



Redditch Borough Council
Communications Strategy
2010-13

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

1.1 Communication is a process that allows us to exchange information by several methods and happens at many different levels. It is a two way process and an integral part of what we do all the time. Good communication leads to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

1.2 Redditch Borough Council understands that effective communication is a key driver in how the public perceives our services. Research suggests that keeping residents informed, listening to their concerns and involving them when making decisions has a significant impact on the satisfaction with the Council and its services. The Communications Strategy looks at internal and external communications and includes an annual Communications Action Plan that aims to deliver the strategic wishes.

1.3 An effective communications strategy takes you from where you are now to where you want to be. It ensures that all your communications are focused on your priorities and are effectively targeted to the right people at the right time.

1.4 To be effective, it has to be a live working document and should reflect the fact that communicating is a cross-cutting issue that affects the whole council as well as the many partners the Council works with. Individual Council teams, departments, directorates should not be operating their own communications in isolation.

1.5 The strategy endorses the Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign. This recommends that the following components make for good council communications:

- Effective media management
- A – Z guide of Council services
- Regular magazine or newsletter
- Branding
- Good internal communications

1.6 Consultation is equally an essential part of the work that the Council does. This is to be covered in a separate Community Engagement Strategy covering both Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council but with separate actions for each Council. Consultation (or engagement) has close links to our communications work but is a separate discipline with its own needs and wants. There is a statutory duty to consult on the Council's work and activities and this has recently been strengthened with the Duty to Involve legislation from Government.

1.7 Listening to what the community wants and involving them in decision making, whether through formal engagement processes or feedback across our communications work (letters from the public in the media on our activities, online reaction through blogs and other social media, or perhaps informal feedback on the Council's magazine) leads to services which are better quality and more appropriate. It makes people within the community feel empowered, giving them a sense of ownership, and it demonstrates to the community the commitment by the Council to listen to and value their views.

1.8 Overall, the Council is involved in a great deal of communications work and consultation. Its commitment to building on and developing this further is underpinned by Redditch Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2009-12. One of the Council's Values described in the Corporate Plan is 'Modernisation (Consultation)'. Next to this Value is the statement 'Consulting with residents and other stakeholders on how we can improve our services and the way we deliver them'. In October 2009 councillors agreed to review this value and the Council's other values and, if anything, have strengthened them in favour of our communications and consultation work. Hence 'Modernisation (Consultation)' has become 'Communication and Consultation'. While among the Council's priorities during 2009-12 is being a 'Well Managed Organisation'. Key objectives in this priority are communications work and include re-introducing the Council's magazine 'Redditch Matters', revising the Council's Corporate Identity, introducing a new media relations policy, reviewing existing communications work and producing a new Communications Strategy. This strategic document is therefore firmly rooted in our corporate planning and priorities.

1.9 The Communications Strategy needs to also contribute to wider community planning and council-wide programmes such as e-government and customer service, or refer to those strategies where they already exist. If those strategies are to be developed, they in turn should tie into the Communications Strategy. If separate departmental or directorate communication strategies are produced, they should show how they will contribute to the objectives set out in this Communications Strategy, as well as setting more local objectives of their own.

1.10 The Communications Strategy must be owned internally, from the top of the organisation to the front line staff, if it is to be implemented effectively and receive the resources it needs.

2. Why do we need a strategy?

2.1 The purpose of this document is to set out Redditch Borough Council's approach to communication over the next three years. It has been written to incorporate elements of the Local Government White Paper 2006; Stronger and Prosperous Communities, findings from the 2008-09 Place Survey for Redditch, the results of a communications audit carried out internally in 2009, and the 2009 Staff Survey. Councils are also directed by the Local Government Publicity Code which is expected to be revised in 2010 by Government. Redditch Borough Council was consulted about possible changes to the code during 2009.

2.2 The adoption of this strategy will ensure that we build a strong and effective communications infrastructure throughout the whole Council and Redditch Borough. It will enable us to assess our performance and to judge if we are delivering best value in terms of policymaking and service delivery through communication with our stakeholders. The Leader of the Council; Executive Committee Members and the Leadership Team will ensure this strategy is successfully implemented throughout the Council.

3. The need for effective internal and external communications

3.1 It is recognised that all facets of communication are equally important in raising the Council's profile and, indeed, improving communications and the perception of the authority both inside and out. We understand that if staff and Members are well informed about the 'bigger picture' and about what the Council is trying to achieve, then they can become true ambassadors for the Council.

