

# **Communication Matters**

*A Communications Strategy for Rochford District Council  
October 2006*

# Setting the Context – the Council's Vision, Values and Aims

## Our Vision

The Council's vision for the district is a simple one:

“to make Rochford the place of choice in the county to live, work and visit”

## Our Values

As part of day to day working, the Council operates a code of conduct to:

- Act with integrity
- Be open and transparent about what we do
- Respect others and treat people courteously and equally
- Be responsive to customer needs and requests
- Always try and improve on what we do
- Work with others to improve what we do both directly and through partnership working

## Our Aims

The Community Strategy for Rochford, which was produced in partnership with other public agencies, the business and voluntary sector, has key themes relating to:

- Feeling safe
- Looking after our environment
- A good education, good skills and good jobs
- Healthy living
- Getting around
- An inclusive community

To contribute to these themes, the Council has agreed its aims as being to:

- Provide quality, cost effective services
- Work towards a safer and more caring community
- Provide a green and sustainable environment
- Encourage a thriving local economy
- Improve the quality of life for people in our district
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

# The importance of communication in helping the Council achieve its aims

Achieving the Council's aims requires good communications with every individual, group and organisation we work with, or provide services for.

An important part of any organisation's role is to ensure that the information provided both by and to it is easily accessible, relevant and timely. To this end, the Council recognises the importance of communication – by whatever means – and is committed to developing its own services to meet the expectations of both the community it serves and the internal information needs of the organisation itself.

In this strategy the Council sets out its goals to make sure that there is a free flow of appropriate information between the Council and its stakeholders – staff, councillors, residents, businesses, partners and service users. The Council also identifies the need to work closely with other organisations in the district so as to meet some of these goals and recognises the important role the media plays.

## What are our communications objectives

We want to:

- Raise awareness of the role of our organisation amongst local people
- Raise awareness of opportunities to influence policies, decision making and services
- Improve existing dialogues with key audiences, inform, involve, consult and report back to them
- Enhance our reputation and public satisfaction with our democratic role
- Enhance customer satisfaction with specific services
- Support members in their work as community representatives
- Enhance the effectiveness of partnership working

To enable this, we will ensure that information is:

- Delivered at the right place at the right time
- Clear and easy to understand
- Consistent and fit for purpose
- Appropriate for the audience
- Accurate

# Our communication principles

The principles which will underpin our approach to communication are that:

- Information and communication channels should be equally accessible and relevant to all groups of the community, irrespective of personal background
- Responses received should be treated fairly and consistently regardless of source
- All communication should have a clear purpose and be assessed and reviewed accordingly
- The Council will respect every individual's right to receive clear, concise information
- A culture of open and honest internal communication is encouraged

## Aims of the Communication Strategy

1. To make sure that the Council has appropriate ways of encouraging, listening to and taking account of views about its services and policies and other local issues
2. To contribute towards achieving the Council's aims by having good internal communications which ensure that both staff and councillors are kept well informed and involved
3. To provide information about the Council's work which is up to date, accurate, relevant and provided in a way suitable for the people receiving it
4. To maintain an effective face to face interface with those people who choose to access our services in person
5. To develop electronic communications to provide information and services by remote access to all those who wish to access information and services in this way
6. To strengthen the Council's image and public awareness of its services through the use of a consistent corporate identity
7. To promote effective media relations and to encourage accurate reporting and coverage of events and issues relating to the Council, recognising that the media may represent alternative views to those of the Council
8. To support the Council playing an active role in local, regional and national affairs as appropriate

## Audiences

The audiences for Rochford's communication strategy are set out below:

Rochford residents	Media – national, regional, local and trade
Users of Council services	Voluntary and community groups
Employees and potential employees	National government
Councillors	Local government – other councils
Visitors	Regional agencies
People living in the wider region	Trade and professional bodies
Businesses	Public sector partners

However, residents and service users are the primary focus of the strategy

# How we are performing currently and what we need to do to improve

## 1. Consultation

Whilst there are many examples of good practice in involving service users through effective consultation, we need to improve our approach in a co-ordinated fashion to ensure we get maximum benefit from the information available to us. We need to review our Consultation Strategy and then develop our consultation mechanisms.

## 2. Internal Communication

We have developed a number of internal communications, most notably through 'The Rochford Files' – a staff newsletter, the Staff Sounding Board, regular team meetings and the members' bulletin. However, there is still room for improvement so as to continue to ensure both staff and members feel they are able to carry out their respective roles. We will develop a formal approach to team briefing to ensure consistency throughout the organisation.

## 3. Public Information

Rochford District Matters is delivered to all households across the district free of charge. Feedback indicates that the publication is well received, but again we need to continue to improve on its relevance and usefulness. The Council Tax leaflet has been revised to improve the design and give clearer information. However, we still need to further improve public information and ensure that spending on public information is effective.

## 4. E-Government

The Council has met the Government's targets for the provision of electronic service delivery. The website will now be upgraded and improved as this access channel continues to grow in importance for both the provision of information and direct access to services. We will participate in an Access to Service Review and then develop an action plan to implement its recommendations.

## 5. Corporate Identity

The Council's identity has been strong, but it can be diluted through service logos, alternative formats etc. It is necessary to revisit the identity to ensure it is still fit for purpose and ensure that whatever is agreed is used consistently. We will undertake a review of current practice and agree a corporate approach

## 6. Media Relations

The Communication Officer manages the Council's relationship with the media and deals with a range of enquires on local issues. There is also a steady flow of media releases. However, we need to improve the profile and marketing of the District and continue to create more media awareness within the organisation.

