

ROSSENDALE BC
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
(DRAFT)

Rossendalealive

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1. Foreword from the Leader

Welcome to our first Communication Strategy. This has been developed to make sure we focus on communication and engagement as we take forward our agenda for change.

We have come a long way already – and we are proud of what we have achieved so far. Underpinning much of our changes has been a commitment to improve the ways in which we communicate. To make even greater improvements we need to hear what people want for themselves and their area, to ensure our priorities are focused on the things which will make a real difference to people. And we must make every effort to tell people the actions we are taking, and the ways in which they can be involved.

Communication is at the heart of all we do – and getting it right will be a major challenge for us over the coming months

Councillor Duncan Ruddick
Leader
Rossendale BC

2. Introduction

Rossendale Council is in the middle of a period of rapid change. This pace of change has been a necessary and welcome response to the need for the organisation to improve quickly.

With a new senior management team in place and the organisation's previous weaknesses being addressed, Rossendale Council can look forward to the future, confident that its improvement and transformation can be sustained and that real improvements can be delivered for the people of Rossendale.

Rossendale Council recognises that effective communications are essential to an effective, well performing organisation. They are crucial in ensuring people understand the Council today, and how it's delivering on its priorities – not how things used to be.

More fundamentally, as the role of the Council shifts from service provider to service commissioner, together with the increasing role as community leader, championing local people, communication is at the heart of everything the Council does. Elected Members and staff will require effective communication skills in order to contribute to the Council achieving its objectives and the borough being the best it can be.

Significant improvements in Communication have already been made, including additional resources being directed into communication activities, however there is still scope to improve the way that the Council communicates with all of its stakeholders. These improvements should take place within the framework of a comprehensive communications strategy that is applied across the whole Council and is driven by the needs of the Corporate Improvement Plan.

This Communication Strategy identifies the key communication challenges that the Council faces, and sets out what must be done to ensure that the Council overcomes these challenges. It shows how effective communications can help the Council to achieve the objectives in its Corporate Improvement Plan and add value to the business plans for individual service areas.

The strategy also supports and makes linkages with several other corporate strategies and initiatives including the Community Strategy, the Equalities Policy, the Consultation Strategy, the Customer Services Strategy the Staff Morale Action Plan and eGovernment Initiatives.

The result is a strategy which demonstrates, in a positive way, that the Council is corporately committed to developing a communications culture which is based on genuine communication between Members, employees, our partners, ourselves, and the people of Rossendale. Communication isn't just about imparting information, it is also about listening and responding, openly and honestly.

Rossendale Council recognises that the majority of its communication takes place beyond the scope of a structured Communications programme. Therefore, this strategy sets the overall framework and approach for communication that supports and guides Council employees and Members, helping them to deliver the changes that are required to make this strategy a

success. In so doing, the strategy seeks to create a communications culture that will inspire people and facilitate a culture of excellence within the Authority.

3 Corporate Communication Challenges

Communication is central to all that we do – from developing our priorities, to ensuring staff understand and deliver on them. In developing this Strategy we have reviewed national and local communication trends and considered the key messages from resident and staff surveys together with Rossendale’s ambitions as set out in Rossendale Alive and Rossendale BC’s Corporate Improvement Plan.

From this the five key communication challenges identified are:

- Improving the profile of Rossendale Borough Council (Challenge 1)
- Improving customer satisfaction (Challenge 2)
- Engaging with communities (Challenge 3)
- Promoting Rossendale (Challenge 4)
- Engaging with staff (Challenge 5)

Challenge One - Improving the profile of Rossendale Borough Council

“Communication is a fundamental component in how local residents judge the overall image of their council.

IDeA – Connecting with Communities

Rossendale BC has achieved significant improvements across its services and the way the council itself operates. This has been recognised by external organisations but more needs to be done to communicate these changes – and the very real difference they make to the quality of life for local people.

National research indicates that people know little about councils or what they do. Nationally, only half of the people surveyed feel their council keeps them well informed. For Rossendale BC xx% people believe the council keeps them well informed.

This is important as research indicates that the less that people know about an organisation, the less well they are likely to perceive its performance. There a strong link between how familiar people are with a service or organisation and how favourable they are towards it.

This clearly demonstrates that the profile of the Council has a major impact on the way people view the services they receive.