3.2 Communications is seen as a priority within the Council and it is recognised that a good communications infrastructure is essential in supporting the delivery of our key priorities. It touches every service and every interaction with the public; from the way it presents itself visually to the way our customers are treated, from its public advertising, to its leaflets and forms; from its information to staff, to its consultation with user groups.

3.3 We want to communicate better with our stakeholders – the people we serve, our staff, partners and audiences beyond our borough boundaries. As a Council, we are committed to improving the way we communicate, engage and consult with our stakeholders, building upon work already being done within our services.

3.4 Evidence of how we have recently been performing comes with the **Place Survey for Redditch 2008-09** (see Appendix B). This was conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Redditch Borough Council. The survey methodology comprised posted self-completion forms as required by the Audit Commission and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The survey period was late September to mid December 2008. It should be pointed out, however, that as with the new Audit Commission Oneplace reports, the survey is mostly about Redditch and not just the Council.

3.5 The chart for `Being kept informed` shows that only 36 per cent of people surveyed felt they were `very well informed` or `fairly well informed` with, what actually should read, 64 per cent not feeling informed. The average for Worcestershire was 39 per cent for informed. Worryingly Worcestershire districts are lagging behind the 49 per cent `informed` figure for all districts nationally. We anticipate the re-introduction of the Council's magazine `Redditch Matters` last year and greater media activity will help increase this figure next time the survey is conducted.

3.6 In 2009 a Council Task and Finish Group was established to consider the future of Neighbourhood Groups. As a channel for external communication, the setting up of the groups over a decade ago had been innovative but in recent years their effectiveness had been questioned on the grounds of the low numbers of people attending meetings (often same people each area meeting), issues discussed (often repeated) and the costs of staging Group meetings bearing in mind officer time and venue hire. Councillors have now decided to abolish the groups in favour of more involvement in the PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings. They have recommended a range of further actions. Some of these have a communications aspect to them and are covered in this strategy.

4. The need to engage and consult

4.1 The Council recognise that in order to develop policies and provide services that our local communities actually benefit from, the Council needs to be able to understand their needs, views and expectations. The Local Government White Paper 2006; Stronger and Prosperous Communities first set out a range of proposals designed to strengthen local communities and to expand their opportunities for local decision making. When it became law it gave local authorities and their partners the flexibility to draw up a comprehensive community engagement strategy to combine activity, improve the coordination of engagement across Local Strategic Partners (the Redditch Partnership in the case of this Council), including the Third Sector, and to reduce the risk of `consultation overload`.

4.2 Engagement and consultation as envisaged by the Government in its Act was to cover three main areas, which are: Sustainable Community Strategy; Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework. As a result, we now work with our partners to ensure that we capture all planned engagement requirements and, wherever possible, combined activity. This has been endorsed further by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill that has changed the Council's statutory duty from `to consult` to one of a `duty to inform, consult and involve`.

4.3 In doing so we want, as a Council, to ensure that:

- *A wide variety of viewpoints are considered that enable us to make effective decisions about the services we offer to our communities.*
- *We have a transparent process that can increase public trust.*
- *All parts of the Council need to share this commitment to enable us to achieve our objectives to improve the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors and to underline our priorities.*

4.4 With the sharing of services with Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch Borough Council is about to work on a new joint strategy for community engagement, especially in view of the latest Duty to Involve requirements (briefing presented to Members recently), but with separate actions for both Councils. Bromsgrove has a recently approved Community Engagement Strategy which we intend to build upon, thus taking forward a joint approach to community engagement.

4.5 Recent consultation carried out in Redditch has been supported by the Communications Team, particularly in regard to organising a series of Consultation Roadshows and the general promotion of consultation work and its results. With our Policy Team colleagues we have recorded all consultation carried out during 2009 and consultation planned for the first part of 2010. The Communications Team will be supporting the production of the new joint strategy with its bespoke actions for Redditch.

5. What we have done so far

5.1 The previous Communications Strategy for Redditch covered 2006-10. However, this was superseded part way through its delivery by the creation in 2007 of a Task and Finish Group of Members (chaired by Councillor Juliet Brunner) who were appointed to look at our Communications as a Council. Furthermore 2008 saw significant staff changes within the Communications Team which severely hindered delivery of the strategy. Both the then Communications Manager and the Council's Press Officer departed midway through the year.

