/Staff feedback from core briefing system and surveys	HR unit

6.1.3	ensure that 'communications ability' is included as a key target and result area in the annual appraisal of corporate managers and service managers	nil	CE/ED	Year 1	Annual appraisal review	HR
6.1.4	commission a corporate reporting framework for key communication mechanisms (news media, publications, web, internal communication) that is linked in to the performance management system	nil	Comm s/ policy	Year 1		Policy & performance
6.1.5	communications be made integral to all major council projects. Clear project communication plans, performance evaluation and allocation of management responsibilities be required for all major project pid's	nil	CE/ED	Year 1	Sample Audit of major projects	SMT/EMT
6.2	Corporate managers and service Managers:					
6.2.1	be accountable for ensuring the successful implementation of the Communications Strategy in their own areas of responsibility	n/a	C&S M	Year 1	appraisal	SMT
6.2.2	ensure that communication efforts are targetted at key stakeholders	n/a	C&S M	Year 1	appraisal	
6.2.3	ensure that staff are fully aware of the Communications Strategy, and act upon it	n/a	C&S M	Year 1		SMT
6.2.4	provide regular feedback to the communications team on strategy implementation and areas for improvement	n/a	C&S M	Year 1		Comms team
6.2.5	implement the corporate internal communication actions in their areas of responsibility	n/a	C&S M	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey	HR
6.2.6	each corporate and service manager makes communications ability and performances a key target and result area in staff appraisals.	n/a	C&S M	Year 1	appraisals	HR

6.2.7	future management development programmes incorporate training on communication skills for managers	tba	HR	Year 1/2	Appraisal results demonstrate that communications performance amongst relevant managers staff is continuously improving	SMT/EMT
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7. Making change real

SCDC has begun a three-year journey of cultural and organisational development that will bring change to all parts of the organisation. No one is underestimating the scale of change required, or the need to deliver radical improvement in political leadership, efficiency and effectiveness, and service standards. The importance of effectively communicating success in delivering change cannot be overstated.

Stakeholders must not be relied upon to automatically recognise nor value changes and achievements. Instead SCDC must keep them regularly and fully informed of progress (as well as areas of non-progress), and the benefit progress provides to them. Planned and managed communication, in line with the strategy and key messages, can deliver stakeholder understanding, and through that, measurable improvement in reputation.

The role of communications in delivering successful change is threefold:

1. internally to involve and engage, communicate reasons, priorities, direction and progress
2. externally to involve, to demonstrate that change is delivering stakeholder wants and needs and to communicate success
3. to demonstrate leadership and commitment from the top for the change

To achieve the above will require regular planned communication, plus the adoption of communication values and styles that mirror the objectives of the change programme. This will need changes in leadership and management style and behaviours.

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation /csf	evaluation by
7.1	Develop and appropriately use styles of communication that reflect and support achievement of the required cultural change.	n/a	all	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey/ user feedback	HR, Policy & Comms
7.2	Evaluate written and oral communication against the desired values and styles and take development actions required.	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Report results and actions taken	Comms team

8. Accessible communication

Providing effective communication support to all users of local services is an essential part of creating equality of access and opportunity. It helps tackle the effects of racism, social exclusion and disability, and supports the removal of other barriers to full participation in society.

Workstream D of the Improvement Plan (Standards, Equalities and Diversity) will tackle the need to improve capacity and performance in reflecting the needs of all sections of the community as an employer, service provider and community leader. Achieving Level 1 of The Equality Standard for Local Government by December 2007 (the Council's agreed target) will require all elements of council communication to take account of the diverse needs of South Cambridgeshire residents, and of the council's own employees.

Consideration of the needs of specific groups should be integrated into the planning and implementation of all council communication. This work will support delivery of the areas of activity that Workstream D is responsible for, and generate wider understanding amongst Members, staff and partners of the value of accessible communication. The South Cambridgeshire stakeholders who will be the focus of this work are:

- Travellers
- ethnic minorities
- disabled people
- people with special needs
- other hard to reach groups

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation /csf	evaluation by
8.1	develop and implement accessible communication standards and actions meeting the requirements of Equalities Standards Level 1. Apply the standards to all council communication	tba	E&D officer	Year 1	Achievement of level 1	Improvement manager

9. Key messages

Successful organisations take particular care in ensuring that their messages are clearly understood and reach all stakeholders. This will require the Council to develop a set of high level corporate messages that:

- remain constant
- are limited in number
- are repeated in all key communication
- are easily understood by all
- are capable of being put across effectively through all communication channels
- are not forced to compete with lower level messages developed on an ad hoc basis

By developing, agreeing and ensuring effective use of a set of key messages based upon the objectives, values and priorities, the Council will be in a position to manage its reputation with stakeholders. This will require corporate leadership and discipline to be successful, as well as the introduction of clear requirements for all council communication activity, both internal and external.

