

Putting Kent First



Communication Strategy 2008 -2010

Draft 1.4

13 March 2008

Introduction

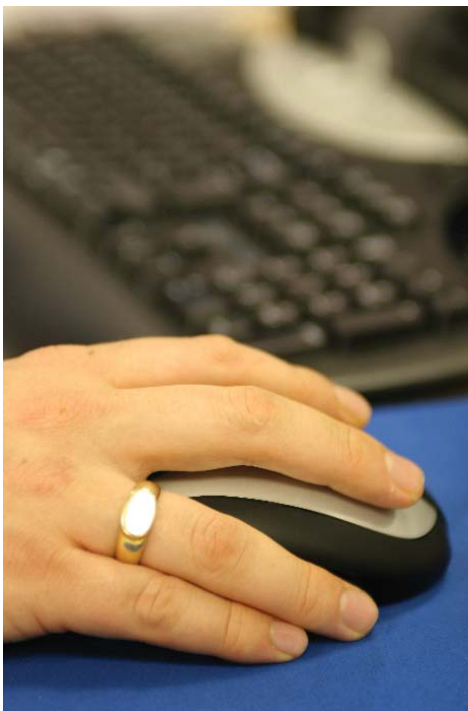
This strategy is a framework and focus for Kent County Council's communication activity and will underpin all work across the authority to ensure we continue to remain excellent in everything we do.

Kent County Council aspires to make Kent an exceptional place to live, work and visit and has set itself challenging targets to achieve this. The aims and principles included in this strategy support the delivery of goals in KCC's long term Vision for Kent strategy and Towards 2010 document.



Two way communication is key to achieving these aims for the county and ensuring that Kent County Council continues to deliver the best possible services to the people of Kent. By communicating widely and openly, internally and externally, and engaging with all audiences through consultation and inviting feedback, KCC can continue to improve and remain an excellent authority.

We believe that working in partnership with the communities and businesses in Kent is the best way to continue to drive Kent forward. Excellent communication will sit at the heart of these relationships to ensure involvement, understanding and accountability.



Context

The world of communication operates in the context of fast changing technological channels and quickly increasing customer expectations. The ability to provide information to Kent residents in the format they, individually, wish to use is increasingly challenging as communication channels further fragment. This is likely to be the most significant challenge in the coming years and the ability to make full use of emerging technologies and adapt to new methods of communication will be essential in order to maintain and improve our services.

Kent County Council has a duty to communicate with residents of Kent about its services and believes that communicating well is essential. This strategy provides a corporate framework in which all communication will be delivered for and on behalf of Kent County Council.

Further strategies and action plans to support this one will be developed to focus specifically on the following elements of communication:

- Public relations
- Internal communications
- Branding
- Promotions and advertising
- New media and web

Additionally, each directorate will have either separately or within other business planning, a communication plan which aligns to this strategy and gives further details relating to their own priorities.

Key Messages

Kent County Council has hundreds of messages to deliver each week, to many different audiences. It would be very easy therefore, for these messages to become confused, muddled and possibly even contradictory. Therefore, it is important to have coherence running throughout all communications, to all audiences.

For KCC this theme is “Putting Kent First”. This strapline has been formally adopted and will be used as a key message throughout all of our communication. Whilst it does not have to be said overtly in each communication, it should be very simple for the reader or observer to pick out why any particular project puts Kent first. All communication can be measured against how it supports this statement, i.e:

- A press release announcing the redevelopment of a gallery – explain how this is Putting Kent First.
- An internal newsletter – illustrating how staff are Putting Kent First.
- Representing the county at a national meeting – arguments and agendas that Put Kent First.



Aims

The aim of this strategy is to support KCC to achieve the following:

- Two way communication, giving residents the choice of how to communicate with us;

- Kent residents who are well informed and have a high awareness of the Council's services and how to access them;
- Kent residents who have a positive perception of KCC and its services;
- The reputation of the organisation is maintained and enhanced locally, nationally and internationally;
- A fully informed, engaged workforce enabled to deliver the best services possible;
- To endorse communication as a priority issue for the authority;
- Partnerships are developed and improved.

Principles

In order to achieve these aims, KCC is committed to ensuring all communication (whether internal or external) adheres to the following principles:

Customer focused

- We will put the customer at the heart of everything we do and adhere to the standards of our Customer Care Charter.

Open and honest

- We will give honest, positive, evidence based messages and be open to debate and questions.

Timely

- We will communicate with our audiences proactively when the messages are relevant to them.

Jargon free

- We will make sure our messages can be understood by the intended audience. We will avoid jargon, unless it is suitable for those we are communicating with.

Accessible to all

- We will offer an appropriate choice of communication methods in order not to disadvantage any members of the community. We will also insist all of our channels adhere to accessibility standards.



Relevant to the audience (both in message and method)

- We will create and develop communication channels that allow the audience to access as much or as little information as they feel appropriate. We will develop a wide range of channels so that the audiences have choice in how they access that information. We will continue to try to target messages to those who will most benefit.