5.2 But in November 2008 a new, strengthened team was in place following the appointment of a Communications and Marketing Manager and two new posts of Media and Communications Officer. They joined a Senior Design and Print Officer and a part-time Administration Assistant. Communications became part of the HR and Communications service, led by a Head of HR and Communications and located within the Environment and Planning Directorate. The Council's Print Unit of four further staff became the responsibility of the Communications Team's Senior Design and Print Officer.

5.3 The Task and Finish Group completed its work in late summer 2008 and made a number of recommendations. These effectively became the **Council's Communications Priorities for late 2008 and for 2009**. They were:

- re-introducing Redditch Matters, the Council's magazine for residents
- introducing Communications Champions across the Council's service teams
- introducing a Corporate Identity for the Council
- introducing a PR issues or a Communications Planner
- supporting partnership working especially with Worcestershire County Council and the other Worcestershire districts, and the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum (LRF) for emergency planning
- developing internal communications
- ensuring communications is on Corporate Management Team (CMT) agendas
- working closely with the Leader and Portfolio Holders to develop the Council's profile and reputation (and that of the town)
- stepping up media relations work and introducing a media relations policy

This is what the Team has been concentrating on since November 2008 and its formation.

5.4 The table below outlines our progress so far. This information has been used to determine what our aims are going to be over the next three years and how we are going to achieve those aims. The **Council's Communications Priorities for 2010-11** are shown from page 14.

Communications priorities for late 2008 and for 2009	What was achieved in late 2008	What was achieved in 2009	What has been achieved in the first part of 2010
Redditch Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding identified for 3 editions in 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council approves re-introduction of magazine • Editorial Panel formed of Members to agree on contents and provide feedback • Appointed advertising sales and printer/distributor for spring edition • New photography undertaken for the magazine • Magazine re-launched with spring edition • Appointed suppliers for following 3 editions after quotation process • Summer edition published • Autumn/winter edition published 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding agreed to increase to 4 editions in 2010 • Work on spring edition completed • Survey created for spring edition to obtain residents' views

<p>Communications Champions</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champions recruited from the 11 Council services and scope of role published • First meeting held includes session with a reporter from the Redditch Advertiser and a look at media relations work • Second meeting includes a photography workshop with a local professional photographer 	
<p>Corporate Identity</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Identity taken to Council for approval. No change to existing logo but new Style Guide and Plain English Guide introduced for all staff and Members, secondary logos rationalised and corporate e-mail footer introduced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Identity explained to the Redditch Community Forum and large print, Braille and translation services promoted
<p>Communications Planner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly planner created identifying issues and opportunities across the whole Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planner on CMT agenda once a month and updated accordingly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planner on CMT agenda once a month and updated accordingly

Partnership working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications and Marketing Manager re-establishes Redditch's involvement in the County Communications Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Council Tax leaflet produced through County Communications • Support given to County's Economy Action Group • Re-join West Mercia LRF with particular involvement around swine flu pandemic • Help Redditch Partnership respond to media interest in the red flag status for Redditch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on joint Council Tax leaflet for publication in March 2010 • Support for 'We are Redditch' event in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and produce related newspaper advertising four-page wrap
Internal communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly Members' Bulletin started • Develop Core Brief as regular staff e-newsletter • Contact, the staff quarterly magazine goes to full-colour. December edition introduces staff to the new Communications Team as well as the Print Unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communications reviewed and discussed with the Chief Executive and CMT. Various recommendations made and followed through including developing a new joint intranet with Bromsgrove District Council. • Core Brief goes fortnightly picking up on each CMT meeting decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work begins on a new joint intranet site (to go live from April/May)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff briefings and drop in sessions with the Chief Executive held around Shared Services, as well as `walk the floor` by the Chief Executive. • Staff Survey undertaken and results given to staff 	
Communications and CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications added to all CMT agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative from the Communications Team attends each CMT meeting to report for Core Brief 	
Supporting the Leader and Portfolio Holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocols created for responding to media requests and discussions on working style and priorities held 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All press releases include quote from either the Leader or relevant Portfolio Holder as per the media relations policy • Provide media support to the Redditch Partnership for the Audit Commission's Oneplace report 	
Media relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press coverage analysed on a weekly basis and circulated to senior staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media relations policy introduced • 272 press releases issued between November 2008 and December 2009 and approximately 20 radio interviews given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap produced with the Redditch Standard on behalf of the Redditch Partnership