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation / csf	evaluation by
9.1	develop and agree a set of (up to five) key messages based upon the objectives, values and priorities. Ensure their use as appropriate in all council communication.	n/a	Cabinet/SMT	Year 1	Audit of communications - Council stakeholders demonstrate a clear understanding of the Council's vision, values and priorities	Comms team
9.2	review, revise and update the council's key messages	n/a	Cabinet/SMT	2010 or when change of political control		

10. Internal communication

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

10.1 – Staff communication

Context

National research demonstrates how high performing organisations see highly motivated employees as key to their success.

Evidence gained from research among councils supports this – Ipsos MORI have found that employees who feel well informed are twice as likely to feel involved in their organisation, to understand its objectives and to believe that they can make the best use of their skills and abilities.

The research also identified a direct link between levels of staff satisfaction and advocacy. The more dissatisfied employees feel about their organisation, the more likely they are to speak critically about it. Conversely, the more satisfied staff are, the more they are likely to act as ambassadors and advocates for the council and its services.

Changing an embedded organisational culture is not straightforward. During times of change staff become understandably concerned about how they might be expected to change their role, and are fearful of potential redundancies. To succeed requires all staff to fully understand why the change must happen, what it means for them and their job, and to be able to understand and buy into the new vision.

For this to happen managers must be capable of, and work hard at, leading and motivating teams and individuals. Managers need to develop and deploy high quality communication skills, and be visible and available to all. Managers must be effective at communicating and understand that communication is a core part of their management role, not an optional extra.

Without this staff feel uninvolved and disengaged from the change. They feel that change is something being done to them, rather than something they are an essential part of. Creating a culture where staff feel listened to, well informed and supported to change is an essential pre-requisite for successful change.

A structured and effectively resourced system of internal communication will provide essential support for both staff and managers. It will create channels through which information can flow, where staff can be involved and listened to, and which can ensure that employees have the information and knowledge required to do their jobs well.

Current position

The stakeholder consultation highlighted dissatisfaction with past internal communications performance. These results are mirrored in findings of recent staff surveys. There is a strong demand for more effective management and resourcing of internal communication, and a belief that significant change is required. Staff believe that the value and business benefits of supporting social communication is not clearly

understood and that effective communication is neither valued nor seen as a required skill for managers.

Internal communication should be organised to support SMT and senior members in building and leading a team of more than 400 individuals to deliver change and improvement. This will be a challenging task requiring an organised and broad set of corporate engagement, communication and information mechanisms.

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
10.1.1	<p>Develop the existing cascade system into a council-wide monthly core team briefing system based upon the Work Foundation model. The system to feature the following as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all briefings delivered by managers in teams and face to face • a maximum of five cascade levels • integral upward feedback and response mechanisms • monthly briefing calendar with fixed dates • core and local briefing topics • monitoring and evaluation of delivery • team brief awareness sessions be provided for staff 	tba	HR	Year 1	<p>Core brief feedback</p> <p>Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed</p>	HR
10.1.2	<p>Use the report and feedback on the outcomes of the May/June 07 team brief training to inform final decisions on developing the team brief system (and other internal communication mechanisms).</p>	n/a	HR	Year 1		
10.1.3	<p>Review current induction and EDR arrangements for staff and agency staff. Recommend any changes required to ensure all staff receive effective induction and ongoing support to understand SCDC vision, values and priorities</p> <p>Review the effectiveness of exit interview arrangements and</p>	n/a	HR	Year 1/2	<p>Staff survey and feedback</p> <p>Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the council</p>	HR

	processes					
10.1.4	Review arrangements for Member induction	n/a	Democratic services	Year 1/2	Member survey and feedback	Democratic services
10.1.5	Develop the intranet to be the prime source of business and social information for staff and members, with regular maintenance and updating.	tba	Comms	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the council	Comms
10.1.6	Launch a regular (monthly) hard copy newsletter produced by staff for staff working to clear objectives and containing a mix of business and social information	est £10k pa	Comms	Year 1	Reader surveys and staff survey Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the council	Comms
10.1.7	ensure that the council's values and key messages are reflected in all internal communication	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Audit of internal communication	
10.1.8	ensure that the council's agreed brand is applied to all internal communication channels	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Brand audit	Comms
10.1.9	Use the results of the 2007 staff survey to benchmark performance and set targets for future year on year improvement.	tba	HR/comms	Year 1	Staff survey	HR/Comms

10.2 Member communication

Because of their unique role elected Members have specific communication needs. Where these are addressed and Members kept fully informed through information and communication (written specifically for them and addressing issues that interest and affect them), they can experience a greater stake in the organisation they lead and represent, and value it more.

