



Corporate Communications Unit

Service Plan

2001/2

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Introduction

Local government is undergoing a period of radical change. With the government's modernisation agenda, new role for councils as community leaders, best value, increased accountability and partnership working, there is a real need for effective communications management within today's local government.

Nationally, research by MORI has shown that local councils are perceived as the worst communicators in the public sector, over half the population believes their council does not keep them well informed.

Carlisle City Council is facing many of the same external challenges as other local authorities and is currently developing a new ten year vision, City Vision, in partnership with other public bodies, the private sector, voluntary organisations and the community. City Vision will shape the council's aims and objectives for the next ten years and aims to be the strategic partnership for developing the vision for the city and making that vision a reality.

The Corporate Communications Unit was established in June 2000, following national trend to bring together a corporate function which includes media relations, PR, corporate marketing, publications and other communication initiatives.

Summary of services

The Corporate Communications Unit delivers a range of services including:

- Media relations
- Public relations
- Corporate marketing
- Corporate publications
- Corporate identity
- Internal relations
- Corporate web site
- Customer relations*

Council values and objectives

This communications plan links to the current aims and objectives of the council and will be reviewed and amended in the light of the development of the new City Vision strategy.

Current organisational values are to:

- Achieve 'best value' services
- Put customers first
- Train and develop staff
- Consult and listen
- Encourage participation
- Pursue equality
- Be environmentally friendly
- Be open and accountable
- Provide community leadership.

Reflecting the organisational values, our communications should be:

- Accessible to all
- Timely and relevant
- Clear and concise

Consistent

- Targeted
- Proactive.

This intends to help address the corporate key objective of

advancing Carlisle as a regional and cultural capital

and the commitment in the council's mission statement

"to encourage the involvement of the community and to listen to Carlisle residents."

It will do this by increasing awareness of the City Council and the City, locally, regionally and nationally, so helping raise the profile as an important regional centre; and also increasing the accessibility and quality of information available about the council and the city, aiming to inform more residents and encourage them to have their say in local issues.

- Customer relations were not addressed within the Communications Best Value Review and are not incorporated within this strategy. This will be the focus of the Customer Contact Best Value Review 2001/2 and it is felt prudent to wait until after this review before developing actions for improving customer relations.

Communications Objectives

The overall aim of corporate communications is to:

enable the City Council to communicate with its residents and partners easily, effectively and efficiently to help us achieve our objectives and vision.

Key objectives of the Corporate Communications Unit are to:

develop constructive media relations and proactively increase positive media coverage

- raise awareness and increase understanding of citizenship and increase participation of residents and partners in activities
- develop and maintain a positive high profile for Carlisle City Council and the City locally, regionally and nationally
- develop and maintain the council's corporate identity
- develop a range of publications to inform residents, partners and other organisations about the council and issues within the district
- develop internal communications to inform and involve staff in decisions, and ensure two way communications
- develop an accessible, informative, and interactive web site in accordance with national best practice and e government strategy.

In this plan, a number of key areas which were highlighted in the Communications Best Value Review (2001) are addressed, such as development of internal relations, improving media relations and strengthening corporate identity. This also has links with other council strategies, including tourism and economic development which also contribute to the marketing and profile raising of Carlisle and the e-government strategy which is integral to the development of the web site.

Customer consultation

As part of the Unit's best value review, officers, members, media representatives and representatives from external partners were all consulted with. The Unit aims to continue this consultation with customers on an annual basis to assess the needs of our customers and to ensure that the service is fulfilling the requirements of our customers.

Benchmarking

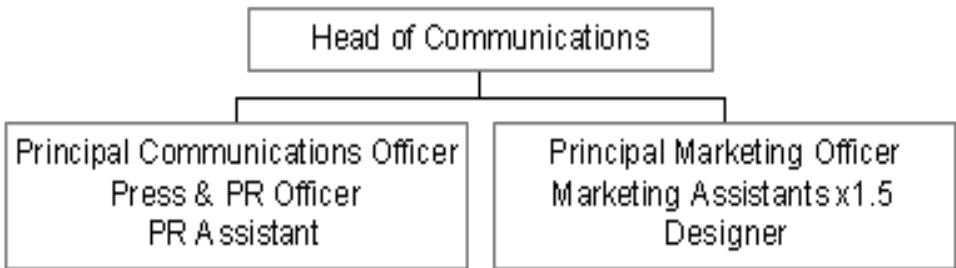
Nationally and locally work on benchmarking is still in initial stages but is progressing. The Unit is participating in a national Best Value Communications Group which is developing benchmarking and performance measures with comparable authorities.

The Unit is also represented on a county wide public sector PR group which is developing local performance indicators and sharing comparable data.

Staffing and budget

The current directly controlled budget for the Unit is £246,660.

Following the Best Value review, the staffing structure below was adopted.



Action Plan

Media relations

Objective: to develop constructive media relations and proactively increase positive media coverage

Issues

Media coverage has often been perceived as negative towards the council. A baseline for evaluation of media coverage has been established by the Head of Communications. This looked at press coverage between February – July 2000 and indicated that 45% of the coverage was negative for the council.

