



South
Staffordshire
Council



EXTERNAL **Communication**

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Foreword

Our previous external communication strategy was introduced in 2008 and since then we've made huge progress in improving the way we communicate.

Communications for local councils has changed rapidly over the past two years. Social Media is playing an ever-increasing role against a backdrop of financial uncertainty which has changed the traditional channels upon which councils have relied for communicating with local communities.

'Value for Money' is the key as local councils are rightly expected to justify and make the most of every penny of tax payer's money spent.

Communications is a two-way process – it's about giving people the chance to have their say and air their views as well as simply providing information. That's why communicating, engaging and consulting effectively with our local communities is so important – because better communications lead to more effective and efficient services, a better reputation and stronger relationships.

Successful organisations like us know that we can't stand still. We need to review and develop what we do with a commitment from across the organisation – members, management, staff and partners.

This strategy sets out where we've come from, where we are and where we want to be in the future.



Where have we come from and where are we now?

Since 2008 we've communicated with, engaged with and consulted with thousands of local people.

Our audiences are wide and complex and include:

- Local people and local businesses
- Partner organisations including the community and voluntary sector
- Parish councils
- Other councils
- Developers
- Media
- Regional and central government
- Tourists and visitors
- Councillors
- Staff

In fact, last year alone we:

- Issued over 200 media releases.
- Had over 25,000 hits on our website on average, each month.
- Hosted several focus groups with local people to talk about local issues.
- Delivered 138,000 copies of the South Staffordshire Review.
- Surveyed 1,000 bus token users.
- Surveyed over 400 local bus pass users.
- Sent copies of the 'Business Review' newsletter to every business in the district.
- Hosted two forums for local property landlords.
- Surveyed hundreds of customers from our revenues and benefits service.
- Launched a new drop-in session for advice on benefits and financial support at Wombourne Leisure Centre.
- Worked closely with scores of local community/friends groups.
- Developed new links and relationships with local carers.
- Launched our Twitter page.
- Enlisted over 400 people to our tourism e-marketing emails.
- Used SMS text messaging to register votes for the People's Pub Awards.
- Developed two new newsletters – our 'Leisure Newsletter' and 'Your Community'.
- Worked with thousands of local children through our Local Democracy Week programme and leisure activities.
- Redesigned our website based on feedback and consultation with users.
- Launched our very own social media site - 'MyPlace MySay'.



South Staffordshire Review Newspaper

Our newspaper, 'The South Staffordshire Review' is delivered free to every home in South Staffordshire, three times a year and remains our most effective form of communication.

Each paper is produced at a cost of around 33p per household.

The Review continues to be our main communication channel with local people and offers us the opportunity to tell local people about the work we do and the services we deliver.

In 2010, a survey found that 96% of respondents had heard of the South Staffordshire Review and of that number, 94% regularly read the paper. 64% said that they found it interesting and useful.

Timetable for Publications 2010/11 and 2011/12: *

Edition	Delivery dates
Spring 2011	February - March 2011
Summer 2011	June - July 2011
Autumn 2011	October 2011
Spring 2012	February 2012



* Please note that these dates are not finalised and are subject to change.

For more information, contact Jamie Angus, Communications Officer,
on 01902 696502 or e-mail j.angus@sstaffs.gov.uk.

Our 'Viewpoint' Panel

Each year, around 1,000 local people have the chance to tell us what they think about how we're performing and about what they think we should be doing to help local communities.

Our 'Viewpoint' panel takes part in postal surveys and focus groups and what they tell us helps us to understand the issues which matter to local people.

Our panel members have told us that:

- 55% think that we're a well managed council
- 63% are satisfied with the way we run things
- 52% feel that we offer value for money
- 84% think we're trustworthy
- 91% are satisfied with South Staffordshire as a place to live



Where do we want to be?

"We want to be seen by our local communities as a responsible and efficient council, offering good quality, value for money services. We want local people to trust us and we want to have a reputation for putting their needs first".

Our long term vision is set out in our Corporate Strategy and communication plays a vital role in helping us achieve those aims.

With the smarter use of customer insight tools and the development of our locality working approach we want to adopt a stronger community focus. With this stronger and more in-depth knowledge of our communities, we will promote and market our services and our role more effectively.

Over the next few years:

- We want local people to see South Staffordshire as a great place to live.
- We want local residents to see us as a well performing authority providing top quality, value for money services.
- We want local people to know what we do and to make them aware of the services we provide.
- We want to encourage local people to get involved in the decision-making process.
- We want to work with local people and local businesses to tailor our services to their needs.
- We want to show our communities that we're working together with our partners to help make South Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit.