Members also have specific communication responsibilities. When a Member speaks on behalf of the council, what is said, and how, has an immediate impact on the council's reputation. Being clear about what it is they want to communicate and the style and behaviours they intend to employ, (in other words managing their communication to deliver intended results) will help to develop the positive reputation Members desire for both themselves and the council.

The Council has already made some progress in improving communications as stated in the introduction. However there remains relatively low levels of planned and managed communication from the council to Members. Where it does exist, the communication often relates only to statutory requirements, decisions required and meetings to be attended. Outside of the political groupings, forums and council meetings, Members are not normally targetted with timely and useful communication about the council, its progress, performance and people. This represents a missed opportunity for Members to be better and more widely informed, and feel supported by and part of the corporate organisation they are elected to. Managed and regular communication with Members, once embedded, can also lead to opportunities for Member consultation.

Actions

	action	cost	by whom	by when	evaluation / csf	evaluation by
10.2.1	Implement a monthly hard copy newsletter for members in addition to 'Bulletin'	Within existing	Democratic services /Comms	Sept 07	Member survey Members survey responses say that they are kept well informed by the Council and that they feel their role and contributions are recognised and valued by staff.	Democratic services
10.2.2	Provide communications training for all Members	tba	Democratic services	Year 2	Measurable improvement in member communication skills/survey	Democratic services
10.2.3	Consult on and then develop a member communications section within the Member toolkit making clear Member roles and responsibilities for communication	n/a	Democratic services /Comms team	Year 1	Member survey	DS/Comms PFH

10.2.4	Consult with all members about their communication needs and develop managed and regular communication mechanisms (hard copy and/or electronic) specifically for members that accord with their preferences	tba	Democratic services	Year 1/2	Member survey	Democratic services
10.2.5	Implement an annual survey of members on communication and use the result to continuously develop and improve member communication	n/a	Democratic services /Comms	Sept 07	Survey results	Democratic services

11 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

11.1 Corporate identity and brand

Context

Whether it is consciously or unconsciously developed, every council has a brand. While the visual side of the brand – the corporate identity – can be well understood, national research has shown that most local authorities fail to tackle the more intangible elements of their brand, the corporate ‘personality’ or reputation.

A range of factors sum up a council’s personality – from its stated values to comments made in the media and, most importantly, the behaviour of staff and members as experienced by key stakeholders through letters, phone calls or face to face contact.

When South Cambridgeshire residents think about the council, their judgements are based upon the whole picture.

It follows that our determination to improve reputation will require concerted action in all areas: perceptions of service quality, written materials, images, staff and member behaviours, journalist perceptions/ media relations and language styles.

Current position

Ensuring that stakeholders are able to readily identify the council and its services is an important first step. In recent years there has been success in key areas including the brand identity (colour, logo, font etc.) being accurately and consistently presented on key corporate communications (letterhead, website, residents magazine, posters etc.) Even today though, an audit of communication material highlights areas where the brand is missing, incorrectly presented, or has been ‘redesigned’.

For the future SCDC will need to ensure that whenever a stakeholder uses a service, receives a communication or enters a council building, that they are fully aware it is provided by SCDC. There is little benefit of a person valuing what they receive, if they aren’t clear who the provider is. For stakeholders to value SCDC’s contribution to the community they need to be made aware each time SCDC does or provides something that benefits them. Best practice advises against jargon and abbreviations. SCDC as an identity is known to those in the know only and could as easily be Suffolk Coastal District Council.

The Council needs to take effective control of its physical identity by setting out exactly how brand is to be managed. All managers and staff need to understand the importance of the Council’s brand, and to be responsible for its proper use.

