

REPORT TO CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 12 April 2007

Title: Internal Communications Strategy
Report of: Head of Policy & Performance
Report reference: PPP31/07

Summary:

The report presents the draft Internal Communications Strategy (the Strategy) which outlines how improved internal communications within the organisation will contribute to delivery of the City Council's key priorities.

Key Issues:

The Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Consider and comment upon the Strategy (contained at appendix 1) with a view to improving internal communications throughout the organisation.
2. Consider whether the principles of the draft Strategy are likely to meet the internal communication needs of Members.
3. Consider other means of internal communications that should be explored and developed in order to improve Member / officer communications.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communication is a powerful tool that can be used to develop the culture and values of an organisation. In an age of openness and greater accountability, especially in the public sector, we need to actively engage with all our stakeholders, and particularly our employees and elected Members. This is not just a responsibility for management but involves everyone within the Council. Effective, internal communication is about enabling us to do our jobs to the best of our ability, and ensuring that all of us are working together towards the same organisational goals.

The purpose of the strategy is to set out **how** the Council will improve internal communications to develop a culture where employees and Members feel valued and are able to contribute to achieving the Council's key priorities.

A number of issues are driving the development of the Internal Communications strategy:

- The Chief Executive's Sounding Board lunches highlighted the need to share information and improve access to information, as well as to improve communications across the City Council.
- The Annual Employee Opinion Survey. The most recent was undertaken during November and December 2006. From a possible 778 staff, there were 283 responses, giving a response rate of 36%. 73% were satisfied with internal communications. 27% were dissatisfied.

The Internal Communications Strategy aims to contribute to delivery of the Council's key priorities and Vision through:

- Promoting proactive, dynamic information sharing across the organisation that increases knowledge of staff and councillors enabling us to provide excellent standards of service
- Establishing and sharing communications best practice throughout the council.

The principle aim of the strategy is to develop the Council's internal communication infrastructure so it is better able to deliver our communication needs. Internal communications must help employees and Members to understand their individual, and corporate communications responsibilities, so we can all work together more effectively and efficiently to deliver the Vision for Carlisle.

2. CONSULTATION

To date: Senior Management Team, Service Heads and other managers and staff
Joint Management Team

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY - Draft

1. INTRODUCTION

Carlisle is a city of regional status in the north of England and the Council continuously “punches above its weight” in the scope of services it provides. The City Council’s mission is to drive forward the economic, physical and social renaissance of Carlisle, making the city a vital and attractive place where people chose to live, work and visit.

The Council’s Vision is to ensure a high quality of life for local people in all of Carlisle’s urban and rural communities. The City Council has identified three key priorities where it will focus its efforts over the next three years and that will help to turn its Vision into reality:

Carlisle Renaissance Cleaner, Greener, Safer Carlisle, and Learning City

The Internal Communications strategy will contribute to delivery of the key priorities by:

- ✓ Promoting proactive, dynamic information sharing across the organisation that increases the knowledge of employees and Members and enabling us to provide excellent standards of service
- ✓ Establishing and sharing communications best practice throughout the Council

The Strategy sets out our commitment to good communications within the organisation and forms part of a wider communications strategy, currently under review. It will address a number of issues highlighted in the Employee Opinion surveys of 2005 and 2006.

Ultimately, the Council should gain recognition as an organisation with innovative, excellent communications which are actively, and effectively, monitored and evaluated with a view to continuous improvement.

The intended audience for the Strategy is elected Members and employees.

2. PURPOSE

Communication is a powerful tool that can be used to develop the culture and values of an organisation. In an age of openness and greater accountability, especially in the public sector, we need to actively engage with all our stakeholders, and particularly our employees and Members. This is not just a responsibility for management but involves everyone within the Council. Effective, internal communications are about enabling us to do our jobs to the

best of our ability and ensuring that all of us are working together towards the same goals.

The purpose of the strategy is to set out **how** the Council will improve internal communications to develop a culture where employees and Members feel valued and are able to contribute to achieving the Council's key priorities.

