

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SERVICE PLAN FOR COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

2010/11 TO 2012/13

Portfolio Holders:

Communications: Cllr Tim Wotherspoon
Customer Service: Cllr Tom Bygott
Elections: Cllr Simon Edwards
Equality and Diversity: Cllr Mark Howell

Partnerships: Cllr Ray Manning, Leader
Performance Management and Policy &
Improvement: Cllr Tim Wotherspoon

SERVICE PLAN OVERVIEW

1. About our service

The key functions of the Community and Customer Service area are as follows:

- ❑ To communicate the Council's vision, priorities, objectives and processes effectively both to staff, through an effective internal communication and consultation process, and externally to partners, agencies and the public.
- ❑ To develop and actively contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate communications strategy by maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders including the media and protecting and improving the reputation of the Council.
- ❑ To actively foster and develop positive relationships with local organisations and partners, including the voluntary sector and local business as well as other statutory bodies at county, regional and national levels.
- ❑ To ensure that the Council meets all statutory requirements regarding electoral registration and the conduct of elections.
- ❑ To support the Council's policy-making and service planning processes ensuring their links with the Corporate Plan and the needs of customers and local communities.
- ❑ To support the monitoring and benchmarking of service delivery against national and local indicators and to empower managers across the Council to take action to improve performance where necessary.
- ❑ To champion the examination of policy and services from the perspective of customers, Partners and communities across all services.
- ❑ To make an active and positive contribution to the Council's process of implementing cultural change and organisational development and help to embed a shared vision and values across the organisation.

Community and Customer Services comprises four teams - Communications, Elections, Partnerships, and Policy & Performance. The responsibilities of each team are set out below. However, it should be recognised that there are synergies between functions and a number of shared responsibilities that necessitate close working between the teams and with other service areas across the Council.

The Communications Team is responsible for the following statutory activities:

- Supporting the Council in meeting its statutory duty to inform, consult and engage residents and communities
- Ensuring that Council communications comply with legislation
- Supporting services in their duty to "warn and inform" under the Civil Contingencies Act

... and the following discretionary activities:

- media relations – press office, media releases, media briefings / conferences, coordinating broadcast and print interviews, working with reporters / editors, promoting and pursuing positive opportunities
- publications – including residents' quarterly *South Cambs magazine*

- corporate branding – reviewing and monitoring use of the corporate brand and guidelines for its use
- promotional work – posters, displays, leaflets to support services and corporate initiatives
- internal communication – including staff magazine, Corporate Brief and intranet ‘Pinks’ and ‘Hot Topics’
- reputation management – including strategic communications planning for management or corporate initiatives such as service changes, budget savings and growth areas

The Electoral and Support Services Team is responsible for the following statutory activities:

- compilation and maintenance of the electoral role
- management of elections
- promoting democratic engagement

... and the following discretionary activities:

- catering service for meetings and staff canteen

The Partnerships Team is responsible for the following statutory activities:

- Taking the lead role in preparation and delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy for the South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
- Supporting the development and implementation of the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement (LAA)
- Taking the lead role in the preparation and delivery of the Community Safety Rolling Plan for the CDRP
- Managing projects to enable the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy, the LAA and the Community Safety Rolling Plan
- Supporting Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector to influence Council, LAA and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) decision-making and promoting an environment for a thriving third sector
- Coordinating the delivery of the Council’s Community Engagement Strategy, including neighbourhood panels, parish planning, parish charter and information events

The Policy and Performance Team is responsible for the following statutory activities:

- Promoting equality and diversity and ensuring that the Council complies with all related statutory requirements
- Supporting the Scrutiny and Overview function and ensuring that it meets relevant statutory requirements such as annual Crime and Disorder scrutiny
- Publishing performance information for National Indicators to statutory timescales

... and the following discretionary activities:

- Supporting the development of corporate priorities and policies
- Developing and supporting corporate consultation
- Co-ordinating the Council’s response to, and helping the Council to perform as well as possible in relation to, audit and inspection regimes
- Promoting and supporting performance management throughout the organisation
- Supporting the Service First group to improve customer service
- Managing the Council reception service at Cambourne
- Managing customer service processes such as complaints management.
- The monitoring & review of the Council’s contract, financial payments and performance of the Contact Centre.