Continue to develop new ways of reaching audiences (particularly those seldom heard)

- We will innovate in communication and continue to take advantage of new technologies and opportunities that arise to improve the range and reach of communications with all of our communities.



Encourage and enable feedback

- We will publish contact information on all communication we produce and continue to encourage feedback in order to improve two way communication.

Listen actively as much as inform

- We will proactively seek the opinions of our audiences, acknowledge them and respond to them quickly, honestly and consistently.

Regularly evaluate and measure our communication, and respond to the outcomes

- We will endeavour to measure the success of each of our communication channels, products and messages as appropriate and be open to change based on the results.

Minimise environmental impact

- We will select communication methods which are cost effective and environmentally responsible, using electronic channels where appropriate. This supports the implementation of the KCC Environment Policy commitments.

Value for money

- We will make the best possible use of our resources and budgets by working with colleagues across the organisation to bulk buy, get good rates and share best practice.

Audiences

The Local Government Association’s (LGA) Reputation Campaign (published in July 2006) carried out research into how local government organisations are perceived by the public. From this they identified 12 core actions that would improve public perceptions, five of which were directly linked to communication:

- manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council;
- provide an A-Z guide of council services;
- publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents;
- ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services;
- good internal communications – make sure staff and members are informed.



The research highlights the need for excellent communication across all audiences in order for the organisation to be valued by its communities. Communication therefore has a direct link with customer satisfaction.

It is essential to identify all of the relevant audiences we communicate with in order to deliver the most relevant messages to them in the most appropriate way.

Each individual will have different needs and expectations of their interaction with KCC. We shall therefore use as many channels of communication as appropriate to reach as many people as we can.

Our main audiences broadly include:

- Kent residents and customers
- KCC employees
- Elected members
- Partner organisations
- Recognised trade unions
- National government and government agencies
- Other local authorities
- Voluntary sectors
- Kent’s 600+ schools
- Businesses
- Members of Parliament
- Public outside of Kent for inward investment, tourism etc
- Media

Methods

KCC currently uses a huge variety of methods to communicate with various stakeholders. These currently include (but are not exclusive to):

Kent residents

Face to face

County Show and other events
 Citizen's Panel
 User groups/focus groups
 Consultation
 Partnerships e.g. district councils, voluntary sector, NHS, police, fire, private sector
 Information and access through offices, libraries, Gateways, children's centres, etc.
 KCC chairman's activities and events
 Lord Lieutenancy and Deputy Lieutenants
 Youth Council
 Kent Ambassadors
 LiNKS
 Citizens panels

Written (hard copy)

Around Kent publication (for all Kent residents)
 Campaigns, e.g. road safety, Clean Kent, free nursery places etc.
 Press/media coverage
 Strategic documents e.g. Towards 2010, Annual Plan, Vision for Kent
 Information leaflets

Electronic / New media

KCC website
 Other KCC-related websites
 Kent TV (community channel)
 Leader's blog
 Consultation with Kent residents and organisations
 Web casting
 Downloads

Telephone

KCC 24 hour contact centre

KCC Employees

The following channels are in addition to those used for residents as most employees are also resident in Kent.

Face to face

Line management and supervision
 Roles and Relationships seminars (or equivalent large staff meetings)
 Team Briefing
 Quality Service Awards
 Team meetings
 I:ls
 Leadership seminars
 Communication representatives

Written (hard copy)

Kent First (internal staff magazine)
 Campaign specific events
 Action plans/personal development plans
 Directorate magazines
 Business Plans

Electronic /new media

KNet
 Global emails
 Chief Executive's blog
 Webjamming

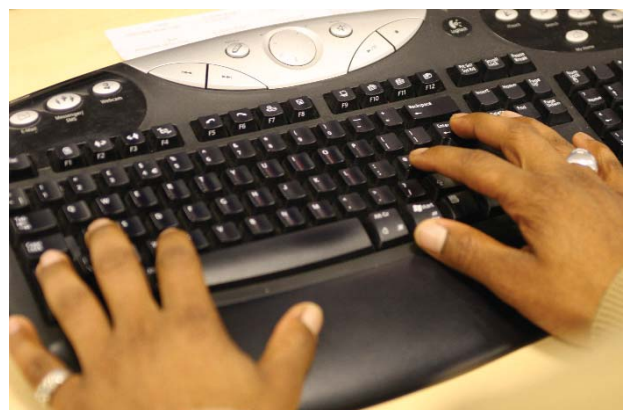
It is essential that messages are given through the most appropriate channel, to ensure that they are received and understood by the relevant audiences. Full definitions of all current channels, their purpose, their audiences and the tone of messages will be compiled soon. This will help them to be used to their full potential and avoid conflicting messages.

Additional strategies / plans

As mentioned, this strategy provides a framework for the all communication across the authority and additional strategies and plans will sit underneath this one to address specific issues. The strategy will also support cross cutting, user driven communications focussing on specific target audiences. A range of standards and guides will also be developed to help all officers achieve consistent and high quality communications. Plans will be developed to cover the following areas:

Media Centre

Kent has four large newspaper brands (Kent Messenger, KOS Media, The Courier, Adscene), each producing a variety of local papers. The area is covered by two local TV news programmes (BBC South East and Meridian) and three local radio stations (Radio Kent, Invicta FM and KMFM which has devolved localised news programmes). These are in addition to growing new media channels including Kent TV.



