ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

COMMUNCATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY

July 2003

CONTENTS

COMMUNICATIONS AND PR STRATEGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the communications and public relations strategy for the Isle of Wight Council.

As a unitary authority, the council needs to communicate effectively with a wide range of audiences including customers, staff and the public. The strategy has been developed to ensure that all communication is clear and focused, and that key audiences understand the council's strategic objectives and how these are being achieved.

The recent CPA assessment of the council as 'fair' offers significant scope for improvement. Communications is a key element in creating a good or excellent authority.

1.1 AIMS

The Communications and PR Strategy aims to:

- put communications at the centre of all council activities – we are one organisation with strong and consistent messages
- ensure the council's key messages are communicated in a clear and balanced way
- support the council's aims, objectives and improvement plans
- provide advice and guidance on effective communication
- raise staff awareness of communication issues and how good communication can help achieve the council's objectives

1.2 IMPLEMENTATION

Day to day implementation of the strategy will be the responsibility of Communications and PR. Effective communication should be a key priority for Directors and Heads of Service, and the responsibility of every council employee and elected member.

A Communications Action Plan has also been developed to make sure the strategy is implemented and evaluated.

2. KEY ISSUES

The key communication issues facing the council include:

- lack of co-ordination and focus
- no clear communication standards
- little strategic direction
- diverse messages
- no evidence of widespread commitment to a more focused, corporate approach

Communications need to be co-ordinated to ensure that resources are used effectively and the council is recognised and promoted as one organisation with clear messages.

2.1 COMMUNICATION METHODS

There is a range of communication methods for delivering key messages to target audiences including:

Face to face – includes meetings, briefings and presentations
The media – includes press releases, statements, telephone and face to face
Advertising and promotion – includes recruitment, official notices and consultation / information.
Publications – a wide range of publications is produced, from tourism guides to council tax information
Public Relations - includes submitting articles on council initiatives and achievements and attending conferences and exhibitions
Electronic media – Internet and Intranet sites. Electronic communication is expanding significantly and the Government agenda is for all council services to be available online by 2005.
Wight Insight – six issues a year
Corporate events –includes a council presence at the Garlic Festival, County Show and Cowes Week.
Chairman's and leader's events –regular meetings, lunches and other events
 Verbal communication – as key ambassadors for the council, it is vital that staff maintain high customer care standards.

2.2 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- Although Directors and Heads of Service are aware of the council's aims and messages, many staff across the organisation are not

- From the results of the 2003 Employee Survey, communications with staff could be improved. Some aspects were encouraging but areas of concern included a lack of communication between Directorates, the management of change and workload pressures.

- There are a range of communication mechanisms, including the quarterly staff newsletter, Bulletin and In Touch. Coverage is patchy and the format and contents could be improved. There is no consistent source of corporate information for staff.

- Some departments hold regular team meetings but in others there is no formal mechanism for updating staff on key issues. This can result in the 'grapevine' culture and the wrong information being circulated

- The Intranet is only available to around 40% of staff, although this proportion is growing

2.3 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- Many council publications are excellent, including Wight Insight, although there is always scope for improvement. There is no consistent approach to the production of corporate publications, which results in poor 'branding' of the council's corporate image.

- There is currently no guidance on the use of the council's corporate image and identity. This can result in confusion, abuses of the logo and a lack of consistency. Council compliment slips and headed notepaper can vary from department to department in layout, font type and colour although they are produced in the Print Unit. Some departments have also developed their own visual identity. A strong corporate image is vital in ensuring the council is viewed as one organisation

- There is no coordinated method for submitting articles for publication or nominations for awards

- The current range of corporate display equipment does not promote a consistent image

2.4 MEDIA MANAGEMENT

- There is a need for more effective news management and better anticipation of news items emerging through committee and management structures. The local media reports on many council meetings without influence from within the organisation.

- Information is initiated from a range of sources within the council but there is currently little planning or coordination to ensure that key messages are delivered.