2. The Context for Our Plan

a) External Drivers

The following external drivers will influence the service

<p>Political</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of Members in the LAA and partnerships • Involvement of Members in the improvement agenda, including values and scrutiny • Local and general elections • Recognition of the role of the Communications team in reputation management • Expectation of partners in joint communication projects • Making Cambridgeshire Count 	<p>Economic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council budgets and financial position • Recession resulting in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more demand on voluntary advice and support organisations • potential increase in crime levels • potential loss of advertising revenue for <i>South Cambs magazine</i>
<p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic changes • Housing costs and availability • Transport issues • Growth areas e.g. social housing, age, cultures, religion – differing communication needs and implications for equality, diversity and community cohesion • ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ danger – need to manage communications with new and existing communities • Increasing customer expectations 	<p>Technological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further developing performance management ICT and sharing data with partners • Potential for new technology to open communication channels, especially for new home areas • Need for provision of basics such as broadband across the district, including new communities. • Increasing impact of ‘social’ networking sites
<p>Legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAA regime with its emphasis on performance management • Further legislation aimed at strengthening local democracy • Increased scrutiny powers and duties through Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2008 and Police & Justice Act 2007 • Single Equality Bill’s new duty to reduce socio-economic inequality • Individual Registration from July 2010 	<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural areas with differing communication needs • Increasing necessity to look at environmentally-friendly, yet effective methods of communication

b) Key Partners

- Members of Cambridgeshire Together
- Members of South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership and its theme groups, such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- Cambridgeshire consultation partnership
- Cambridgeshire Direct
- Cambridgeshire scrutiny network
- Contact Centre
- East of England scrutiny network
- Equalities Consultative Forum
- IDeA and Improvement East
- Local and industry media
- Parish councils
- Performance management partnership with the County Council and other district councils using CorVu
- Stonewall
- Voluntary and community sector organisations funded by the Council

c) Strengths and Weaknesses

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism, skills and experience • Multi-disciplinary teams • Enthusiasm and commitment • Externally funded posts based at SCDC equals links and resource gain • Working directly with communities to find out their needs • Skills and experience of working with the voluntary sector • Award-winning magazine recognised and valued by staff, councillors, partners and residents 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service is stretched over a range of complex corporate projects with limited resources: for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - policy development - communications projects beyond South Cambs magazine • Management changes with long spells of management vacancies • Lack of technical systems expertise to enable better use, support and development of Resourcelink • Insufficient research expertise • Small teams reliant on individuals' knowledge and skills
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Corvu system • Equalities agenda/EqlAs allow more evidence based decision making • More working in partnership to increase outcomes • Statutory community engagement duty • Scope for greater co-operation and joint work between our teams • New Corporate Manager will improve capacity • Work with graphics and website officers to achieve consistency of communication • Growing use / importance of social media (blogs etc) • Increased importance of communications recognised by Place Survey and performance indicators • Need to promote the Council's achievements and value for money • Need to develop political support for the role of scrutiny 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New National Indicator set and performance management framework • Potential loss of momentum on improvement programme following discontinuation of Improvement Board • Impact from partners' services on our performance e.g. Anti-Social Behaviour. • Funding coming to an end – Equalities secondment • Lack of understanding of impact of growth areas • Lack of buy-in to strategic communications • Increased social media v traditional channels • Greater scrutiny responsibilities not matched by greater resources • No additional funding to meet additional legislative changes relating to electoral services and scrutiny

3. Council Objectives

The Council set Aims, Approaches and Actions for 2010/11, which helps us to achieve the South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy, the Council's vision and the county-wide Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Delivery of all five Aims are supported by the communications, elections, policy and performance and partnerships teams.

DRAFT COUNCIL ACTIONS FOR 2010/11

Community and Customer Services provides corporate support for all twelve of the twelve Council Actions agreed in draft form by the Cabinet on 10 September 2009. We have direct or shared responsibility for the delivery of five of them:

We will achieve Customer Service Excellence accreditation by 31 March 2011
We will increase the number of teenagers taking part in positive activities by ? (figure to be added) in 2010/11
We will achieve ? % (target to be added) reductions in the emission of CO ₂ from the Council's operations and publicise the outcome in order to set an example to other organisations
We will work with parish councils to complete at least 6 local projects (or other quantified targets to be developed) supported by LPSA funding to contribute to the county target for the reduction of CO ₂ emissions
We will implement key actions (yet to be determined) from the Community Transport Plan

VALUES

The Council has also adopted a set of Values which will be embedded in the service in 2010/11 through behaviours agreed across the Council:

Customer service; Mutual Respect; Trust; Commitment to Improving Services

4. Service Objectives

Service objectives have been developed to take account of the Council's aims, approaches and actions, which assist the Council in delivering the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement the South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy.