As part of the raising of the profile of Rossendale BC the Council will be rolling out a new corporate identity. Focus groups carried out during 2004, and the Best Value Review of Customer Services, identified the need for the Council to update its branding in view of some negative perceptions that were attributed to the legacy logo.

The rapid improvements that have been made in customer services and the future improvements that are now identified in the Corporate Improvement Plan mean that the time

is now right to introduce this change. As services continue to improve it is right that the Council should seek to capitalise on this by adopting a new corporate identity.

The new identity is based on the Rossendale Alive branding which was developed as a generic brand for Rossendale and as an identity for the Rossendale Partnership and the Community Strategy developed by the Partnership.

By adapting the Rossendale Alive branding, the Council is publicly demonstrating its synergy with the Community Strategy and its support for the Rossendale Partnership. The new branding will be phased in over a five year period.

A key challenge for the Council is to explain the importance of focusing on key priorities that have widespread support in the community, and in so doing, to demonstrate that it is capable of making a difference and adding value.

One of the most important communications channels for the Council is the local media and the Rossendale Free Press in particular. As part of raising the profile of the Rossendale BC, it is important that the Council achieves a balanced or positive media profile. Current media monitoring statistics show that of all the media coverage of the Council between April and June 2005, 60% was positive in tone, 10% was balanced and 30% was negative. Our aim, as Council services continue to improve and the Council becomes more effective at media management, should be to achieve 70% positive, 25% neutral and less than 5% negative.

Having introducing a centralised media enquiries service during February 2005 and provided some media training during Spring 2005, a key focus for the Communication Department will be to deliver further media training and to ensure that Corporate Media Guidelines are developed and implemented.

Challenge Two – Improving Customer Satisfaction

Rossendale Council is aiming to have achieved a customer satisfaction level of at least 50% by 2007 rising to 80% by 2008.

Our previous customer satisfaction surveys have recorded relatively high satisfaction levels with individual services such as waste collection, and parks and open spaces which both had satisfaction levels above 70%, but the overall rating for the council has been significantly lower. This is the case nationally – with people identifying more strongly with individual services than the Council overall. A key challenge is to ensure that the Council as a corporate body receives the credit for the successes within individual service areas and that popular services are clearly branded as being part of the Council.

Our levels of overall customer satisfaction are largely influenced by local people's perceptions that they have received poor services in the past and their lack of awareness of the services which the Council provides. We want customer satisfaction to reflect the improving nature of our services – as part of this we will focus on publicising our service improvements.

A key element of delivering improvements in customer satisfaction will be the successful implementation of the Customer Services Strategy. Our targets for improving customer service and increasing customer satisfaction demonstrate our commitment to this issue. The Communications Department will be supporting this initiative by promoting the Customer Service Standards, implementing relevant parts of the Customer Services Action Plans and supporting the internal communication processes which will help to cascade customer feedback and embed good practice.

3.4 Engaging with Communities (Challenge 3)

Rossendale BC is committed to strengthening its role as community leader in order that it can fully champion the borough and its people. This requires Councillors to be able to articulate the needs of the community and ensuring that these are met by the Council and other partners either directly or indirectly. The Communications Department will support this goal by helping Members to become more effective ambassadors for the Council and their communities.

Central to the notion of community leadership is the importance of community engagement and effective consultation, particularly in relation to identifying customer service needs and priorities. In achieving this, Rossendale BC will ensure:

- good intelligence gathering and community consultation mechanisms, which take account of different interests and perspectives and are used to inform priority setting
- feedback is provided to those involved in consultation and more efficient ways are developed for getting input from service users and acting on it.
- The Council's priorities continue to respond to both national and local priorities, and these are effectively communicated internally and externally.

The Communications Department will be supporting several key areas of consultation and engagement outlined in the corporate plan including:

- Consultation with hard to reach groups including young people, rural households, the ethnic minority community, young mothers, unemployed people, disabled people and other significant minority groups.
- Raising public awareness and participation in Area Forums.
- Supporting the Member Development programme in raising the profile of councillors so as to achieve a 50% recognition rating for local councillors by March 2007.
- Demonstrating that action is being taken as a result of official complaints that have been made to the Council. This will help to increase the level of satisfaction in relation to complaints handling to 70% by March 2007.