- Staff and members contacted directly by the media can result in confusing messages and negative publicity

- Lack of media training for key staff and confusion about who is authorised to speak to the media

3. STRATEGY FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The strategic communications aims are to:

- gain support for the council's vision
- work effectively with partners to achieve our corporate objectives
- promote the council's services and achievements
- support our aspiration to be seen as one of the best performing councils in the country
- gain support for the council by influencing opinion and behaviour
- support the work of elected members as representatives of the community
- provide high standards of communication

3.2 KEY MESSAGES

The mission of the council is to 'Improve island Life'. The six corporate objectives and what we are doing to achieve them are the key messages that need to be communicated effectively and consistently.

 Other supporting messages are that we:

- are a learning and improving council that aims to be an excellent authority
- are one organisation with a clear vision and message
- welcome the challenges and opportunities of Modernisation and Best Value
- are committed to working in partnership to achieve our objectives
- consult with our customers and partners and involve local people in the decision making process
- acknowledge the key role of staff and strive to be a good employer, including focusing on training and development

3.3 KEY PRINCIPLES

All communication between the council and its audiences should:

- focus on corporate objectives and messages
- be clear, honest and open
- be easily understandable, timely and up to date, including written, spoken, visual and electronic communication
- be shared and made available to support service excellence
- conform to corporate standards in the council's style guide

3.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Effective internal communication is essential if an organisation is to achieve its corporate objectives. If staff understand the vision, aims and objectives of the council and the context they work in, they will develop loyalty and pride in their work.

a) Team Briefing
Monthly Team briefings will be introduced to replace the current In Touch, although there will be a section on the Intranet for key messages from the chief executive officer.

The content for team brief will include key messages from the Directors Group. The brief will be e-mailed to Heads of Service for cascading to all staff within a defined timescale – three days. The contents will be brief and written in a clear style.

b) Key Communicators
Each Directorate will designate a Key Communicator to ensure the Communications and PR Strategy is implemented.

The role of the Key Communicator includes:

- ensuring all aspects of the strategy are implemented within the Directorate
- liaison with Directorate staff who have communication requirements and supporting these
- ensuring that all communication needs are identified and forwarded to Communications and PR
- informing Communications and PR about opportunities to publicise the Directorate's work
- responsibility for identifying important issues in committee agendas or papers, or other issues likely to be of media interest, and developing an action plan if necessary
- improving the content of the staff newsletter and promoting involvement in social events including lunchtime presentations and debates
- managing the Directorate's web and Intranet pages
- co-ordination of responses to media enquiries within the Directorate, in liaison with the Communications and PR team

Key Communicators will be members of a Corporate Communications Group chaired by the Head of Corporate Policy and Communication, with meetings held every quarter.

The Web Editor will be a member of the group to ensure that communication is consistent across all media.

c) Internal publications
This includes the quarterly staff newsletter Contact and Bulletin, the weekly newsletter for members. We will continue to produce the staff newsletter and Bulletin and will review the content and design of both in October 2003.

d) Intranet
About 40% of staff are connected to the Intranet and this is becoming an increasing useful way to communicate.

A section on the Intranet will be developed for updates from the Chief Executive Officer to supplement Team Briefing.

e) Developing an integrated communication, graphic design and printing service
Communications and PR aims to provide an integrated communication, graphic design and printing service. This includes advice on effective communication, public relations, advertising, publicity material, media relations graphic design support and printing.

Graphic design staff are currently located in other departments and this will be reviewed with the aim of providing an integrated corporate service with common standards.

All printing requirements across the council will be overseen by the council's Print Department, whether this is done in-house or sourced externally.

f) Style Guide
A Style Guide will be developed to ensure the consistent use of the logo and corporate identity. All publications, electronic and visual communications must comply with the council's design standards.

