



**Report to: - Cabinet
Personnel and Resources Committee**

Subject Employee Communications Strategy

Date Cabinet – 2 December 2004
Personnel and Resources – 6 December 2004

Author Head of Cabinet Office on behalf of Senior Management Team

1. Purpose of the Report

§ To present a final draft Employee Communications Strategy and Action Plan, for Cabinet and Personnel and Resources Committee approval, amended as result of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

2. Background

2.1 - Development of a Communications Strategy is a key improvement task for the Council for the current year.

2.2 - The task has been broken down to develop separate employee and external communications strategies, though there is likely to be some overlap between the two. Member communication is being considered separately, though it impacts on both to an extent and these impacts will be considered as the strategies are developed.

2.3 - The Employee Communications Strategy has been developed first. This reflects its inclusion in the CPA Improvement Plan, and also links with liP developments.

2.4 – Cabinet and Personnel and Resources Committee considered and agreed a draft Strategy in August 2004, which has since been subject of consultation with relevant stakeholders. These include all employees and their representatives.

2.5 – Improvements to internal communications recently put in place have contributed to the Council's success in securing liP accreditation. The Strategy and Action Plan seeks to consolidate and further develop these improvements.

3. Proposal

3.1 – A copy of the proposed final Employee Communications Strategy and Action Plan is attached at **Appendix A**.

3.2 – A number of changes have been included, compared with the original draft, largely in response to issues raised by UNISON in their response to the consultation exercise. Changes from the original documents are set in italics.

3.3 – At the time that the Strategy was first developed, the Council was in the process of recruiting a new Communications Officer, and specific commitments to completion of Action Plan points could not be made. Now that the post has been successfully recruited to, it has been possible to put forward targets dates for remaining actions in the Action Plan, and these are also set in italics.

3.4 – Successful completion of the Action Plan requires commitment to its delivery across the organisation – it is not just a central Communications function. Senior Management Team supports this view and feels in particular that the new Employee Consultation and Involvement group will have a key role to play.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 – It is likely that the Action Plan commitments can be met from within existing agreed resources.

4.2 - It should be acknowledged that recently introduced increases in corporate capacity (in staffing and technical terms) have already played a role in initiating these improvements and will continue to be important in ensuring the Action Plan is delivered.

4.3 - Any initiatives that require additional resource in the future will be submitted through the Council's Budget and Service planning processes in the usual way.

5. Recommendation

5.1 – Cabinet and Personnel and Resources Committee are **recommended** to agree the Employee Communications Strategy and Action Plan.

Appendix A

**DRAFT – Revised November 2004, arising from consultation replies
(Proposed amendments set in italics)**

Gedling Borough Council

Employee Communications Strategy

1. Objectives of the Strategy

The overall objective of the strategy is:

“To develop and maintain a two-way flow of information within the Council, using all appropriate means, that supports and encourages teamwork, trust and loyalty.”

In doing this, the strategy will: -

- Embed a clear understanding of the council’s role, priorities and values amongst all target groups.
- Contribute to improved service delivery and customer care.
- Improve employee morale *and demonstrate that employees are valued.*
- Contribute to improved employee retention rates.
- Ensure that communication is delivered in a way that is relevant to its audience, comprehensive and accessible in language and style.
- *Ensure effective feedback mechanisms for employees throughout the Council, encouraging new ideas and initiatives as well as responses to proposals.*

2. Target Audience

The target group is: -

- All employees

Within this broad grouping, there are a range of sub groups.

These include: -

- Front-line employees
- Office-based employees
- Managers
- *Trade Unions.*

The strategy recognises that each sub-group will have different information needs. Techniques employed will need to reflect this, while recognising that all groups will need to be able to access certain key information.

3. Techniques to be Deployed

The following tools and techniques will be used to deliver the strategy.

- Newsletters
- Team Meetings/Briefings
- Service/Issue specific briefings
- Staff Attitude survey
- Briefing and discussion notes
- Intranet
- Email
- Face-to-face conversations
- Director/Senior manager briefings
- Focus groups
- Formal employee appraisals

This list is not exhaustive, and new techniques will be used as appropriate.

4. Areas for Improvement/Action Plan

Proposed areas for improvement are set out in a draft Action Plan, attached at **Appendix 1**.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

“My responsibility, your responsibility, our responsibility”

Culturally, internal communication is part of all employees’ jobs, but there are nevertheless specific roles for key individuals and groups.