3.6 Promoting a positive image of Rossendale (Challenge 4)

The long term success of the borough and its people relies on us being able to project a positive image of the area. Rossendale will be developing and promoting a 'whole life image'

– promoting the excellent aspects that the borough has to offer for people at every stage of their lives. This will contribute to Rossendale’s developing role within East Lancashire, Lancashire County Council and the Region. It will also support the borough maximising the benefits from initiatives taking place outside its boundaries.

Rossendale Council recognises that it cannot achieve its aims in isolation and must work with the community and its partners to secure key objectives for the borough.

Without exception, the objectives set out in the Rossendale Alive Community Strategy will contribute to achieving a positive image for Rossendale.

3.8 Improving Staff Engagement and Morale (Challenge 8)

The significant programme of change ongoing within Rossendale BC creates challenges for staff. A Staff Morale Action Plan has been implemented and a Staff Morale Working Group formed. The Staff Survey and the resulting Action Plan outline a clear role for Communications in helping to improve staff morale and increasing employee engagement.

This work will support the corporate objective of increasing the percentage of staff who agree that the ‘Golden Thread’ is clearly communicated from 25% currently, to 60% by March 2006 and 75% by March 2008.

Several important improvements in Internal Communications have already been implemented including a regular ‘Daily Message’ through email, weekly media briefings, increased use of the Intranet, the re-launch of the Grapevine internal newsletter, corporate briefing sessions (e.g. accommodation relocation proposals), Team Briefing, more employees being offered one to one sessions with their manager and more employees being offered regular Personal Development Reviews. These changes and are already having a positive impact on staff morale, but a key challenge will be to ensure that the changes become embedded into the way that the Council functions.

Internal Communications activity will concentrate on engaging with staff and explaining the reasons for the numerous major change initiatives within the authority. This will be complemented by a re-launched staff suggestion scheme, a new staff recognition and rewards scheme, communications support for the Team Briefing system, and regular editions of the Grapevine internal newsletter.

4. Target audiences

Rossendale Council has many stakeholders and a large number of people and organisations that it must influence in order to secure its strategic objectives. Many of these are listed in Appendix A and although this list is by no means exhaustive it does demonstrate the breadth of people and institutions that the Council needs to communicate with.

The purpose of identifying these audiences is to be able to make our communications more effective by targeting particular audiences in a particular way. Clearly if we have a good understanding of the audience we are targeting then our communications can be pitched appropriately and are more likely to achieve the desired results.

In order to communicate effectively we must present our message in the most appropriate way for the intended audience – This includes using different formats (large print, audio tapes); relevant languages and appropriate media.

5 Consultation, Community Engagement and Customer Information

Consultation is a key form of communication which allows the Council to listen to, and act upon, the views of the community. Its value is that it provides the opportunity for the Council to have a two-way dialogue with people. It can be used both to explain what the Council wants to do and to give people the opportunity to say whether they agree, or if they think there is a better way to do something. Effective consultation procedures mean that the Council can be truly responsive to community needs and will help the Council to make better decisions.

Rossendale Council recognises the importance of effective consultation through its existing Consultation Strategy developed in 2003. The Consultation Strategy provides the framework within which the Council undertakes a wide variety of consultation and community engagement activity using a variety of tools and techniques.

This Communication Strategy has a key role to play in helping to deliver the Consultation Strategy and in supporting consultation activity within Rossendale.

Consultation activity and customer information gathering currently take place across numerous council departments. The internal communications programme that has been outlined previously can help the Council to plan and share consultation and customer information more effectively so as to spread best practice and maximise the benefits of the activity that takes place and the information that is gathered.

The effectiveness of consultation activity would also benefit from having a lead officer at Management Team level to oversee the gathering and use of consultation and customer information and the co-ordination of key internal stakeholders who collect and use consultation and customer information.

Through this Strategy, the Communications Department will ensure that communications mechanisms are in place to help promote and deliver more effective consultation activity and will provide advice to colleagues on the most effective way to reach particular audiences.

This will include providing communication channels which will help us to improve that way that we providing feedback to the people we consult and making more effort to publicly demonstrate that we are using the information collected to help shape policies and decisions.