## 7. Public Affairs

The public affairs role links into many of the Council's other strategies and partnerships. It is considered it could be developed further in a number of ways, particularly in a partnership context. Issues arising are greater recognition of the importance of communicating partnership work and improving the branding and marketing of partnership activities. We will do this by raising awareness internally of the importance of effective communication of events and issues.

## Action Plan

The action plan is intended to address the issues identified above and is included as an appendix.

## Evaluating our Success

We intend to regularly monitor progress on this Strategy and evaluate the following indicators to measure improvement in:

- The staff satisfaction survey indicators
- Public satisfaction with the council overall as measured by the Best Value Survey
- Regular feedback from key partners
- Usage figures of internet
- Number of media releases gaining coverage
- Level of satisfaction with RDM, as measured by annual survey

The Council's Policy, Finance & Strategic Performance Committee will have overall responsibility for this Strategy and the Service Development & Improvement Officer Sub-Group will take responsibility for the periodic monitoring of its effectiveness.

## Communication Strategy – Action Plan

Objective 1 – To make sure the Council has appropriate ways of encouraging, listening to and taking account of views about its services and policies and other local issues				
Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Milestones	Comments
1.1 To revise the Corporate Consultation Strategy to ensure internal co-ordination and best practice in consultation methods	Corporate Policy Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January 2007</li> <li>March 2007</li> <li>March 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Consultation Strategy agreed</li> <li>Database of consultation established</li> <li>Toolkit of methods in place</li> </ul>	There will also be need to take account of the consultation activities of other agencies/ partnerships
Objective 2 – To contribute towards achieving the Council's aims by having good internal communications which ensure that both staff and councillors are kept well informed and involved				
Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Milestones	Comments
2.1 Introduce a formal approach to team briefing across the whole organisation	Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2006</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly briefing produced</li> <li>Feedback received</li> <li>Consistent approach to team meetings</li> </ul>	Approach agreed by SMT in August 2006 with a review to be undertaken after 6 months
2.2 Review the effectiveness of 'The Rochford Files' and make any identified improvements	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved content of newsletter</li> <li>Improvement in user satisfaction (staff survey)</li> </ul>	This needs to take place approximately 6 months following the introduction of team briefing
2.3 Hold regular Chief Executive/Leader staff sessions	Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>June each year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CE/Leader meet all members of the Council's workforce</li> <li>All staff informed of Council aims and priorities (staff survey)</li> </ul>	There will be a cost in hire of venue and staff time

2.4 Re-design and improve the content of the intranet	Web Services Development Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved content and navigation of intranet</li> </ul>	
Objective 3 – To provide information about the Council's work which is up to date, accurate, relevant and provided in a way suitable for the people receiving it				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Comments</b>
3.1 Review 'Rochford District Matters' to ensure it provides value for money	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• September 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction with RDM either maintained or improved</li> </ul>	
3.2 To promote best practice in communication materials by working with Heads of Service to identify their needs	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 2006</li> <li>• September 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular meetings with HoS</li> <li>• Evidence of planned approach to major initiatives or events</li> </ul>	
Objective 4 – To maintain an effective face to face interface with those people who choose to access our services in person				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Comments</b>
4.1 To implement the recommendations arising from the Access to Service Review regarding customer access	Head of Administration & Member Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• April 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review completed and recommendations received and agreed</li> </ul>	The recommendations may require new actions and substantial resources
Objective 5 – To develop electronic communications to provide information and services by remote access to all those who wish to access information and services in this way				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Comments</b>
5.1 Re-design the website to make it more user friendly and to expand the range of services and information available online	Head of Administration & Member Services/Web Services Development Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• December 2006 – website re-design and relaunch</li> <li>• May 2007 – expansion of online services and take up/marketing campaign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web departmental champions</li> <li>• Web brand and identity clearly defined</li> <li>• 'Take up' awareness campaign</li> </ul>	There are likely to be costs associated with the expansion of online services and a marketing campaign



Objective 6 – To strengthen the Council's image and public awareness of its services through the use of a consistent corporate identity				
Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Milestones	Comments
6.1 To review the Council's corporate identity and ensure it is fit for purpose	Communication Officer/Web Services Development Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed approach to use and form of corporate identity</li> <li>Consistent identity on all documentation etc</li> </ul>	May require wider consultation if significant change is suggested
Objective 7 – To promote effective media relations and to encourage accurate reporting and coverage of events and issues relating to the Council, recognising that the media may represent alternative views to those of the Council				
Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Milestones	Comments
7.1 To raise media awareness and co-ordination by all Heads of Service regularly meeting the Communication Officer	Communication Officer/all HoS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2006</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More inter-departmental knowledge of events/issues</li> <li>More media opportunities identified</li> <li>More press coverage received</li> </ul>	
7.2 Use committee reports more effectively to inform media releases	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2006</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactive approach to provision of information</li> <li>More press coverage received</li> </ul>	
7.3 Revise and publicise the media protocol	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarity on who speaks to the media on what occasions</li> </ul>	

Objective 8 – To support the Council playing an active role in local, regional and national affairs				
Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Milestones	Comments
8.1 To provide communication support to the Council's key partnerships	Communication Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>December 2006</li> <li>June 2007</li> <li>April 2007</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement in Thames Gateway Image &amp; Branding group</li> <li>Recognised identity for LSP</li> <li>Contribute to marketing of Rochford as a tourism destination</li> </ul>	