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
11.1.1	The name South Cambridgeshire District Council is used in full at all times on all material	nil	all	Year 1	Annual brand audit/Residents survey Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	Comms
11.1.2	The corporate identity manual is revised and updated, and all services adhere to its requirements	nil	Comms/all	Year 1	Annual brand audit	Comms
11.1.3	Responsibility for brand management be allocated to a member of EMT	nil	SMT	Year 1		SMT
11.1.4	All council communication and information be clearly branded for both internal and external audiences.	nil	All	Year 1		EMT
11.1.5	All services provided are promoted as part of the corporate body and use only the agreed corporate identity.	tba	SMT/EMT	Year 1	Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	EMT
11.1.6	All managers responsible for 'visible' services (refuse, housing, recycling etc.) produce a plan on how they will ensure the brand is reflected and promoted by their services	tba	Service managers	Year 1 & 2	Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	EMT

11.2 News media

Context

The majority of UK residents still rely on the local media, particularly their local newspaper, for information and news about the council, its performance and how it serves them (source Ipsos MORI). Summary results of resident surveys commissioned by councils consistently show the local media as being in the top third of preferred means of receiving information from or about their council.

Councils who work to establish effective relationships and pro-active ways of working with their local media are able to make productive use of what is a key communication channel with their residents. Those councils who have little or no relationship with their local media often find that this is reflected in resident satisfaction scores and their willingness to value the council's work. Residents will often cite the local media as a key influence for why they hold certain perceptions of their local council – usually negative.

Similarly a direct link has been found between how positive the relationships between local journalists and the communications team are, and the general line or slant of that media's coverage. The better a relationship a council has the more generally fair coverage it is given. The news media is an independent channel for communicating with residents and it is productive for councils to see this clearly and to put to one side emotional feelings or concerns about one or more particular news organisations. If the two can work together effectively then both will derive benefits.

Pro-active media work both raises awareness amongst residents of the value to communities of what the council is doing, and also mitigates the impacts of negative or critical coverage.

Most if not all local authorities have, at one time or another, grappled with the challenge of respecting the right of news media to represent all and any views on a given issue. South Cambridgeshire now has an opportunity to do the same and derive the benefits of doing so.

Current position

For some years SCDC's relationship with its local media, particularly the local newspaper, has been characterised by suspicion, mutual distrust, minimal contact and high levels of negative coverage.

This situation is changing. Senior officers and members now meet with editors and regular, proactive contact between the communications team and journalists takes place. The current situation is one where the Cambridgeshire news media believe that the early signs are good and are looking for the progress to continue.

The publication of the State of the Nation and CGI reports provides a real opportunity for the Council to leave behind past problems with local media and to develop new and productive relationships. The opportunity also exists to develop quality coverage in trade journals such as Local Government Chronicle and Municipal Journal, as well as the national media.

Maximising this opportunity will require a new and more managed approach to media relations. Pro-active media work should be targetted on communicating

achievements in key improvement areas. In a situation where resources are restricted it is essential to prioritise, thus what is communicated is only what matters most to the council and its aims. This will mean that lower or non-priority work does not receive attention requiring discipline to identify and then stick to communicating key work areas.

Contact with the media should be managed by the communications team and trained/experienced officers. The reputation of SCDC with local stakeholders is heavily reliant on media coverage and it is essential that full training is provided to all Members and officers who represent the council through the news media.

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation / csf	evaluation by
11.2.1	Corporate Managers identify a minimum of 5 officers from their service areas as media contacts. These officers to undergo media skills training.	nil	CM	Year 1	all media coverage of SCDC includes at a minimum a positive official statement/response from the Council	Comms
11.2.2	A programme of media skills training be developed and implemented – separate for officers and members	tba	Comms	Year 1	media contact to and from the council is managed by the communications team and trained/experienced officers and members	Comms
11.2.3	Review existing protocols.	tba	Comms	Year 1	'no comment' or 'unavailable for comment' never appears in the news media against the name of SCDC	Comms
11.2.4	A 12 month media plan setting out the priority areas for media coverage be developed from the improvement plan and implemented	n/a	Comms /services	Year 1	regular coverage of the Council's priority work areas and achievements is achieved in the local, specialist and national media	Comms
11.2.5	Monthly media briefings be introduced to brief journalists on key work, progress and to answer questions. These briefings to be timed to allow maximum attendance and planned around the Council decision making calendar.	n/a	Comms / services	Year 1	regular coverage of the Council's priority work areas and achievements is achieved in the local, specialist and national media	Comms

	Regular meetings are held between CE/ED, Cabinet and senior media representatives				positive senior level relationships with the news media are developed by SMT and Cabinet and subject to regular review	SMT/Cabinet
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11.3 Publications

Context

Recent national research has shown that those councils who regularly communicate with their residents through a useful and interesting magazine, seen by every household, tend to be the best regarded in local government. The Ipsos MORI analysis of residents recall of council magazines also indicates that those councils who fail to get this area of communication right, tend to be worse rated by both the public and the Audit Commission.