These standards will be introduced in phases, with the first guidelines on stationery and publications in December 2003, followed by signage, livery and other visual communications in April 2004.

g) Electronic templates
Electronic templates for letters, faxes, presentation slides and memos will be developed (with the help of the IT department) to ensure there are consistent standards throughout the council. Compliance will be monitored through regular communication audits.

h) Plain English
If we want people to understand our policies and services we must make them clear, understandable and accessible to all.

We will promote the use of plain English and customer-friendly writing in all written communication, including letters, committee agendas, reports and papers, the Intranet and web site, publicity material, published reports.

This will need a corporate training programme but we will also produce a handbook for staff on using plain English.

i) Communicating with members
Effective communication with members promotes better understanding and helps the decision- making process, as well as building good relationships between members and officers. Portfolio holders will receive media training.

We will develop a members' area on the Intranet and offer a consistent corporate design for newsletters sent out by members, to include the council's key messages.

j) Noticeboards
Key Communicators will be responsible for ensuring that noticeboards in their directorates are kept updated, including details of staff events and Healthy Workforce updates.

k) Staff events / Healthy Workforce
Social activities and other staff events are a good way of encouraging communication across organisational barriers.

We will continue to publicise Healthy Workforce events in Contact and promote staff events and presentations to enable better understanding of each departments work.

3.5 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

a) PR Calendar
We will produce a quarterly calendar of key council events to inform the communications and PR work, including the Chairman's and Leader's events. Information from the monthly discussion at Directors Group will also be included to ensure key messages are updated on a regular basis.

b) Wight Insight
Produced by the Publications team, the award winning publication provides information about the council in an interesting and informative way. Ideas for the content are generated internally, with a fair spread of articles across all departments.

Regular consultation through the Citizens Panel has shown the magazine is recognised and appreciated by its target audience. The Publications team continuously reviews the style, content and costs of print and distribution. To generate additional income, new sponsors and advertisers are being actively sought.

There are currently six issues each year – one every two months published on the third Friday in April, June, August, October, December and February. The publication schedule will be more widely advertised internally and externally.

From August 2003 we will refresh the concept and design by linking articles to the council's corporate objectives in each issue.

Wight Insight is area where we control the messages and we should continue to build on the strong branding to develop the magazine as a key communication tool.

c) Web site
In the last few years there has been a significant increase in electronic communication, including e-mail and the Internet. Plans for the future include installing broadcast cameras in the council chamber and other committee rooms to enable wider access to council meetings.

The IT department is responsible for the content and design of the council's web site and Intranet. The web site has recently been re-launched with a new look and revised content. The award-winning site is another showcase for council services and attracts widespread interest.

Communications and PR will work with the web team to develop a more balanced 'news' section to reflect the local media outlets, with three news streams instead of one link to the County Press web site.

We will also assist in the future design and development of the site as a key communication tool. The Web Editor will be a member of the Key Communicators group to ensure that all opportunities for communication are maximised.

d) Spokespeople
We will arrange for key staff and members to take part in the regular lunchtime phone in on Isle of Wight Radio on topics including planning and highways where there is a significant amount of local interest. These sessions will be held once every six weeks to provide advice and guidance on a range of issues.

A list of 'experts' on various issues or policy areas will be developed and maintained by the Communications and PR team, to enable an authoritative response to national or local issues.

e) Corporate campaigns
Campaigns are a good way of highlighting specific issues to raise public awareness. We will organise at least two high profile campaigns a year.

f) Logo
The council's logo is almost 10 years old and needs refreshing. The first phase of the Style Guide, for printed material and stationery, will be developed in December 2003.

Changes will allow for the continued use of the original logo to reduce the costs involved.

g) Articles for publication
Directors and senior managers are expected to submit articles for publication to the local, national and trade press. This helps to raise the profile of the council and gains recognition for new initiatives and innovative projects. We will aim to achieve one published article a month in the national or trade press.

Communications and PR will issue press releases on key appointments and coordinate articles for publication.

h) Awards
 Entering the council and its departments for awards raises the profile of the organisation, provides positive media coverage and boosts staff morale. We will submit entries for all relevant awards as this increases the likelihood of success. We will aim to submit at least one entry for an award each month.