1. To work towards the following communications objectives - that
 - the council is held in high repute by all stakeholders for its services and the leadership it gives to all South Cambridgeshire communities
 - members and staff feel well informed and act as advocates for the council with all stakeholder groups
 - 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.
2. To support the democratic process by striving to make voting and voter registration easier, secure and more accessible to all, using the most up to date methods.
3. To build strong and sustainable communities through the continuing development and delivery of activities, resources and support to strengthen the skills and confidence of people and community groups to enable them to take effective action and leading roles:
 - Support partnership action aimed at creating sustainable communities, through ensuring robust governance, council engagement and appropriate leadership
 - Co-ordinate the delivery of the district council's Community Engagement Strategy
 - Empower and engage the third sector
 - Empower and engage Parish Councils
4. To work with local people and partners to co-produce strong, safe and sustainable communities
 - Promote and support effective partnership action through ensuring robust governance, council engagement and appropriate leadership
 - Promote and support effective community engagement, providing opportunities for individuals and organisations to influence decision-making
 - Support, engage and empower the third sector
 - Support, engage and empower parish councils
 - Work together with partners to tackle anti-social behaviour and the impact it has on local communities
 - Work together with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime

5. To promote equality and diversity, targeting resources to those in greatest need.
6. To work with the Service First Group to promote a culture and commitment to excellent customer service across the Council, with the whole Council achieving the national Customer Service Excellence award by 31 March 2011.
7. To provide a reception service which is an outstanding first point of contact at which customers can easily access services and information.
8. To keep under review the Council's contract and financial payments with the Contact Centre and the resulting level of service provided, resolving issues with the Contact Centre management or through the agreed mechanisms, as appropriate.

5. Our Customers

We have a range of customers -

- Internal customers – staff and Members – who receive support regarding communications; partnership advice; customer service (for example through Reception and the complaints system); performance management (CorVu); policy advice, service planning; equality and diversity; and scrutiny.
- External customers include members of the local community, partner organisations, grant recipients, parish councils, businesses, the voluntary sector and community groups, visitors to reception and all electors.
- Internal audit, external audit, Audit Commission and other inspection bodies.

What do customers think of the services provided by the service?

46% of residents feel well informed about the Council, more than all other residents in the county (2008 Place Survey). The readership survey of Spring 2009 show a high satisfaction rate with *South Cambs magazine*. Around three quarters found the magazine easy to read, well designed and informative.

Internal communications is improving - two thirds of staff feel well informed and 78% have regular team meetings. 97% of managers have attended corporate brief and 100% agree that they get the information they need to brief their team. 90% prefer the new-style of delivery. Any issues arising from the 2009 staff survey will be built into the refreshed communication strategy and action plan.

As part of the internet registration process, electors have provided feedback on the registration service. All the feedback has been positive and demonstrates the growing demand of the electorate to use electronic methods of communicating with the Council.

The Policy and Performance Team asked for feedback from internal customers on its roles and responsibilities and this led to a minor restructuring of the team, and a refocusing of priorities implemented in Autumn 2009.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee conducted an annual survey which showed Cabinet's and officers' growing confidence in its abilities. Feedback following the Orchard Park review was very positive. One minor reservation was expressed regarding the task and finish group's need for more informality; this will inform our approach at future reviews.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee also provides a feedback form for people who attend their meetings. Last year these showed that people always feel welcome, that they can generally understand what is going on and they feel that the committee works efficiently and effectively. Some would have liked more time for residents' questions. However, this would only be appropriate if the scrutiny meeting was hosting a public forum.

Regular externally run surveys indicate good levels of satisfaction among visitors to the Cambourne office, with the majority rating our reception service as excellent and no visitors rating it as poor.

The Place Survey showed a high satisfaction rate amongst residents regarding crime and anti-social behaviour, and yet only an average level of satisfaction with the role played by the Council, police and other local services in dealing with these issues.

6. Are we meeting the needs of all our community?

The Policy and Performance team is supporting all services within the Council to understand customers' changing needs. Customers' equalities data is starting to be effectively mapped in some service areas and this is being further developed alongside the EQIA process.

A key message is that the percentage of residents aged 65 or above is forecast to rise from 14.8% in 2001 to 23.5% by 2021. Conversely, the percentage of under 20-year olds is forecast to decrease from 25% in 2001 to 22.6% by 2021. The Gypsy and Traveller population is also growing and the District is report to have one of the highest populations of migrant workers in the country.