Repeated survey evidence demonstrates that of all the publications a council can produce, an A to Z that is delivered to every door is the one thing that is most highly valued by residents.

Current position

The award winning 'South Cambs' magazine is seen as a good example of an interesting and relevant publication which is widely read. Consistent distribution to all households continues to be a challenge for the council, as is the continuing demand for efficiency savings.

The Council's current A to Z for residents is a joint one published with other councils in Cambridgeshire. In any independent assessment, the A to Z gives much greater prominence to county council services and a much lower profile to South Cambridgeshire services. In addition the Council brand is lost. It is unlikely that South Cambridgeshire residents will value their Council for this A to Z publication. In the light of the research above this represents a missed opportunity in terms of reputation.

Actions

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
11.3.1	Options for production and door to door distribution (inc. sponsorship and advertising) of an SCDC A to Z of services be researched and recommendations made for its production	n/a	Comms	Year 1		
11.3.2	Research and recommend on options for ensuring 100% door to door delivery of South Cambs magazine at least four times per year.	tba	Comms	Year 1		
11.3.3	Put in place a process for auditing of publications and e.communication materials to ensure compliance with all requirements of this strategy (accessibility, brand, style etc.)	n/a	EMT/Comms services	Year 1	annual brand audit Improvement in satisfaction with council communication	EMT/Comms

11.3.4	A South Cambridgeshire District Council A to Z of services is produced and delivered door to door	tba	Comms	Year 2	User feedback/resident surveys/comment and complaint feedback/mystery shopping improvement in satisfaction with council communication	Services / Policy/Comms
11.3.5	South Cambs magazine is delivered to 100% of homes at least four times per year	tba	Comms	Year 2	Readers survey 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	Comms

11.4 e.communications

Context

e.communication is no longer the future but the very real present. All stakeholders, to varying degrees, use e. communication and expect the Council to do the same. A study of recent Society of Information Technology Managers (SOCITM) surveys demonstrates how the quality of a council's website is used as a benchmark of customer focus and on ability to adapt to and make effective use of the web for customer communication, information provision and services.

Successful use of e-communication comes from a council understanding its importance and wanting to make it effective. Use, or lack of it, can be an important indicator to stakeholders of the culture and customer focus of the organisation, which will impact on organisational reputation.

Current position

The website offers a wide range of information on services, contacts and events. As implementation of the improvement plan begins the importance of the website as a tool of customer communication, service access and modernisation will grow. It is especially useful to our external partners. Demand for further development of transactional capabilities, customer response mechanisms and access to more and more complex information will grow. The Council will need to be pro-active in its development and ensure that key messages, successes etc are at the front.

There is a risk that development of e.communication and e.services will become demand-led rather than driven by agreed corporate priorities and stakeholder needs. This is a key issue during a time of limited resources and anticipated pressures for development of the website and associated services.

Though this strategy paper is about council communication, it is useful and convenient to recommend here research and development of a new strategic approach to the councils use of the web and e.communication. This will help ensure that future investment and management is determined by council priorities rather than competing demands and 'who shouts loudest'. Within the three year life of the improvement programme there will be sufficient space to develop clear plans and outcomes and then to implement them.

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
11.4.1	Research, develop and approve a full e.strategy for SCDC	tba	Comms /EMT	Year 2/3		
11.4.2	Identify sufficient resources to maintain and improve operation of the existing web presence and e.communications	tba	SMT	Year 1	User feedback/resident surveys/comment and complaint feedback/mystery shopping improvement in satisfaction with council communication	Comms/policy

11.4.3	Develop and implement new rules and standards for email communication covering style, brand, accessibility and signatures	n/a	Comms	Year 2	Staff and user surveys	Comms
11.4.4	Implement e.strategy actions	tba	tba	Year 3	tba	tba

11.5 Consultation and marketing

The Council is facing significant financial and other resource pressures, and this situation is likely to continue for the period covered by the improvement plan and this strategy. The ability to focus on resourcing and delivering key priority areas will be necessary for ultimate success.

This strategy and its actions focus on building a set of key corporate communication tools to directly support delivery of the Council's strategic priorities. Over time, and as excellent performance becomes the norm, consideration can be given to broadening this workstream to encompass marketing, research and consultation. This will provide an opportunity to further develop the existing SCDC consultation strategy and to consider whether and how the social marketing of services can be integrated into service design and delivery. This will be especially important in supporting the customer services strategy workstream.

	action	cost	who	when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
11.5.1	Conduct an options appraisal and make recommendations for the development and implementation of strategies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research • consultation • marketing 	n/a	Comms	Year 2/3		
11.5.2	Consider and report on whether social marketing of services can offer value to the Council	n/a	Comms	Year 2/3		

12. Conclusion

The Inspire Improvement Plan presents SCDC with the opportunity to employ communication as a strategic tool for managing change, and to use it in delivering the full range of improvements. The role of internal communication in motivating and inspiring staff and Members to be part of the future success will be of particular importance.