All successful awards will be reported to Communications and PR to maximise media coverage.

i) Corporate events
The council is represented at key local events such as the annual Garlic Festival, County Show and Cowes Week. This is an important way to raise awareness of the council's work, engage with the public and promote partnership arrangements.

To ensure a more consistent corporate image at these and other events, several lightweight and portable display systems will be purchased. With a design that promotes the council's corporate objective, the display will be available for use by members and departments. Bookings will be organised through Communications and PR.

 j) Equality issues
Council publications will be made available in different formats, either on request or in line with national legislation to promote social inclusion and access to services. A comprehensive taping service for Wight Insight has recently been introduced in partnership with the Isle of Wight Society for the Blind.

The Communication and PR team will advise on a range of communication issues, including translation into other languages, taping or Braille.

kj) Partnership arrangements
The council has many partnership arrangements to ensure delivery of the corporate objectives, for example the Local Strategic Partnership (Island Futures).

We will work with partners to develop plans to ensure communication requirements are defined and met. All joint press releases will include the council's logo.

l) A to Z of services

There is no printed directory of council services although some information is available on the web site. We will produce an A to Z of council services for the public and a range of other stakeholders. A 'mini' directory will also be included in a future issue of Wight Insight.

3.6 MEDIA MANAGEMENT

All Directors, Heads of Service and Portfolio holders will undergo media training. Following this, additional training will be arranged for managers and other staff likely to be interviewed by the media. The sessions will be practical and details of the training will be recorded and kept on file by HR.

a) Promoting good news

For many local people, a key source of information about the council is the weekly County Press with a readership estimated at 94% of the population. It is not possible to attend every committee meeting but we will take a more proactive approach by identifying newsworthy items and attending Executive briefings to highlight key issues.

Isle of Wight Radio has a daily lunchtime phone in that often portrays the council in a negative way. To be more proactive, we will offer key staff and members as regular guests on the phone in.

Solent TV is a new addition to the local media and is keen to be more involved with the council. We will support a bid to install broadcast cameras in council meeting rooms.

The Beacons are well read community magazines and we will use the Key Communicators group to provide local 'good news' stories for these publications.

b) Media events

Informal events for senior staff and members to meet with representatives of the local media are a good way of fostering positive relationships. We will arrange at least one 'Meet the Media' event every year.

Regular meetings with local editors are also a useful way of influencing media coverage and gaining more balanced and positive coverage of council news. The Communications and PR Manager will meet with local editors at least once a quarter

c) Media Relations Policy

The Media Relations Policy will be updated to take account of recent changes in staff and structure.

The revised policy will state clearly that staff must not have direct contact with the media without authorisation from Communications and PR. This also applies to members, although it may be more difficult to enforce in practice.

Members should report all media contact to Communications and PR to enable a consistent approach to issues.

d) Media training
In line with recommendations on media training, only managers and staff who have received training will be authorised to act as council spokespeople. Media training will be mandatory for all Directors, Heads of Service, other managers with regular press contact, portfolio holders and Select Committee Chairs.

Authorisation to speak to the media will be limited to this smaller core of officers and members who are media trained, briefed and keep updated on corporate as well as service specific issues.

e) Press releases
To promote the council's achievements in a more co-ordinated way, the Communications team will aim to 'theme' press releases based on the six corporate objectives as well as exploiting all opportunities to deliver the council's key messages.

Individual officers must get 'sign off' from any other departments involved prior to submitting press releases – this will be included in the Media Relations Policy.

All press releases will incorporate the council's key messages, including 'elevator' messages. A 'boilerplate' outlining some key facts and figures will also be included.

f) Media contact
It is important to develop good working relationships with the local media. The Communications and PR Manager will meet regularly with local editors to build on and improve current relationships.

