

People and Communities Directorate

Communication Strategy 2015 - 2016

Strategic Director People and Communities

Signed:

Dated: 30 April 2015

People and Communities Communications Strategy 2015 - 2016

Introduction and background

This strategy has been designed to outline and provide clear direction for communications (both internal and external) for the People and Communities Directorate. This communications framework will help to embed the **20/20 Vision, the Council's Vision and Values and Corporate Customer Care Standards** for Bath and North East Somerset Council within the People and Communities Directorate. It will help us to better deliver services across our core areas:

- **Children's Services**
- **Adult Services**
- **Public Health**
- **Clinical commissioning Group**

Why do we need this strategy?

The ultimate aim is for everyone coming into contact with People and Communities to have a clear understanding, appropriately designed information and a positive perception of our services, leading to high levels of satisfaction and engagement.

Aims, Vision and Objectives

The 20/20 Vision for Bath and North East Somerset Council sets out four key themes for development:

- (1) **Growth and Prosperity**
- (2) **Our Successful Business**
- (3) **Customer and Community Focus**
- (4) **From Reactive to Preventative**

These four themes are integral to all directorates but due to the nature of the services we deliver across the People and Communities directorate, **themes 3 and 4 are particularly crucial:**

- **Customer and Community Focus:** *"We will keep our **customer at the heart of everything we do** and will support customers and communities to do more for themselves. We will work even more with our communities and public service partners. Not every service needs*

to be delivered universally and we must focus on those who need our help the most.”

- **From Reactive to Preventative:** *“To get this right, we need to work with our communities to support people earlier, before they reach a crisis point. If we can shift the balance so that more of what we do is preventative then it allows us to be much more effective as an organisation, focusing our resources and energy where we can add value”*

The provision of good quality information is central to what we all do. People using our services and the staff providing them, need accurate, relevant, timely and accessible information appropriate to their needs. Good information ensures people understand what services are available to them, their cost (if any), who provides them and how to access them. Good information assists the work of operational and strategic staff and helps redress adverse publicity by increasing understanding of duties, services and resources available. Effective information enables customers to exercise choice in accessing services; it empowers people and enables them to take responsibility for their own lives.

Delivering Objectives/Outcomes

In order to deliver the above themes, a robust communications strategy needs to be place to deliver and reinforce these key messages to all staff and to customers, so that over time they become more embedded and integrated into the work we do.

To do this, we need to remember that the **customer is at the heart of everything we do**. An effective communication strategy will help us to honour this pledge and deliver the following objectives of:

- **Understanding** our customers and how they prefer to be engaged with
- **Ensuring** information accurately reflects the needs of our local population and the services available
- **Ensuring** people get the right information and/or advice the first time they seek it, by asking the right questions at the right time.
- **Ensuring** people receive the same high quality, consistent and accessible information wherever they access it
- **Engaging** regularly with customers by establishing clear communication channels and listen to customer views rather than just merely informing customers

- **Giving** customers the opportunity to provide feedback and encourage them to help us shape services
- **Utilising** research available to develop a clear understanding of customer needs
- **Improving** access for socially excluded/'seldom heard or unengaged groups

It is important that we increase efforts to understand what local communities are saying.

Our communications strategy will therefore also need to reflect our approach to consulting our customers (see People and Communities Directorate Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2015 – 2018)

Audiences – who are our stakeholders?

The People and Communities Directorate within Bath and North East Somerset Council have a range of audiences. It is important for all teams, services and commissioning providers to ensure that key messages are delivered to right the audiences at the right time and in formats/languages and locations that are accessible to all, to ensure we reach as many people as possible.

- Customers and residents
- Potential service users
- Voluntary/third sector organisations
- Businesses and investors
- Commissioned services
- Staff
- Members
- National Government
- Government Agencies
- Media – Local, National, Trade, On and Offline
- Visitors

How we do reach them?

- With face to face interactions, e.g. at One Stop Shops, during outreach, training sessions
- Web information, including blogs, news alerts and apps
- Social media (eg Facebook and Twitter)
- Leaflet/poster/booklet/bookmarks – printed material
- Over the phone (e.g. Council Connect telephone line)
- By email, text and on line forms
- In person –During dedicated weeks, e.g. Stop Adult Abuse week, Carers’ week, school intake open evenings etc. Connect TV
- Ask them – how would they like to be contacted and when?
- Ensure the information is in a format and/or language the customer can access – more information can found here - <http://intranet/translation-interpretation-and-other-formats>

What information do we provide?

- What services are (and are not) provided
- How to apply (e.g. for social housing, a school place etc)
- How to buy/book services and what the cost will be
- How to contact us
- Signposting to other services (e.g. for ‘self-funders’)
- Information about eligibility/how to make a referral/assessment
- What people can expect from a service
- How to make a complaint/compliment about services
- How can customers participate in shaping services
- How customers can comment on the service they have received and how we will use their feedback

How do we provide it?

External Media

Bath and North East Somerset’s reputation is based on perception, or how people see us. It is therefore very important that when producing content for print media, the web or social media, that we adhere to Bath and North East Somerset’s [Corporate Identity and Branding guidelines](#).

Internal Communications

Developing a coordinated approach to internal communications for the People and Communities Directorate will ensure that staff are aware of the Directorate's priorities. Any questions re-communication can be directed to the **People and Communities Communications Co-ordinator, Melanie Hodgson on 01225 477983 or email Melanie_Hodgson@bathnes.gov.uk**, who can advise on this and support services involved in communication campaigns.

It is also important that employees understand how their actions and how they communicate contributes to the achievement of priorities, as well as how the Directorate (and subsequently the Council) is perceived internally and externally.

In order to develop our People and Communities consistent and accessible internal communications strategy, we will continue to deliver:

- **Staff Briefings** – These are delivered quarterly at a number of locations for all People and Communities Staff. For those who cannot attend, any relevant documents/information reports can be found on the staff intranet
- **Ashley Ayre's Blog** All staff receive fortnightly updates from the Strategic Director reiterating key messages and updates on relevant legislative news, priorities, etc

If staff have any ideas or ways to improve our internal communications within People and Communities, they are encouraged to contact the **People and Communities Communications Co-ordinator Melanie Hodgson on 01225 477983 or email Melanie_Hodgson@bathnes.gov.uk**

How will we know this is working?

We will review our communications strategy annually with staff, stakeholders and customers to ensure, where possible, all communication activity continues to be effective and reach the target audience in the best way.

We will continue to seek feedback from our customers and service users in a number of ways on how they engage with different communications and use this to improve our communication strategy.