By deploying communications in a planned and managed way, founded upon SCDC's new objectives, values and priorities, managers will be able to deliver significant organisational benefits and support the delivery of corporate priorities.

The key role of communication in determining wider successes (or failures) means that the Council will benefit from directing and paying close ongoing attention to Council communications. Success in this will deliver significant improvements to the council's reputation and how it is valued and supported by local communities.

This strategy recommends actions to develop and improve performance in key areas of corporate communication. By commissioning and supporting this work communications will play a major role in delivering the vision for South Cambridgeshire and the improvements that members, staff, partners and residents all want to see.

The Inspire Communications Workstream Group

June 2007

V2

Appendix

13. Implementation plan

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
Section 3 - Stakeholders							
	3.1	Approve the list of key stakeholders and ensure that SCDC communication plans and actions recognise and address their needs	nil	Cabinet	July 07	n/a	
	3.2	Conduct an annual survey of stakeholders to assess how well their communication needs are being met	tba est £5k	Comms team	Jan. 08	Survey results Stakeholders are satisfied with the style, content and frequency of Council communication and information	Comms PFH
Section 4 – Required outcomes							
	4.1	Agree the above as the three over-arching outcomes required of this strategy	n/a	Cabinet	July 07		
Section 5 – Communication style(s)							
	5.1	Develop an agreed communication standards and style guide for SCDC making explicit to Members, managers and staff the council's expectation of all who communicate on its behalf. This guide to be made widely available internally	nil	Comms team	Year 1	Sample of communications against standards and design guide	Comms PFH
	5.2	Research options and make recommendations for provision of plain language development and training for all staff and Members	nil	Comms team	Year 1	n/a	Comms/ policy

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	5.3	Implement a plain language development and training programme for Members and staff	tba est £5K	Comms team/contractor	Year 1	User surveys/staff survey/residents survey	Comms team / comms PFH
Section 6 – Managing communication							
	6.1	The chief executive and executive director assume ultimate accountability for leading the communications strategy and:	nil	CE/ ED	Year 1		SMT
	6.1.1	actively and visibly apply its values, principles and actions to all aspects of their work	nil	CE/ ED	Year 1	Staff feedback and surveys/S. holder survey	Comms team
	6.1.2	communicate their decisions, and thinking behind them, clearly and expeditiously to corporate managers and service managers face to face, and via Team Brief so that the cascade of essential information to staff at all levels is both accurate and timely	nil	CE/ ED	Year 1	EMT/Staff feedback from core briefing system and surveys	HR
	6.1.3	ensure that ‘communications ability’ is included as a key target and result area in the annual appraisal of corporate managers and service managers	nil	CE/ ED	Year 1	Annual appraisal review	HR
	6.1.4	commission a corporate reporting framework for key communication mechanisms (news media, publications, web, internal communication) that is linked in to the performance management system	nil	Comms/policy	Year 1		Policy & performance
	6.1.5	communications be made integral to all major council projects. Clear project communication plans, performance evaluation and allocation of management responsibilities be required for all major project pid’s	nil	CE/ ED	Year 1	Sample audit of major projects	SMT/EMT

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	6.2	Corporate Managers and Service Managers:					
	6.2.1	be accountable for ensuring the successful implementation of the Communications Strategy in their own areas of responsibility	n/a	C&SM	Year 1	appraisal	SMT
	6.2.2	ensure that communication efforts are targetted at key stakeholders	n/a	C&SM	Year 1	appraisal	
	6.2.3	ensure that staff are fully aware of the Communications Strategy, and act upon it	n/a	C&SM	Year 1		SMT
	6.2.4	provide regular feedback to the Communications Team on strategy implementation and areas for improvement	n/a	C&SM	Year 1		Comms team
	6.2.5	implement the corporate internal communication actions in their areas of responsibility	n/a	C&SM	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey	HR
	6.2.6	each corporate and service manager makes communications ability and performances a key target and result area in staff appraisals.	n/a	C&SM	Year 1	appraisals	HR