The third citizen's panel showed that 85% of residents gain information from the media about the council, showing that the majority of residents are gaining their information through the local media, highlighting the need for positive and factual coverage to convey council messages and information.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets
	2001/2 2002/3

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase the number of proactive press released issued by the Corporate Unit which are used by the media. <p>To date the 2001/2 target has been exceeded and currently take up is 99%</p>	85% 90% take up take up
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure responses to all media enquiries are issued within the timescale to meet the reporter’s deadline <p>To date the target has been exceeded and 100% of enquiries are being responded within deadline</p>	95% 98%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that all media enquiries are dealt with by the media team in the Corporate Communications Unit in the first instance <p>To date 99% of all corporate council enquiries which lead to media articles are coming in the first instance to the Unit</p>	95% 100%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At all times issue a response or holding statement, in accordance with the media protocols, to all media enquiries <p>To date this is being achieved and 100% are dealt with.</p>	100% 100%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactively organise media events, photo calls and interviews when appropriate	N/A N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold media briefings and organise press conferences when appropriate	N/A N/A
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure members and officers have access to media advice and training <p>Training sessions for officers and members have been arranged in Feb and March and printed guidelines are being developed aiming to be published by April.</p>	In place by April 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain feedback and develop relations with local media through workshops and surveys. <p>One survey was carried out in 2001 and a workshop in conjunction with other organisations in planned in March.</p>	2. 2 workshops/surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Benchmark the media service with other local authorities nationally. <p>This is an ongoing activity through a national Best Value group, local indicators aim to be developed by April</p>	By Feb 2002

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give professional media advice to all other council departments and units <p><i>This is an ongoing activity, backed up by training and guidelines detailed above.</i></p>	Being developed
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Public Relations

Objective: to raise awareness and increase understanding of citizenship and increase participation of residents and partners in activities

Issues

Proactive PR can help people recognise their council and the work it does, develop a civic pride and encourage people to become more involved in local democracy. Effective PR can also help the council develop its role as community leader and encourage more people to take part in activities such as council meetings and consultation by raising their awareness of what the council does and how they can have their say on local issues.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets 2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage in national events such as Local Democracy Week at a local level. <p><i>Promotion of events at a local level has exceeded targets and included participation in: National Glass Week; Diabetes Awareness Week; Food Safety Week; Local Democracy Week; Energy Efficiency Week; British Market Week; National Play Day.</i></p>	2 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the ways in which people can become involved in council matters, such as the right to attend meetings. <p><i>To date work has started on this by: developing links and invitations with students at Cumbria CD; ‘Your Council’ leaflets produced and distributed; exhibition boards</i></p>	4 4

<i>produced and exhibited in Carlisle library</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop ways of engaging hard to reach or traditionally excluded groups, working with Carlisle Access Group. <i>To date no specific campaigns have been undertaken but links with and promotion of CAG developed. Publications and material has been reviewed by CAG and more involvement and feedback of material before publication is being developed.</i>	2 campaigns 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure council information is accessible to all. <i>See above; all corporate material is available on request in different formats.</i>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organise regular public events such as open days in the Civic Centre. <i>Work has started with schools, the wider public was invited to take part in Local Democracy Week. Further events need to be arranged.</i>	3 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a range of citizenship initiatives. <i>Four school debates in the Civic have been undertaken so far with a further four events planned. Meeting with sixth form heads to develop a structured programme of events.</i>	2 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish baseline levels of awareness of and participation in citizenship activities <i>This has not been possible so far due to lack of resources and data but will be looked at in development of a structured citizenship programmes.</i>	By Nov 2001

Corporate Marketing

Objective: develop and maintain a positive high profile for Carlisle City Council and the City locally, regionally and nationally

Issues

Without marketing itself corporately an organisation can be seen as fragmented or invisible rather than one unified body.

Carlisle City Council in the past has not had a corporate unit marketing the council as a whole. Increased partnership working and the development of City Vision mean that the council is also taking a lead role on raising the profile of the city locally, regionally and nationally.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets 2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver regular corporate marketing campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the council and its services. <p><i>Local Democracy Week gave an opportunity to promote the council and a joint roadshow in January with the Parish Council Association was also undertaken.</i></p>	1 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and place corporate adverts for use in relevant publications. <p><i>Corporate advertising was developed and placed in the Official City Guide, the Festival of Sports publication and Carlisle United programmes.</i></p>	2 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give marketing advice and support to other departments and units. <p><i>Ongoing – will be assessed by internal customer survey annually.</i></p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with partners to raise the profile of the city regionally and nationally through joint campaigns and messages. <p><i>City Marketing Forum has been set up to develop this, with Head of Communications coordinating this group.</i></p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with partners to evaluate the level of effectiveness of campaigns nationally <p><i>See above</i></p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a range of high quality corporate resources such as photographic images and exhibition material for promotions <p><i>Electronic image library currently being trialled, new and stock imagery has been commissioned; one set of</i></p>	By April 2002

exhibition material produced, another being developed.	
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Corporate Identity

Objective: to develop and maintain the council's corporate identity

Issues

One of the findings of the Communications Best Value Review was that the council has a weak corporate identity, the most visible signs of identity ie the logo is applied inconsistently and corporate identity is not managed.