Specific responsibilities are set out below.

Senior Management Team is responsible for: -

- Identifying developments and proposals that might affect particular wards and ensuring that members are kept informed of these, working with relevant Cabinet members as appropriate.

- Agreeing key messages for dissemination arising from senior management meetings.

Senior Management Team and Section Heads are responsible for: -

- Ensuring that key messages are communicated in a timely and accurate manner, using all appropriate techniques at their disposal.
- Ensuring that opportunities are offered for feedback from employees, and that this feedback is fed into appropriate mechanisms, to be acted upon as appropriate. Results of any deliberations should also be fed back to whoever raised the original idea.
- Contributing ideas and material for inclusion in corporate publications.

Section Heads are responsible for: -

- Ensuring that sections of the Internet and Intranet relating to their service are kept up to date.

All employees are responsible for:-

- Adopting a positive and constructive approach to communication, making full use of communication mechanisms available.

Cabinet Office is responsible for: -

- Managing the production of all corporate internal communication publications.
- Overall content management of the Intranet.
- Development and publication of good practice guidance.
- Providing formal and informal advice and support to all employees on internal communication issues.

Personnel and Organisational Development is responsible for: -

- *Supporting managers in* identifying and addressing corporate training needs relating to internal communications.
- Overall technical management of the Intranet.
- Sampling employee attitudes and perceptions of internal communications, through Employee Attitude surveys and other techniques as appropriate.
- *Supporting managers to develop* competencies relating to communication at management and other levels.

6. Training and Development

While communication impacts on all employees, there will be areas and issues where there are training needs to allow for employees to fulfil their responsibilities.

These will be considered and addressed through provision in the Corporate Training programme and through other means as appropriate.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The overall effectiveness of internal communication can only really be measured in a subjective way.

It is therefore suggested that key questions relating to internal communications are included in a Staff Attitude Survey, linked to liP accreditation, and that this survey is repeated on a regular basis to allow performance to be tracked.

The first survey, to be carried out in 2005/06, will provide baseline data against which future targets can be set.

Suggested questions are set out below. The Employee Communications and Involvement Group will play a key role in developing these further.

- I feel that communication in the council has improved over the last 12 months
- I feel adequately informed about council activities
- I feel that the council has clearly defined aims and objectives
- I would describe my own morale as generally good
- Staff morale in my service has increased since last year
- I know how my work fits into what my service is trying to achieve
- I believe that the council is a good employer
- My manager regularly informs me about issues concerning the whole Council/about other departments.

This data could be supported by “soft” data, gathered from PDR interviews, exit interviews etc, which may be gathered more systematically, and by a limited number of input/process based indicators, such as the number of employee newsletters produced, number of hits to the Intranet.

Specific initiatives should be evaluated using surveys or questionnaires appropriate to the scale of the initiative. This could include readership surveys for publications, or random “mystery shopper” calls about specific initiatives.

Overall consideration will be given to setting a self-assessed target against the IDeA Communications Standard, though this would be best looked at in the context of all communications activity, internal and external.

November 2004

**Draft Employee Communication Strategy
Draft Action Plan**

Area for Improvement	Proposed Action	Issue to be addressed	Lead Responsibility	Timescale
<p>Improvements to consistency of information from senior management</p>	<p>Introduction of core briefing notes from Senior Management Team meetings</p>	<p>Current arrangements for the dissemination of key messages from senior management meetings are very much ad-hoc. Key issues for communication are not agreed.</p> <p>Experience shows that messages cascaded verbally are often misinterpreted, and repeated misinterpretation can completely alter the message transmitted.</p> <p>Good practice suggests that an agreed briefing of key issues for communication, systematically disseminated, can ensure a consistent message reaches all parts of an organisation.</p>	<p>HoCO</p>	<p>With immediate effect – review after six months</p>
<p>More systematic cascade of information</p>	<p>Guidelines to Section Heads on approaches to team Meetings, including standard agenda items and feedback techniques</p>	<p>Team briefing of some description now occurs throughout the Council. It is a potentially excellent two-way communication tool, if handled effectively, delivered with enthusiasm by managers and approached positively by all involved.</p> <p>Because of the diversity of employment settings, a rigid format and prescribed frequency for Team Meetings is not appropriate, but it may be helpful to set out clear guidelines of what is expected of team meetings and some accepted common agenda items, including Core Briefings. Advice on how to present information may also be valuable and a minimum frequency (monthly) should be specified.</p>	<p>HoCO/HoPOD</p>	<p>Autumn 2004</p>
<p>GEN employee newsletter</p>	<p>Consultation on changes to content, frequency and style of GEN newsletter</p>	<p>The GEN (Gedling Employee News) has been in place since 1991. It has been developed in various ways since then, but its purpose has not been systematically reviewed, in spite of significant technological and</p>	<p>HoCO</p>	<p><i>Consultation by end Jan 05. Agree any revised</i></p>