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	6.2.7	future management development programmes incorporate training on communication skills for managers	tba	HR	Year 1/2	Appraisal results demonstrate that communications performance amongst relevant managers staff is continuously improving	SMT/EM
Section 7 – Making change real							
	7.1	Develop and use appropriately styles of communication that reflect and support achievement of the required cultural change.	n/a	all	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey/ user feedback	HR, Policy & Comms
	7.2	Evaluate written and oral communication against the desired values and styles and take development actions required.	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Report results and actions taken	Comms
Section 8 – Accessible communication							
	8.1	Develop and implement accessible communication standards and actions meeting the requirements of Equalities Standards Level 1. Apply the standards to all Council communication	tba	E&D officer	Year 1	Achievement of level 1	Improvement manager
Section 9 – Key messages							
	9.1	Develop and agree a set of (up to five) key messages based upon the objectives, values and priorities. Ensure their use as appropriate in all council communication.	n/a	Cabinet/S MT	Year 1	Audit of communications Council stakeholders demonstrate a clear understanding of the Council's vision, values and priorities	Comms team

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	9.2	Review, revise and update the council's key messages	n/a	Cabinet/SMT	2010 or when change or political control		
Section 10 – Internal communication							
10.1 – Staff Communication							
	10.1.1	<p>Develop the existing cascade system into a council-wide monthly core team briefing system based upon the Work Foundation model. The system to feature the following as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all briefings delivered by managers in teams and face to face • a maximum of five cascade levels • integral upward feedback and response mechanisms • monthly briefing calendar with fixed dates • core and local briefing topics • monitoring and evaluation of delivery • team brief awareness sessions be provided for staff 	tba	HR	Year 1	<p>Core brief feedback</p> <p>Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the Council</p>	HR
	10.1.2	Use the report and feedback on the outcomes of the May/June 07 team brief training to inform final decisions on developing the team brief system (and other internal communication mechanisms).	n/a	HR	Year 1		
	10.1.3	<p>Review current induction and EDR arrangements for staff and agency staff. Recommend any changes required to ensure all staff receive effective induction and ongoing support to understand SCDC vision, values and priorities</p> <p>Review the effectiveness of exit interview arrangements and processes</p>	n/a	HR	Year 1/2	<p>Staff survey and feedback.</p> <p>Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and</p>	HR

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
					well informed by the council		
	10.1.4	Review arrangements for Member induction	n/a	Demrocratic services	Year 1/2	Member survey and feedback	Demrocratic services
	10.1.5	Develop the intranet to be the prime source of business and social information for staff and members, with regular maintenance and updating.	tba	Comms	Year 1	Staff feedback and survey Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the council	Comms
	10.1.6	Launch a regular (monthly) hard copy newsletter produced by staff for staff working to clear objectives and containing a mix of business and social information	est £10k pa	Comms	Year 1	Reader surveys and staff survey Staff feedback from surveys, team briefing and via the newsletter says that they feel valued and well informed by the council	Comms

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	10.1.7	ensure that the Council's values and key messages are reflected in all internal communication	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Audit of internal communication	
	10.1.8	ensure that the Council's agreed brand is applied to all internal communication channels	n/a	Comms	Year 1	Annual brand audit	Comms
	10.1.9	Use the results of the 2007 staff survey to benchmark performance and set targets for future year on year improvement.	tba	HR/Comms	Year 1	Staff survey	HR/Comms
10.2 Member Communication							
	10.2.1	Implement a monthly hard copy newsletter for members in addition to 'Bulletin'	Withi n existi ng	Demrocr atic services / Comms	Sept 07	Member survey Members survey responses say that they are kept well informed by the Council and that they feel their role and contributions are recognised and valued by staff.	Democratic Services (DS)
	10.2.2	Provide communications training for all Members	tba	DS	Year 2	Measurable improvement in member communication skills/ survey	DS
	10.2.3	Consult on and then develop a member communications section within the Member toolkit making clear Member roles and responsibilities for communication	n/a	DS/ Comms	Year 1	Member survey	DS/Comms PFH

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	10.2.4	Consult with all members about their communication needs and develop managed and regular communication mechanisms (hard copy and/or electronic) specifically for members that accord with their preferences	tba	DS	Year 1/2	Member survey	DS
	10.2.5	Implement an annual survey of members on communication and use the result to continuously develop and improve member communication	n/a	DS/ Comms	Sept 07	Survey results	DS
Section 11 – External communication							
11.1 Corporate Identity and Brand							
	11.1.1	The name South Cambridgeshire District Council is used in full at all times on all material	nil	all	Year 1	Annual brand audit/ residents survey Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	Comms
	11.1.2	The corporate identity manual is revised and updated, and all services adhere to its requirements.	nil	Comms/ all	Year 1	Annual brand audit	Comms