Information must be communicated to employees and Members that is relevant to them doing their job and to providing the best service they can. In addition, transparent, equitable and consistent access to information about wider Council business will increase general knowledge about key issues, engaging and involving employees and Members more in service planning and delivery.

Improved communications will give employees and Members a clearer insight into how their individual roles support the Council's Vision and key priorities, increasing understanding of Council business and improving morale, motivation and performance.

3. CONTEXT

Key drivers of the Strategy include:

- The Chief Executive's Sounding Board lunches that have highlighted a need to share information, and improve access to information, as well as to improve communications across the organisation
- The annual Employee Opinion survey; the most recent was undertaken during November and December 2006 and achieved a response rate of 36% (283 responses out of a possible 778 staff). Headline results contained in annex 1.

4. KEY PRINCIPLES

The Strategy will help us to develop the Council's internal communications infrastructure so it is better able to deliver our communications needs. Internal communications must help employees and Members to understand their individual, and corporate communications responsibilities, so we can all work together more effectively and efficiently to deliver our key priorities.

Internal communications will be developed and delivered across the organisation in accordance with the following key principles:

- Using established communication channels, and developing new ones, to provide information that enables employees and Members to carry out their roles effectively - and that provide opportunity for feedback
- Informing all our employees and Members of issues and events that affect the City Council and the impact it will have upon them – and providing opportunity for feedback

- Creating opportunities for greater engagement between employees across the authority to promote knowledge of areas other than their own and to share good practice
- Emphasising the key communications role of Senior Management Team and other key communicators in communicating key messages
- Using feedback productively by sharing ideas and taking action that promotes positive change
- Consulting employees and Members through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practices and procedures
- Maintaining a strong, two-way flow of information within the Council that supports and encourages teamwork, trust and loyalty
- Communicating policy decisions, and the reasons for those decisions, so all employees and Members are informed about Council priorities
- Outlining progress on long-term projects
- Explaining change
- Managing crises so that all employees are clear in their respective roles
- Recognising and communicating good performance consistently across the authority so that employees are motivated
- Communicating good news so that we are able to acknowledge and celebrate success e.g. via Staff Focus and Civic Dinner, and externally through the media
- Providing training to improve communication skills of Managers, other employees and Members as part of the Corporate and Member Training and Development programmes
- Ensuring that all employees participate in team meetings / briefings, at least on a monthly basis but when required, where information can be exchanged
- Developing an Intranet as a key resource to facilitate information sharing
- Use existing and develop new communication channels that support Members in their work as elected representatives of local communities
- Monitor and assess the effectiveness of internal communications and continue to develop our practices to meet changing needs

5. EXISTING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

• Senior Management Team (SMT)

Weekly meetings to discuss strategic issues. Information disseminated to employees via a number of means including team meetings and monthly management briefing. Scope to publish bulletin that summarises key issues.

• Directorate Management Team (DMT)

Regular management team meetings within each directorate to discuss strategic and operational issues. Information disseminated through team meetings.

• Management Briefing

Monthly briefings for all managers to discuss and debate current and emerging key issues. Information disseminated to other employees through team meetings. Scope to develop to involve managers more in developing strategy and services.

• Investors in People

Provides a framework for good practice in how the Council acts as an employer. Aspects of Investors in People are linked to internal communications including:

- Capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively must be clearly defined and understood
- Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people
- Peoples' contribution to the organisation is recognised and valued
- People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility through involvement in decision-making
- People learn and develop effectively
- Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation.

• Team Improvement Review (TIR)

Current guidance says to be held twice a year to assess teams' progress against aims and objectives and targets (to include Best Value Performance Indicators where relevant) and to set new targets. In the recent Employee Opinion survey, 48% of employees said they had not had a TIR in the past six months. The process is currently under review.

• Appraisals

Carried out annually with a six monthly update; every employee should have the opportunity to consider and comment on previous performance and receive feedback from their manager. It is also where future work objectives are agreed and any training and development needs identified. It should be clear how individual work objectives contribute to the team service plan and ultimately to the Council's key priorities.

• Staff Focus

Published every 2 months, the magazine carries news and more in-depth features on teams and individuals and Council initiatives. It has a feedback column and letters page; all employees have opportunity to contribute.