The media centre is staffed by eight professionals whose task is to maintain and manage KCC's reputation by building positive and professional relationships with the local and national media. They provide comment and reaction to breaking stories and proactively seek out good news stories from around the county to provide to the media. The media centre also provides advice to the organisation, including elected members, on how to achieve coverage for the work taking place. A plan will be developed to give structure and direction to this work and also give framework for possible future crisis PR.



Branding

A plan will be produced to direct the maintenance and enhancement of KCC's reputation as one of the best local authorities in England through proper management of our brand. Branding is the perception by others of your organisation and affects customer satisfaction, expectations and loyalty. Maintaining our brand nationally, as well as locally, is one of the reasons that we can continue to be innovative and push boundaries as a local authority.

Publications

KCC produces many publications both online and hard copy, internal and external, some campaign or service specific and others more general. The plan will cover how KCC intends to audit these publications and online channels to ensure that they are all fit for purpose, avoiding duplication and meeting the audience

needs. A toolkit will be produced to help staff to produce clear, consistent and appropriate publications that uphold the KCC brand.

Internal communications

This plan will drive the action to make 47,000 KCC staff (including schools) into KCC advocates and ambassadors.

It will aim to increase staff engagement, motivation and retention rates, lower absence and increased innovation across the organisation. It will cover current internal communications and suggest additional ones.

Websites and intranet

This plan will outline how Kent can maximise its website to give the best possible information to residents and staff and become a cutting edge, 21st century communication tool, taking full advantage of the more robust and tested emergent technologies within realistic and affordable budgetary constraints.



Contact Centre

Plans to follow

Directorate plans

Each service directorate either already has or will shortly produce a plan to address the specific needs of its target audiences.

The Chief Executive's department will produce a plan which includes the various units including public health, policy and public engagement.

Environment and Regeneration (E and R) produce a marketing and communications strategy statement annually as well as linked communication action plan. Reputation management across audiences is the

underlying aim. The plan covers the development and management of communication channels as well as development of communications staff. The delivery of the plan is through a devolved network of professionals across E and R services. In addition to the directorate plan, E and R services and projects produce more detailed communication and promotional plans for their specific messages and audiences.

Adult Social Services' public involvement team is producing an external communication plan to address the unique communication needs of their stakeholders. This includes people who don't necessarily want to be customers but have to access services none the less and therefore present unique challenges.

Communities is currently reviewing and updating its communication strategies and plans, to ensure they reflect the directorate's focus on involvement, improvement and impact. It has produced a draft public relations plan and is developing a suite of communications and engagement-related plans, which will be discussed at a Directorate Strategy Management Team meeting in March 2008. These documents will complement and support the standards and guidelines produced by Corporate Communications, including those for the Putting Kent First programme.

Children, Families and Education, Communication and Information Governance team has produced Principles of Communication along with a toolkit for staff in their directorate. This is currently being updated and is published on the <http://www.clusterweb.org.uk> site. The team also offers training in a range of communication areas and has joined the CFE directorate to the Plain English Campaign and has begun to run this training in CFE.

Roles and responsibilities for communication

The Strategic Communication Board

- To agree and drive the Communication Strategy;
- To direct strategic communication issues affecting KCC including branding, PR and campaigns publicity and engagement;
- Ensuring best value for money;
- Agreeing to or formalising new communication approaches/strategies;
- Agreeing best practice and guidelines e.g. quality of DVDs, protocols for events etc;
- Reviewing and improving current communication policies/guides.

The Corporate Communications Unit

- To lead on communication across the authority and take responsibility for implementing the Communications Strategy;
- To ensure that communication with media, branding and publications are cohesive and present a one organisation approach;

- To support, guide and advise the rest of the organisation on communication (including events) to meet KCC guidelines.

Chief Officer Group

- To support and champion good communication across the authority and help embed it into everything we do.

Directorate communication leads

- To translate corporate guidelines into meaningful actions for their specific messages and audiences;
- To create directorate specific communications and feed in to Corporate Communication strategies and work;
- To act as communication advocates.

Managers and supervisors

- To keep up to date with issues affecting their teams or areas, and those affecting the wider KCC community;
- To communicate regularly with their teams, ensuring a climate which encourages feedback and open discussion;
- To run team briefings with their teams at least once a month;
- To find out the answers to questions if they are unknown;
- To communicate team ideas and thoughts up to their manager.

All staff

- To make themselves aware of what is going on in their immediate areas as well as familiarising themselves with some of the key strategic issues;
- To ask questions if anything is unclear;
- To put forward ideas for service improvements, innovation or budget savings;
- To build successful communication within teams.

Next Steps

Communication audits will shortly take place to measure our current performance against these aims and principles. Following this, regular measurement will be included in the action plans that sit below this strategy. This document will continue to be an organic and evolving strategy to meet the needs of Kent County Council and its residents into the future.



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