Area for Improvement	Proposed Action	Issue to be addressed	Lead Responsibility	Timescale
		<p>organisational changes during this time.</p> <p>The aim of the review would be to look at the overall purpose, to strike a better balance between human interest and management focused information, and to encourage greater contributions from departments.</p> <p>In doing this, the review would also look at whether other techniques might be better than a monthly newsletter for the circulation of urgent information.</p> <p>The following alternative approaches are suggested, for consultation with stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEN is produced quarterly, rather than monthly, with a focus on more human interest issues, and less on news and information. Newsy material presented might be more discursive, and less time critical, possibly to introduce new ideas and developments. Print quality should be improved. Copies would still go to all employees. • Alongside this, a new e-GEN is produced for the Intranet, focusing on more immediate newsy issues. This would be much shorter and punchier, and solely text based. Frequency could be fortnightly if resources allow (or at a frequency as required). Hard copies could be printed for circulation to employees in areas where there is no access to the Intranet. • Consideration is given to each GEN being 		<p><i>approach by March 05</i></p> <p><i>Begin implementation Apr 05</i></p>

Area for Improvement	Proposed Action	Issue to be addressed	Lead Responsibility	Timescale
		<p>produced by a "guest editor" from another department, under guidance of the Communications Team.</p> <p><i>Other options, including those put forward by stakeholders, may also be explored.</i></p>		
Clearer "branding" of internal communications	Consistent use of an internal communications brand or logo.	<p>liP survey results have suggested that, in spite of the introduction of new communication methods, employees are still not always aware <i>that communication is taking place</i>, nor of options available to them for feedback and expressing their views. A clearer, more consistent internal communication "brand" (which could be themed around GEN) might address this</p>	HoCO – design SMT - delivery	<p><i>Consultation Jan 05</i></p> <p><i>Implementation of agreed changes from Apr 05r</i></p>
Improved Intranet	Review style and content of Intranet	<p>Now that the Intranet has become established, it may be appropriate to review its style, content and use to ensure it continues to meet with needs, and that it remains up to date.</p>	HoCO/HoPOD	<p><i>Consultation – Spring 05</i></p> <p><i>Agree actions by July 05</i></p> <p><i>Implement – Aug 05 onwards r</i></p>
Director's Briefings	Schedule these to take place at least twice a year.	<p>These briefings have been a success and have recently been opened up to all employees. Arrangements <i>have now been made for them to be held at least twice a year, to be open to all employees, and for some events to be held at other venues to reach employees not based at the Civic Centre.</i></p>	CE	Autumn 2004
Greater departmental involvement in and support for corporate communications	Introduction of "Communications Champions"	<p>Nominated contacts in each department, with a flair for or interest in communications, could act as the link between the Communications team and those departments. <i>It has been suggested that the new Employee Involvement and Consultation Group could fulfil this role.</i></p>	HoCO	<i>From Jan 05</i>

Area for Improvement	Proposed Action	Issue to be addressed	Lead Responsibility	Timescale
Better monitoring of effectiveness of internal communication	Introduction of employee attitude survey	<p>The overall effectiveness of internal communication can only really be measured in a subjective way.</p> <p>It is therefore suggested that key questions relating to internal communications are included in a Staff Attitude Survey, linked to liP accreditation, and that this survey is repeated on a regular basis to allow performance to be tracked.</p> <p>The first survey, to be carried out in 2005/06, will provide baseline data against which future targets can be set</p>	HoPOD	<p><i>Agree survey content by Jul 05</i></p> <p><i>Survey during Sept 05</i></p> <p><i>Results published by end 2005</i></p>

HoCO – Head of Cabinet Office

HoPOD – Head of Personnel and Organisational Development

CE – Chief Executive

SMT – Senior Management Team