- **E-mail**

Something of a blunt instrument but currently the most efficient way of disseminating information within the Council. All Members have access to email although one quarter of employees have no direct access.

- **Face to Face**

Many would argue the most effective means of communicating that ensures messages are understood and offers immediate opportunity for feedback. Scope for managers to better engage face to face with their peers, and with other employees. The success of the Chief Executives' Sounding Boards, which have instigated several new projects, should be captured and developed.

- **Team Meetings**

The Council currently operates a top down team meeting system. Training on getting the best from team meetings and on chairing skills is offered as part of the Corporate Training and Development programme.

- **Staff Induction**

There is scope to improve the communications aspects of staff induction. Currently, little information is given to new employees on information and communications systems and processes.

- **Intranet**

Currently under development. An Intranet is usually the primary source of information in organisations. An Intranet is relatively easy to maintain and update, and will reduce the reliance on paper, in line with the Council's environmental policy. An Intranet allows regular and frequent distribution of relevant information to employees and Members in an effective, efficient and timely manner. A discussion forum to encourage employee and Member feedback on a wide variety of issues will be part of the Council's Intranet.

- **Employee Opinion Survey**

Consultation with employees currently carried out annually. The results are used to inform employee policies and procedures and other strategy such as this one.

- **Consultation**

A number of consultation methods exist in line with The Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations introduced 6 April 2005. A number of methods used within the Council include corporate consultation and directorate level consultation, where requested. Additionally, line managers will also consult with staff individually regarding localised / specific matters.

- **Member's Briefing**

Regular updates to all Members on recent and emerging key issues. Scope for improvement?

- **Portfolio Holder's report**

Presented to Full Council. Some of the information is duplicated in Member's Briefing. Scope for improvement?

6. KEY COMMUNICATORS

Key communicators will be responsible for driving the Internal Communications strategy by actively and demonstrably applying its principles to everything that they do.

Chief Executive to ensure key issues are related to employees and Members mainly via SMT, Management Briefing and JMT, and by any other appropriate means – and to ensure adequate opportunities for feedback.

Senior Management Team to ensure key issues are related to all employees mainly via Service Heads, Management Briefing, and by any other appropriate means – and to ensure adequate opportunities for feedback.

Joint Management Team to ensure relevant information is related to employees and Members via existing communication channels.

Heads of Service to ensure key issues are related to all employees within their own areas of responsibility mainly via team meetings and any other appropriate means – and to ensure adequate opportunities for feedback.

Other managers to ensure key issues are related to their teams via team meetings, TIRs and any other appropriate means – and to ensure adequate opportunities for feedback.

Communications Manager, with support from Head of Policy & Performance, will monitor implementation and subsequent effectiveness of the Strategy. Results will inform future reviews of the Strategy.

9. MONITORING AND REVIEW

Feedback from employees and Members about how the Strategy is being implemented, including what is working well / best practice, and where problems are being encountered, is welcome at all times and should be directed to your line manager / Group Leader, and / or the Communications Manager.

The effectiveness of the strategy will be formally evaluated through the Employee Opinion Survey which will measure employees satisfied with internal communications and ensure that there is on-going improvement.

Employee Opinion Survey, 2006

Headline results:

- 91% of employees said that the Council was a good employer
- 50% agree the council has established a culture where they can contribute their ideas on how things are done while 24% disagree
- 56% say their line manager gives them recognition for work well done always or most of the time; 19% say this happens rarely or never
- 54% of employees know their opinion will be listened to always or most of the time; 31% think their opinions are listened to sometimes
- 48% of employees have not had a team improvement review (TIR) in the last 6 months
- 42% feel the Council values their experience and skills. 35% feel their experience and skills are sometimes valued by the council
- 55% of employees agree that their line manager encourages them to develop new skills and enhance their career prospects while 23% disagree
- The most popular method of communication is via email (80%) followed by team meetings (73%)
- 73% are satisfied with internal communications in the council compared to 74% 2005/06. 27% are dissatisfied

The Strategy will help to address a number of key issues highlighted above.