Through improving our feedback mechanisms and demonstrating that consultation is effective this strategy will help to build trust in the Council's Consultation activities and encourage people to have their say.

6. Evaluation, monitoring, targets and review

The development of this strategy and accompanying Action Plans is only the start of an ongoing process of effective communication for Rossendale Council.

Regular monitoring and review will need to be undertaken to ensure that the strategy is being followed, that actions are on target, and that the strategy is still valid in view of changing circumstances.

An annual review will look at the progress made against the objectives that have been set out, to ensure that the Communications Strategy is still relevant to the Council's overall strategic aims and is focused on the correct communication's challenges.

Monitoring reports will be presented to Management Team once every six months and an annual report will be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny committee setting out progress and identifying areas where the strategy requires updating.

It will be the responsibility of the Communications Department to monitor the strategy and provide updates. It is recognised that significant amounts of baseline performance data are not available and one of the first tasks will be to set up performance management systems, which can capture this baseline data and provide a base from which to monitor progress and improvements.

7. Implementing the Communications Strategy - Action Plans

The focus on external communications aims to raise the profile of the Council, improve its reputation, build a strong brand for the future and support effective consultation and community engagement processes.

In addition, the Council has a wider responsibility to promote a positive image of Rossendale as this will have a significant impact on the wellbeing of the whole community.

The External Communications Action Plan addresses all of these issues.

In addition, the focus on internal communications will build on work which has already begun in terms of improving the internal communications infrastructure and ways of engaging with staff. The aim of this internal communications strategy is to lay the foundations and embed a communications culture within the Council which will support the effective delivery and implementation of cultural change, improvement and transformation within the Authority.

Rossendale Council recognises that good internal communications are vital to the long term success of the organisation. Effective internal communications should be viewed as the oil that keeps the wheels of the organisation turning, by providing employees and Members with key information to enable them to do their job well. More importantly, a good formal internal communications programme gives employees a stake in the organisation and makes them feel that they are valued and their opinions are welcomed. It also helps internal stakeholders to fully understand, apply and relate to the Council's vision, values, goals and priorities and engage with the Corporate Plan. Therefore, the Internal Communication Strategy will help to promote the importance of the Council's 'Golden Thread'.

The next staff survey, due later this year, will provide an opportunity to review the progress that has been made and will help to identify any additional communications support that may be required.

The Action Plans are attached as Appendices

Appendix A

Comprehensive list of relevant target audiences for Rossendale Council's communication activity.

Rossendale Council has many stakeholders and a large number of people and organisations that it must influence in order to secure its strategic objectives. Many of these are listed below, although the list is by no means exhaustive.

The purpose of identifying these audiences is to be able to make our communications more effective by targeting particular audiences in a particular way. Clearly if we have a good understanding of the audience we are targeting then our communications can be pitched appropriately and is more likely to achieve the desired results.

Rossendale Citizens segmented as follows:

Geographic

Urban Rossendale
Rural Rossendale
Rawtenstall, Bacup, Haslingden, Whitworth

Demographic

Young People
Minority Ethnic
Disabled People
Unemployed People
Single Parent
Other disadvantaged and 'hard to reach groups'

Internal Audiences

Rossendale Council Elected Members
Council Employees
Managers

Partners

Rossendale Partnership
Community Network
Police
Primary Care Trusts
Groundwork
Lancashire County Council
Enterprise
Potential Strategic Partners

Media

Rossendale Free Press
Lancashire Evening Telegraph

BBC Radio Lancashire
The Bee
2BR
Tower FM
BBC North West
Tabloids
Broadsheets
National Radio
National TV

Cultural Influencers

Other Local Authorities regionally and nationally
Lancashire Leaders and Chief Executives
North West Regional Development Agency
Voluntary Organisations Network
Northwest Cultural Consortium
Countryside Agency

Political and Governmental

North West Regional Assembly
MPs
MEPs
Ministers
Key Civil Servants

Business

Local Business Leaders (SME through to large institutions)
Businesses (who are dependent upon the Rossendale Catchments)
Employees who work for local businesses
Local & National Chamber of Commerce
CBI
Institute of Directors

UK & International Tourists

Leisure
Consumer (traveling independently)
Visiting, Friends & Relatives (VFR)
Schools & Colleges
Schools Day Visits