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press coverage analysed on a weekly basis and circulated to senior staff • Responses to critical letters in the local newspapers made, as appropriate • Press briefing held on proposed budget savings • Meetings with the Redditch Standard's Editor and Redditch Advertiser Publisher held plus with reporting staff • Discussions held with all the major TV broadcasters about covering the 2010 General Election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press coverage analysed on a weekly basis and circulated to senior staff • Working with an independent production company and NEW College on a documentary for Channel 4 about this year's Morton Stanley Festival
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6. Our aims over the next three years

6.1 Ensure we are seen as a 'customer first' organisation by:

- *Everyone who lives in, works in and visits Redditch Borough is kept well informed.*
- *Raising our profile by actively promoting our services and celebrating successes.*
- *Improve the level and quality of engagement with our community by engaging and consulting with the whole community, as appropriate, in order to continuously improve and shape the services we offer.*

6.2 How will we achieve our aims?

- *Through effective internal and external communications.*
- *We will improve the way we communicate with our stakeholders, and ensure that the Council develops its branding and that it is used consistently in all publications, advertising and promotional material.*
- *Manage the media effectively and innovatively in order to promote the Council to the public and to protect its image and reputation.*
- *Improve internal and external communications so that staff and members become advocates for the council.*
- *Ensure that we use plain English and clear print in all our publications, and so communicate and engage effectively.*
- *Ensure that we listen to the views, needs and aspirations of our residents.*
- *Ensure that we engage with as many sectors of the community as possible regarding our policies and plans in particular the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement and Local Development Framework.*
- *Actively use information we gather through consultation and engagement to inform and influence our decision making.*

7. **Communications Priorities for 2010-11**

7.1 The previous year's communications priorities were largely shaped by the findings of a Task and Finish Group and the need to establish a brand new Communications Team. The Council's **vision and priorities** were, nevertheless, communicated throughout the year at appropriate opportunities.

7.2 The Communications Priorities for 2010-11 take the Council's vision as its cue but include two further priorities that are important: developing our digital communications, and helping to improve Redditch's profile as a place to live in, work in or visit. They are:

- **Enterprising Community**

This is defined as having a vibrant and vital borough where the population is well educated, has high skill levels and is healthy and fit. Housing is excellent and varied and the community is served by a prosperous town centre that has access to first class leisure facilities. The Council's voice is influential and respected by residents, partners, other governmental agencies and suppliers. The town's economy provides sufficient high quality jobs for residents with good levels of pay and reward.

The Communications Strategy includes promoting Redditch as that enterprising community and seeking to ensure our voice is heard and respected.

- **Safe**

The Council works in partnership with other agencies through the Redditch Community Safety Partnership to reduce crime and disorder. The Council identifies key projects to build community confidence and allow residents and visitors to be safe and feel safe.

Community safety has, and will continue to, reflect strongly in our communications activity.

- **Clean and Green**

The Council is committed to the development of attractive open spaces, taking enforcement action against littering, fly tipping and other behaviour detrimental to the environment where appropriate and supporting measures to tackle climate change. The Communications Strategy seeks to promote Redditch's enviable green credentials (large amount of green space in the borough, commitment to tackling climate change, pro-active work to improve the local environment) at all possible opportunities.

- **Well Managed Organisation**

Underpinning all of the above is the desire for Redditch Borough Council to be an organisation that uses its resources effectively in order to achieve its priorities and values and to deliver high quality services that meet the needs of its residents and provide value for money.

This priority is particular to the Council's Communications work and places communication at the heart of the Council's service delivery, by informing and involving residents and stakeholders about all our services, and ensuring users know about the Council and what it is here to do and intends to achieve in the future.

- **Increasing digital communications**

As a Council we have embraced intranet and extranet technologies since their introduction to this authority in the early part of this decade. The website is one of our most important communications tools and was re-designed in 2009 as part of a Worcestershire Hub project. The staff intranet has been in need of a re-design for a while but this too will see major improvement in 2010 with the launch of a new joint intranet site with Bromsgrove District Council as part of the sharing of services.

`Increasing digital communications` needs to be a communications priority to reflect the continuing and rapid growth in web, intranet usage and especially in the area of social networking through applications including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr photographic sharing and blogging. Digital can help us communicate quickly, target the more `hard to reach` groups (young people especially make great use of social media), can be inexpensive, and is certainly going to expand in importance and probably at the continuing expense of print communications. It therefore has to be one of our priorities in this strategy. But we have to be realistic what we can achieve with our resources i.e. some councils now employ officers solely to respond to social media sites, a luxury we are unable to afford at the present time.