- We want local people to play an active role in helping us plan the future development of the district.
- We want to utilise social media and our website as a way of encouraging and helping local people to get involved.
- We want to be seen by other authorities as a progressive and well run council, recognised for our achievements.

Hard to Reach Groups

We know that our villages and our communities are unique; each with their own identity; each with their own needs.

Hard to reach communities in South Staffordshire include:

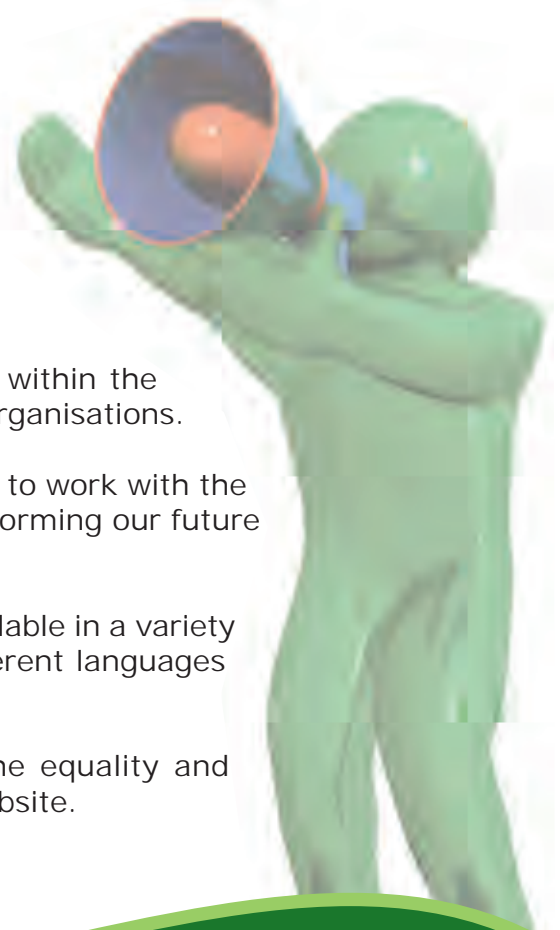
- Older people
- Rural communities
- Young people and socially excluded young people
- Those with special needs
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
- Black and minority ethnic groups (BME)
- Inter-faith groups
- Victims of domestic violence
- Those who have no fixed home
- Gypsies, travellers and showmen

We will continue to work to identify 'hard to reach' groups within the district and build relations with representative groups and organisations.

We will also continue to utilise our locality working approach to work with the voluntary and community sector because they are key to informing our future service delivery.

We will continue to make our publications accessible and available in a variety of formats such as large print, Braille, audio tapes and different languages upon request.

To find out more about what we are doing to promote the equality and diversity agenda in South Staffordshire you can visit our website.



Our Duty to Involve

Since 2009, we have had a duty to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say on decisions that affect them, and on the services which they use and upon which they rely.

We must:

Inform: give local representatives of local people/local groups information about our services, policies and decisions which might affect them.

Consult: give local people the opportunities to have their say through effective and meaningful consultation.

Involve: where appropriate, give local people the chance to get involved in the services they use.

We have a commitment to clear and effective consultation and engagement.

Genuine empowerment and a culture of public participation can bring positive change to local communities and the more local people feel involved, the more satisfied they are likely to be.

We want to embed a culture of involvement and empowerment in the way we work.

We want to improve the way we feedback information from consultations.

How will we know when we get there?

Our residents will let us know.

Our key markers for success are:

Satisfaction: Satisfaction with South Staffordshire as a place to live and satisfaction with the way we run things.

Feeling informed: The more we inform, involve and consult, the greater our reputation will be.

Quality of our services: Good quality, value for money services – this is what we want to deliver; this is what our residents expect.

Every year we will continue to conduct surveys and focus groups through our Viewpoint Panel to gauge our residents' views.