We supported managers in completing a total of 46 High and Medium risk Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) by 31 March 2010. In 2010/11 we will focus on Low risk EqIAs and help managers to improve monitoring of customers' equalities data. We strengthened the reporting process to ensure that all reports to Cabinet or Council now have an (EqIA).

In 2009 we enrolled the Council as a Stonewall Diversity Champion, demonstrating the Council's commitment to promoting lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the workplace. We will support seven national and international equality and diversity events during 2010/11.

From April 2011 we will look at developing a Single Equality Scheme to cover age, disability, gender, race, religion/faith and sexual orientation - and perhaps a 7th strand of equalities, called 'rurality.'

We have revised the voluntary sector grants process to benefit more residents.

7. Our Performance and Plans to Improve

Achievements in 2009/10

The revised corporate brief style was well received by staff and is helping to strengthen relationships between EMT and their managers.

Communication of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document was very successful with well-attended exhibitions, balanced and informed media coverage and informed representations. This has led to South Cambridgeshire being hailed as a leader in this field.

Positive engagement with local media and news agencies continues, with improving relationships on all side. This has been supported by informal feedback.

All Electoral Commission performance standards were met or exceeded.

With funding from central government a flyer was included with 2009 canvass form to encourage households to respond. South Cambridgeshire had the highest turnout in the county for the combined local and European elections in June 2009. The elections were conducted smoothly; the count was completed and results announced well within target times.

We were able to disband the Improvement Board created following the Corporate Governance Inspection of 2008. The assessment was that the Council has some way to go but there has been significant improvement in our governance arrangements.

In June 2009 we achieved Level 2 of the Local Government Equalities Standard. An IDeA review showed that we were in fact well on the way to the 'Achieving' level of the Equalities Framework, which we aim to reach by June 2010. As a member of Stonewall we will have access to a national benchmarking framework on equalities.

We won a national award from the Centre for Public Scrutiny for the best use of scrutiny resources. We had completed a wide ranging review of Orchard Park, supported by one full-time scrutiny support officer, which equates to the average level of support amongst district councils.

The new Performance Management system (CorVu) was successfully launched on the In-Site as a portal, which provided easy access to all staff and Members.

Where we plan to improve

With the appointment of a new full-time corporate manager, Community and Customer Services will aim to provide a more coherently understood and better-coordinated service for internal and external customers.

Improvements in all aspects of customer service are expected as a result of working towards the Customer Service Excellence Standard, specifically regarding customer insight and consultation. To enable the Council to put the customer at the heart of its service delivery, Service First Steering Group will be seeking to improve consultation and data collection across the Council.

We will work to improve public perception about the value for money provided by SCDC. In the 2008 Place Survey, only 33% of residents agreed that SCDC provides value for money - on a par with the national average but 3% lower than the Cambridgeshire average. 39% neither agreed nor disagreed which suggests low awareness of the value for money they are receiving, especially given that SCDC has the 12th lowest council tax of all district councils.

We also plan to set up a staff forum if funding allows.

Recruitment of a new, more senior electoral services assistant will enable us to provide more consistent service delivery.

Implementation of the new legislation regarding individual registration will enable the electorate to have more faith in the integrity of the electoral system.

We will continue to build relationships with parish councils and work with them to deliver on their community-led plans.

We will support the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to clearly identify its priorities, make even better use of its resources and publicise the effectiveness of the partnership working that is occurring across the district.

The appointment of a new policy and performance manager and senior policy officer will increase capacity to provide a 'horizon-scanning' policy service and to assume responsibility for project management across the Council; responsibility for this was previously held within ICT services.

Following a restructure of the policy and performance team, its members will aim to provide a tailored and more effective link with individual service areas.

8. Our Financial Resources

To be added into final service plan in March with info supplied by Finance.

9. Value for Money

The Communications, Electoral Services, Partnerships, and Policy & Performance teams are all small, lean teams. Value for money comparison with other councils is difficult because all have different structures and ways of providing these services. However, there are some benchmarking figures.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny's 2008 annual survey shows that in district councils the average number of scrutiny officers was 1.4. SCDC has 1. The average scrutiny budget for district councils in 2008 was £3,735 (down £1,588 on 2007). The figure at SCDC is £5,000 but this also covers venue hire and scrutiny training.

Communications staffing costs at SCDC are £92,000. Across the local authority benchmarking group, the median for staffing costs is £147,000. Communications spend per resident is £1.51. Across the benchmarking group, the median is £2.36.