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
	11.1.3	Responsibility for brand management be allocated to a member of EMT.	nil	SMT	Year 1		SMT
	11.1.4	All Council communication and information be clearly branded for both internal and external audiences.	nil	All	Year 1		EMT
	11.1.5	All services provided are promoted as part of the corporate body and use only the SCDC identity.	tba	SMT/ EMT	Year 1	Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	EMT
	11.1.6	All managers responsible for 'visible' services (refuse, housing, recycling etc.) produce a plan on how they will ensure the brand is reflected and promoted by their services	tba	Service managers	Year 1 & 2	Residents are aware of the range of services provided to them and value the council for its contribution to communities	EMT
11.2 News Media							
	11.2.1	Corporate managers identify a minimum of 5 officers from their service areas as media contacts. These officers to undergo media skills training.	nil	CM	Year 1	all media coverage of SCDC includes at a minimum a positive official statement/response from the Council	Comms

	action		cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
	11.2.2	A programme of media skills training be developed and implemented – separate for officers and members	tba	Comms	Year 1	media contact to and from the council is managed by the communications team and trained/experienced officers and members	Comms
	11.2.3	Review existing protocols.	tba	Comms	Year 1	'no comment' or 'unavailable for comment' never appears in the news media against the name of SCDC	Comms
	11.2.4	A 12 month media plan setting out the priority areas for media coverage be developed from the improvement plan and implemented	n/a	Comms/ services	Year 1	regular coverage of the Council's priority work areas and achievements is achieved in the local, specialist and national media	Comms
	11.2.5	Monthly media briefings be introduced to brief journalists on key work, progress and answering questions. These briefings to be timed to allow maximum attendance and planned around the Council decision making calendar.	n/a	Comms / services	Year 1	regular coverage of the Council's priority work areas and achievements is achieved in the local, specialist and national media	Comms

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
	Regular meetings are held between CE/ED, Cabinet and senior media representatives				positive senior level relationships with the news media are developed by SMT and Cabinet and subject to regular review	SMT/Cabinet
11.3.1	Options for production and door to door distribution (inc. sponsorship and advertising) of an SCDC A to Z of services be researched and recommendations made for its production	n/a	Comms	Year 1		
11.3.2	Research and recommend on options for ensuring 100% door to door delivery of The South Cambs magazine at least four times per year.	tba	Comms	Year 1		
11.3.3	Put in place a process for auditing of publications and e.communication materials to ensure compliance with all requirements of this strategy (accessibility, brand, style etc.)	n/a	EMT/Comms	Year 1	Annual brand audit Improvement in satisfaction with council communication	EMT/Comms
11.3.4	A South Cambridgeshire District Council A to Z of services is produced and delivered door to door	tba	Comms	Year 2	User feedback/resident surveys/comment and complaint feedback/mystery shopping improvement in satisfaction with	Services / Policy/Comms

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by	
					council communication		
	11.3.5	The South Cambs magazine is delivered to 100% of homes at least four times per year	tba	Comms	Year 2	Readers survey - 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	Comms
11.4 e.communications							
	11.4.1	Research, develop and approve a full e.strategy for SCDC	tba	Comms/ EMT	Year 2/3		
	11.4.2	Identify sufficient resources to maintain and improve operation of the existing web presence and e.communications	tba	SMT	Year 1	User feedback/ resident surveys/ comment and complaint feedback/ mystery shopping improvement in satisfaction with council communication	Comms/ policy

	action	cost	by	by when	evaluation/ csf	evaluation by
	11.4.3 Develop and implement new rules and standards for email communication covering style, brand, accessibility and signatures	n/a	Comms	Year 2	Staff and user surveys	Comms
	11.4.4 Implement e.strategy actions	tba	?	Year 3	tba	tba
	11.5 Consultation and Marketing					
	11. 5.1 Conduct an options appraisal and make recommendations for the development and implementation of strategies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research • consultation • marketing 	n/a	Comms	Year 2/3		
	11.5.2 Consider and report on whether social marketing of services can offer value to the Council	n/a	Comms	Year 2/3		

14. Appendix

The individual stakeholders and groups or organisations consulted during the development of this strategy were as follows:

Chief Executive, Cambridge City Council
Director of Communications, Cambridgeshire County Council
SCDC Cabinet and EMT
The Inspire Project Team
The Inspire communications workstream team
SCDC Communications Manager
SCDC Communications Officer
Focus group of SCDC senior and middle managers
Focus group of SCDC frontline staff
Individual SCDC corporate and middle managers