4. MAKING IT HAPPEN

An Action Plan has been developed to deliver the Strategy and improve communications across the council.

4.1 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE
Team briefing - introduce briefing system based on 'core brief' from Directors Group to be cascaded to all staff. Each department to add their own 'local brief'. Replaces In Touch	August 2003
Key Communicators – establish one for each Directorate and arrange quarterly meetings	September 2003
Internal publications – review internal newsletters, including Contact and Bulletin	October 2003
Intranet – create a section for members on the Intranet	January 2004
Graphic design service - review and implement changes as necessary	January 2003
Style Guide – produce first phase of corporate style guide and distribute. Monitor implementation	December 2003
Electronic templates – produce templates for letters, slides, faxes and memos	December 2003
Plain English – develop guide for staff to promote effective communication	June 2004
Notice boards – should be kept up to date and informative through the Key Communicators	October 2003
Staff events / Healthy Workforce – support and publicise council-wide programme of events, including monthly walks	At least two pages in each issue of Contact

4.2 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE
PR calendar – develop a quarterly calendar of key events to focus communication activity	January, April, July, October
Wight Insight – develop to promote the council's corporate objectives and encourage participation across the council	Review content and costs every quarter
Web site – develop as key communication tool	Meetings every month with the web team to promote new ideas for content
Spokespeople – develop a list to raise the council's profile	September 2003
Corporate campaigns and initiatives – involvement in council wide activity	At least two a year – GAGS, 'An Improving Council', Fire Service Modernisation, in 2003/4
Logo – review and 'refresh' as necessary	December 2003.
Articles for publication – co-ordinate articles for publication	At least one article a month in national media or trade press
Awards	Submit at least one entry a month and publicise successful awards
Corporate events – purchase new display system and use at external events	July 2003
Equality – provide a taped version of Wight Insight for people with visual impairment	June 2003
Partnership – develop communication plans with partners	September 2003
A to Z – develop short A to Z of council Services	December 2003

4.3 MEDIA MANAGEMENT

ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE
Promoting good news – coordinate regular guests for Isle of Wight Radio phone-ins	August 2003
Media events – organise informal events where key staff and members can meet the media	First event July 2003. At least one event a year.
Media Relations Policy – review and update	September 2003
Media training – organise training for first level managers and Portfolio Holders	First three sessions in September 2003. At least one training event a year
Press releases – 'theme' based on corporate objectives. Include key messages.	July 2003
Local media contact – regular meetings with local editors	Quarterly meetings with editors (Communications and PR Manager)

5. Delivering the strategy

5.1 The Communications and PR team

The Communications and PR team consists of the Communications and PR Manager, Media and PR Officer and Communications Co-ordinator. It also includes the Publications Unit who produce Wight Insight – the Visual Communications Manager, Graphic Designer and Publications Officer.

With many years of knowledge and experience in communication and PR issues, the team members will provide strategic advice on all corporate communication issues to help raise standards across the council.

The team will also coordinate the delivery of the objectives in the Action Plan.

5.2 Annual Action Plan

The Communications and PR Strategy will be delivered through the Action Plan. We will update the Action Plan each year and Directors Group will approve it.

5.3 Key Communicators group

We will ask Directors to nominate a Key Communicator from each Directorate to form the Key Communicators group. The web editor will also be a member of the group, which will meet every quarter. The Head of Corporate Policy and Communications will chair the group.

The group will focus on improving internal and external communications through the identification of key messages, events and other communication issues. They will also be responsible for providing feedback from staff and internal communications in their Directorate.

5.4 Evaluation and monitoring

Communication methods will be regularly reviewed to ensure they are effective and robust. This includes:

- regular media monitoring to highlight trends – this is carried out in-house and included in the quarterly monitoring reporting. An increase in positive media coverage will reflect improved communication with the media
- monitoring staff awareness of key issues through the annual Employee Survey
- reviewing the effectiveness of corporate communications and publications through surveys and consultation, including Citizens Panels and Best Value Reviews