10. Workforce Overview 2010/11

Partnerships Team:

- 1 x Partnerships Manager
- 1 x Partnerships Officer
- 0.6 x Community Safety Officer
- 1 x Community Liaison Officer
- 0.6 x CDRP Partnership Support Officer
- 0.6 x CDRP Anti-Social Behaviour Caseworker

Policy and Performance Team (all full time unless stated otherwise)

- 1 x Policy and Performance Manager
- 1 x Senior Policy and Performance Officer
- 1 x Equality and Diversity Officer
- 1 x Performance Information Officer (0.5 FTE)
- 1 x Scrutiny Development Officer
- 1 x Customer Services Coordinator
- 1 x Equality Projects Officer (1 year post to May 2010) (awaiting confirmation)
- 2 x Receptionists

Communications Team:

- 1 x Communications Manager
- 1 x Communications Officer (job-share)

Electoral and Support Services team:

- 1 x Electoral and Support Services Manager
- 1 x Electoral Services Assistant
- 1 x Administration Assistant
- 1.7 x FTE Catering staff

Both the Partnerships and Policy and Performance teams are of a multi-disciplinary nature and address issues where there is a great deal of ongoing change. Staff development and keeping up with current issues will continue to be an important workforce consideration.

Another major issue for these teams is that there is very little cover when posts are vacant through turnover or sickness. This was particularly evident last year with vacancies in the Equality and Diversity Officer and Anti-Social Behaviour Caseworker posts.

The size of the Policy and Performance team grew in response to issues raised in the Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) of 2007. Nevertheless, there were still under

resourced areas (such as policy development, research and benchmarking). Following a review of the team structure in June 2009, it was agreed to create a new Senior Policy Officer position. This was funded by creating a 0.5FTE performance information officer post in place of the FT performance improvement officer post, and not filling the vacant Policy Officer post.

The post of Business Analyst became vacant during 2009 and this was seen as an opportunity to make an efficiency saving.

In the restructure of the policy and performance team, its members have expanded the generic element of their roles so that each provides a link with an individual service area. This will necessitate some training and increased communication within the team.

The Communications team lost a fixed term post in March 2009 which has reduced capacity for corporate and cross-council projects. Changes to the Council's firewall, means that staff will need training to make use of social networking sites for more efficient communication.

The main workforce issue for the Electoral and Support Services team is that the service pressures fall unevenly throughout the year.

11. Risk Overview

- a) Failure to deliver community safety targets leading to dissatisfaction by partners and residents and poor CAA score in Cambridgeshire resulting in poor reputation
- b) Failure to meet duty of community engagement leading to disengaged communities and poor CAA score resulting in frustration by partner agencies and loss of reputation
- c) LSP not being fit for purpose judged by Audit Commission assessment leading to poor reputation and further assessment resulting in additional workload
- d) Lack of progress in equalities leading to compliance risks and non achievement of Council objectives
- e) Delayed progress in the implementation of Corvu leading to possible delays in achieving the Council's performance management objectives.
- f) Lack of progress on the embedding of Council values
- g) Poor perception of local services/ Council, leading to low NI scores on satisfaction ratings, resulting in lowered CAA performance and poor reputation.
- h) Limited capacity within small teams to deliver on increasing range of projects and responsibilities (Communications Strategy, Equalities, Values, Growth) leading to ill-informed residents and partners resulting in poor reputation and lowered performance
- i) Poor perception of organisation internally leading to staff dissatisfaction, lower external perception of council, resulting in poor reputation
- j) Limited capacity within a small Communications team leading to issues in delivering in sustained emergencies or major incidents, leading to inefficient response to emergencies, resulting in poor reputation, failure to meet terms of the Civil Contingencies Act
- k) Snap general election leading to election team being unable to cope due to lack of staff and very tight timetables, resulting in one or more election petitions
- l) Illness of Electoral Services Manager before election would mean employing a consultant (they would be able to administer the election, but would struggle with local arrangements) resulting in the Returning Officer having to take control; potentially an election petition could be lodged if there was any question regarding the conduct of the poll
- m) Aggressive customer leading to assault on reception staff resulting in potential need to employ temporary staff to cover absence if injured staff; visitors' perception or experience of reception capability is reduced; criticism over contingency arrangements
- n) Delay or failure to achieve the Customer Service Excellence Standard due to insufficient budget, corporate capacity or buy in from officers and members
- o) Failure to operate an effective complaints handling system could lead to low levels of customer satisfaction and damage the Council's reputation
- p) Failure to maintain an effective working relationship with the Contact Centre resulting in poor performance leading to low levels of customer satisfaction and value for money.