- **Helping to create a more positive image for Redditch**

Redditch does have an image problem especially in the context of its location adjacent to some quite prosperous areas in the rest of Worcestershire and neighbouring Warwickshire. While the economic statistics do confirm Redditch, overall, is less prosperous than its neighbours, this is a friendly town that people are proud to live in.

For its geographic size, it has some impressive facilities – a top ten shopping centre, an excellent theatre, a country park and lake, extensive sports centres and facilities, an historic mill celebrating Redditch's proud history as the world's needles maker, award winning parks and abundant green space (including some five million trees), and a range of Council services that few other councils of Redditch Borough Council's size could match – many of them community rooted; plus major businesses whose headquarters are here including GKN and Halfords.

There are many organisations that have a role to play in helping to improve the image of Redditch. The Redditch Partnership is one such, as is the Borough Council (which also provides management support to the Partnership). As perceptions of Redditch can impact hugely on the Council's work and service delivery i.e. the ability of the Economic Development Team to attract new businesses, the Communications Strategy has a role to play in helping to create a better profile and reputation for Redditch, particularly in supporting the work of the Redditch Partnership (although our main focus and top priority, given limited resources, should always be on promoting the Council first).

With a fair amount of negativity about Redditch in 2009 following press reporting of a survey that placed Redditch poorly in a list of UK areas and the CAA Oneplace report giving Redditch a red flag for poor educational attainment and health inequalities, this therefore needs to be a communications priority in 2010-11.

7.3 The Council also has a set of **Values** (revised by Council in October 2009) that support the **Vision** of `an enterprising community which is safe, clean and green` and the Council's **Priorities** of Enterprising Community, Safe, Clean and Green. The Communications Strategy embraces all of these values and has a specific role to play in the values of `Partnership Working` and `Communication and Consultation` as identified in the strategy document. The new values will appear in a revised Corporate Plan for 2010-13.

- We place a value in **Partnership working**, ensuring that these partnerships add value to service delivery and provide Redditch with a strong voice both locally and regionally.
- We are **Fair** in the decisions that we make. We value probity and fairness and strive to understand the needs of all communities, embracing a diverse range of needs and showing respect at all times.
- We are **Responsive and Accountable**. We believe in customer focus and aim to deliver a standard of service that our customers require whilst being open and honest about the decisions we make. We aim to achieve greater value for money through smarter practices and new technology.

- We value feedback through **Communication and Consultation**. We will listen and act appropriately, and will enable and provide support for people to become involved in the services we deliver.

8. Roles and responsibilities

8.1 This strategy recognises that everyone has an important part to play in communicating the Council's vision, of 'an enterprising community that is safe, clean and green' and the services the Council provides. It also recognises that all employees within their own service areas are responsible for promoting a strong, consistent and professional image that is wholly representative of the Council they work for in Redditch. It is the responsibility of the Communications Team to ensure that this is effective by providing support and working with all teams/services to ensure that consistent messages are communicated to all stakeholders. This includes:

- *Internally - elected Members; the Corporate and Senior Management Teams; the trade unions; all employees communicating those messages via the media, our publications, face-to-face or phone, by email, memo, letters, reports and presentations, the website and social media - and ensuring that all publications are published on the website if appropriate.*
- *Externally - Residents includes Council Tax payers, registered voters, users of our services. Businesses includes potential, new and existing businesses. Partners - the public, private, third sector and non-Governmental agencies. Potential employees. Visitors – any person visiting Redditch Borough.*

8.2 It is important that people living in the borough feel that we, as a Council, communicate with them in such a way that it encourages them to participate in our communications activities where they are able. It is very important to us that they feel they are able to influence and shape the things that we do, especially through our engagement work, not only in Redditch Borough but also in their own communities.

9. Where do we go from here?

9.1 This three-year strategy has an annual **Communications Action Plan (Appendix A)**, which will be reviewed every 12 months. The action plan mirrors our aims set out in section 6 and contains priorities (section 7) that are directly linked to our Corporate Priorities of 'Enterprising Community, Safe, Clean and Green, and Well Managed Organisation'.

9.2 All activities contained within this strategy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are effective, fit for purpose and good value for money.

9.3 This strategy has been produced by the Communications Team at Redditch Borough Council. Contact details for further information are:

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10. Appendices

The following appendices relate to the Communications Strategy and are listed as below:

- A) Communications Action Plan for 2010-11**
- B) Extracts from the Place Survey for Redditch 2008-09**
- C) Redditch Borough Council Media Relations Policy**