Corporate identity should be more than just ensuring consistent use of a logo, it should also reflect and reinforce an organisation’s values and culture. Through the City Vision process new objectives and values are likely to be developed for the council and this will influence the future of the corporate identity.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets 2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop the identity to reflect the organisation’s values and culture. A review of current identity will be developed post organisation review which is due to be complete in July.	By July 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop internal guidelines for officers on applications of corporate identity Guidelines have been developed and issued across the authority and will be reviewed and enforced by the internal marketing officers group.	By Sept 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monitor the application of existing corporate identity Currently informal, the above group is developing more formal systems.	From Oct 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase awareness of and understanding of the use of Plain English	By April 2002

Guidance in the identity guidelines, the marketing officers group will look at and address training issues.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give advice and support to departments and units on the use of corporate identity Ongoing	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a range of high quality corporate resources such as photographic images and exhibition material for promotions Image library and exhibition material developed as detailed previously.	By April 2002

Corporate Publications

Objective: to develop a range of publications to inform residents, partners and other organisations about the council and issues within the district

Issues

Corporate publications can be a prime vehicle to get information and messages across to promote the council and its services, and also provide useful information about other organisations. However the third citizens panel found that only 25% of residents feel that the council is good or very good at keeping them informed.

The key residents' publication, the Civic, has previously been produced once a year in a tabloid format. Following the Communications Best Value Review, this publication is due to be relaunched as a more frequent publication in a different format.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets 2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a quarterly residents' publication which informs people about local services and issues as well as promotes the city council. Carlisle Focus launched September and produced quarterly.	From 4 Sept 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a regular information guide to Carlisle for residents listing services and information useful to those living in the city. Carlisle Pocket Guide published Sept 2001	From Sept 2001 (every two years)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regularly produce a guide aimed at promoting Carlisle to target groups such as professionals, businesses, funding bodies, regionally and nationally. <p>Official City Guide published November 2001 and made available to partners.</p>	From Oct 2001 (every two years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop effective distribution networks which are value for money. <p>As well as Royal Mail distribution, a network of shops, post offices, community and other public venues has been established for publication distribution.</p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure publications are available in appropriate formats for all members of the community. <p>Currently available on request.</p>	From Dec 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop other relevant publications which can help inform people about the council, its services and the city. <p>Currently due to limited resources this year no further corporate publications have been produced.</p>	Being developed

Internal relations

Objective: to develop internal communications to inform and involve staff in decisions, and ensure two way communications

Issues

Carlisle City Council currently does not have a corporate internal communications systems. Many staff rely on briefings from managers while others, as highlighted in the Communications Best Value Review, feel that they only find out about decisions when they read about it in the local press.

Effective two-way communications can help empower staff, increase staff morale, and heighten a sense of involvement and ownership in an organisation.

Staff, particularly those dealing with customers, can be champions for the organisation and help pass factual information and key messages on – but only if they feel involved and know what is going on.

To help us achieve our objective we will:

	Targets
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	2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop systems for information on corporate matters to be accessible to all staff <p><i>To date information on public folders and staff briefing newsletters have been developed</i></p>	From July 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop an annual questionnaire for staff feedback on internal communications, and incorporate the findings in an internal strategy. <p><i>The first survey was undertaken and results/ actions being looked at by internal officers group.</i></p>	From Sept 2001 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Set up an internal group of 'key communicators' from each department to help develop and deliver an internal relations strategy <p><i>Meeting in February</i></p>	From Nov 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop a corporate internal communications strategy <p><i>The above group will contribute to this</i></p>	By April 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Proactively highlight achievements by staff in local and specialist press. <p><i>Being developed, coverage achieved so far included grounds maintenance staff winning national award and staff donating toys.</i></p>	Being developed

NB – the revised service plan will include Members communications within internal relations objective and actions.

E-communication

Objective: develop an accessible, informative, and interactive web site in accordance with national best practice and e government strategy.

Issues

The council's web site was launched in January 2001 and is currently an information based site which offers information about the council's services. An e government strategy for Carlisle City Council is currently being developed. The government has set a target of 100% of council services to be available online by 2005.

To help us achieve our objective, we will:

	Targets 2001/2 2002/3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maintain and update the council’s corporate web site to ensure information is timely and relevant. <p>Currently being done ad hoc due to no dedicated web post – jobs, press releases etc put on within 24 hours. Will become more structured with new appointment.</p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Work with other relevant departments, eg IT, to develop a strategy for the future of the web site and to meet e government targets. <p>Currently being developed</p>	By April 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify and learn from best practice nationally <p>Will be incorporated into above, also inclusion in Society of IT Management annual report.</p>	From Nov 2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure accessibility and appropriateness of the web site by working with user groups. <p>Feedback given by Carlisle Access Group and Citizens Panel.</p>	Being developed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Promote the web site to increase awareness and usage. <p>Currently being done by incorporating web address in logo usage and corporate promotional material. Future plans will be incorporated in the overall development plan.</p>	Being developed