Action Plan

Outcome	Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Utilise social media/web technology to expand and improve methods of communication and engagement	Formally adopt Twitter as a standard tool of communication	February 2011	Communications Officer E-Services Manager ICT Services Manager
	Introduce the new corporate design to the council's website	March 2011	E-Services Manager
	Continue to develop the 'MyPlace MySay' social media site	tbc	ICT Services Manager E-Services Manager Policy & Partnerships Manager Communications Officer
	Introduce a trial period for use of Facebook	April 2011	Communications Officer and E-Services Manager ICT Services Manager
	Investigate the potential of introducing Youtube footage to the council's website	April 2011	E-Services Manager ICT Services Manager
	Introduce Flickr or a similar photo sharing tool to the council's website	April 2011	E-Services Manager ICT Services Manager
	Review and analyse comments received from website feedback on a monthly basis	On going – reported to service managers monthly – cc to Directors	E-Services Manager and individual Immediacy editors
	Investigate the potential of introducing a weekly blog to the council's website and link through other social media sites including Twitter	June 2011	Communications Officer and E-Services Manager ICT Services Manager
	Re-design and update the Equality and Diversity web pages	June 2011 (in-line with the launch of the new Equalities Scheme).	Corporate Policy Officer Diversity Reference Group

Outcome	Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Use our publications to positively promote the services of the council and the achievements of the LSP and locality agenda	Produce and deliver a minimum of three South Staffordshire Reviews per financial year	Spring, Summer, Winter 2011	Communications Officer
	Include a 'Looking at Localities' article in each edition of the South Staffordshire Review newspaper	Spring, Summer, Winter 2011	Communications Officer
	To include a supplement promoting partnership working in each edition of the South Staffordshire Review newspaper	Spring, Summer, Winter 2011	Communications Officer
	To include images which reflect the diversity of the district across all council publications by age, gender, race etc	January 2011 onwards	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer
	Include an annual satisfaction question about the Review in a Residents' Panel Survey	October 2011	Communications Officer
	Introduce the new corporate identity design to all new artwork and to re-design, when appropriate, older documents	February 2011 onwards	Communications Officer Virtual Graphics Team
	To continue to provide the South Staffordshire Review and other publications in alternative formats upon request	ongoing	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer
	Produce an A-Z of services in the Summer 2011 edition of the Review as per LGA reputation guide.	July 2011	Communications Officer
	Produce a supplement detailing the contact details of all local Members following the district council elections in May 2011 in the Summer 2011 edition of the Review.	July 2011	Communications Officer
	Produce an Annual Report for 2010/11	September 2011	Corporate Policy Officer Communications Officer

Outcome	Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Media, Marketing and Branding	To create a definitive list of advertising/marketing channels e.g refuse vehicles, tourist information points etc for internal use	November 2011	Communications Officer
	To continue to work in partnership with other organisations around joint projects including: 1. Extra-Care 2. Life Events 3. Clear Streets	March 2011	Communications Officer with: 1. Housing Strategy and Regeneration Manager 2. Director of Customer Services and Revenues 3. Head of Engineering Services
	To redesign the press release template and PowerPoint template to incorporate the new council design	December 2010	Communications Officer
	To publish press releases on the council's website within 4 working hours of being issued	December 2010	Communications Officer
	To establish a preferred method of receiving information by parish councils through a questionnaire at the Annual Parish Summit	October 2011	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer
	To actively promote the use of the council's website by including the web address on all promotional material. We will monitor to see if there is an increase in website visitors and compare with previous years' figures	January 2011 onwards	Communications Officer Virtual Graphics Team
	Develop use of SMS text messaging for marketing and customer service opportunities	October 2011	Tourism and Economic Development Officer Customer Services Manager Communications Officer
	Develop our e-marketing programme	July 2011 onwards	Tourism and Economic Development Officer
	Utilise customer insight tools such as ACORN when planning campaigns	April 2011 onwards	Corporate Policy Officer Communications Officer
	To continue to pursue a proactive media agenda and monitor media coverage of the council and react when necessary	January 2011 onwards	Communications Officer

Outcome	Action	Due Date	Lead Officer
Improve consultation and engagement feedback mechanisms	To host focus groups and a minimum of one postal survey per year through the Viewpoint Panel	October 2011 (focus group timings tbc)	Policy & Partnerships Manager Communications Officer
	To provide annual feedback to the Viewpoint Panel	Summer 2011	Communications Officer
	To improve the usability of the council's consultation web pages	April 2011 – March 2012	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer E-Services Manager
	To create and utilise a 'You Said, South Staffs Did' feature on all consultations undertaken	June 2011	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer E-Services Manager
	Work with voluntary sector and other organisations to maintain a database a community groups and their purpose – to be stored for viewing on the Council's intranet system	February 2011 onwards	Communications Officer Corporate Policy Officer
	To investigate the role of MyPlace MySay as a tool to feedback consultation responses	July 2011 onwards	Communications Officer
Local government perception	Use the annual postal survey to track satisfaction/reputation levels as recommended in the LGA Reputation Guide	October 2011	Policy & Partnerships Manager Communications Officer
	Investigate the potential of establishing a peer review inspection.	September 2011	Communications Officer