

The Highland Council
Redesign Board – 24 May 2016

Agenda Item	5
Report No	RDB/8/16

Redesign Board Communications Strategy

Report by Corporate Communications Manager

Summary:

The Board is invited to consider the draft Redesign Communications Strategy which aims to: manage effective internal and external communications with a wide range of stakeholders during the Redesign Project and subsequent decision-making and implementation phases, in order to maximise the Council's ability to meet corporate objectives and reduce associated risks.

1.	Background
1.1	Effective external and internal communication and the organisation's approach to this are crucial to the ability of an organisation to achieve its corporate objectives.
1.2	The Board has agreed that the Redesign process will be inclusive of a range of views. A communications strategy is proposed to support the work of the Redesign Board. It includes internal and external communications. This is attached as an Appendix.
2.	Communication Objectives
2.1	Key communication objectives would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To describe the need for redesign and decision-making processes 2. To engage with stakeholders in a range of ways and gather their views 3. To involve staff and Unions in the process using a range of mechanisms 4. To ensure effective communications with all stakeholders throughout the project, decision-making and implementation stages 5. To manage the reputation of Highland Council through open, transparent, honest and inclusive processes 6. To apply the existing values and principles of the Council, pending the development and agreement of new values. The strategy and approach should be in line with the agreed principles within Council Corporate Communication Strategy.
3.	Audiences and Methods
3.1	The Communications Strategy describes a number of methods for informing and engaging a wide group of internal and external stakeholders. The plan acknowledges the need for focusing information and involvement on specific affected groups as the project moves forward.

4.	Implications
4.1	Resource: It should be recognised that independent reviews have highlighted the importance of communication strategies to the success of projects and the adequate resourcing of this. The proposed strategy would be resourced from current budgets and staff time.
4.2	Equalities: Efforts will be made to include a variety of mechanisms and methods to ensure that equalities groups staff and people hardest to reach have the opportunity to be informed and engaged in changes which may affect them.
4.3	Risk: The organisational risks to reputation, staff morale and the achievement of corporate objectives are outlined in the paper and the proposed strategy aims to address these risks.
4.4	There are no Legal, Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Gaelic and Rural implications.

5. Recommendation:

5.1 The Redesign Board is invited to consider the draft Communications Strategy, propose any changes to agree the strategy.

Date: 24 May 2016

Author: Ruth Cleland

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Redesign Board Communications Strategy

DRAFT

Aim of the strategy

This strategy aims to manage effective internal and external communications with a wide range of stakeholders during the Redesign Project and subsequent decision-making and implementation phases, in order to maximise the Council's ability to meet corporate objectives and reduce associated risks.

Introduction

Effective external and internal communication and the organisation's approach to this is crucial to the ability of an organisation to achieve its corporate objectives.

The effects of public spending constraints and how these are managed can have a significant effect on an organisation's culture and reputation which may affect its ability to achieve its corporate objectives.

The Council has to reduce costs, either by efficiency savings, service redesign or direct service and staffing reductions, in order to balance its budget and deliver value for money. This also means ensuring that public resources are used to best effect, influencing not only what the Council does but how it does it, the standards it sets and who else is engaged in service delivery.

The economic downturn and resultant budget restrictions have seen many public sector bodies reorganise the services that they provide. In addition to cost reduction exercises, possible outcomes can include transfer of service to another provider including the third sector, use of alternative service delivery models or the decommissioning of some non-statutory services.

The scale of year on year savings since 2008 with further savings expected means that redesign of the Council also means re-thinking the relationship between the Council and the public and the mutual expectations about public service delivery.

Some public services have come under closer scrutiny following a number of high profile difficulties, which have led to reputation increasingly becoming a 'top ten' risk on some strategic risk registers.

The management of reputational risks can be addressed through organisational culture setting the right tone at the top; effective external and internal communications strategies and plans; media and social media management, as well as handling of customer service and complaints; staff and public consultation and surveys; and emergency/contingency planning. The importance of communications is always a focus during periods of organisational change as well as unplanned events.

The pressure on public sector organisations to maintain service delivery in the context of sustained funding cuts generates a number of organisational risks including reduced capacity and resource, loss of experience and expertise, lower

staff morale, and potentially increased staff absence. Effective internal communication is key to reducing these risks through involving and empowering staff, explaining the reasons for change and ensuring adequate access to information people need to do their jobs effectively.

The public have a right to information about changes to publicly funded services which may affect them. The Community Empowerment Act (2015) goes further than this with a duty to enable the public to be actively involved in decisions affecting them. Effective external communication is key to this process.

Background

A Redesign Board was established following agreement at Council on 24 March 2016. The Redesign will be an inclusive process led by a Board of 16 Members.

Following difficult budget decisions on 25 February, there will be significant reductions in staff and service budgets which will take effect from the end of March 2016. The full impacts of these reductions are yet to be felt but it is clear that former levels of service and performance cannot be sustained.

Further significant budget reductions (of an estimated £50 million) are anticipated over the next 3 years and there is uncertainty about future grant settlements.

The Board has agreed that it will produce proposals for the Council on redesigning the Council. These proposals will include:

1. A statement of the Council's purpose and values;
2. Clarity on the outcomes the Council seeks to achieve;
3. Reprioritising statutory and non-statutory duties and reviewing the level and standards to which services should be delivered to achieve the outcomes and meet the reasonable expectations of the public;
4. Recommendations on options for the delivery of public services that are affordable and designed with performance in mind, including shared services;
5. Clear links to the Council's localism agenda;
6. Recommendations on increasing public participation in Council services;
7. Recommendations on the structure and management of Council operations;
8. A draft programme to support organisation change for modern public services and for staff and Member development.

The Board will ensure that the process for developing the proposals will be inclusive.

Key stakeholders to involve are:

- Staff;
- Trade Unions;
- Key customer groups;
- Communities of place and of interest;
- Other public bodies; and
- Other service providers.

The Board will use a range of methods to draw on a range of evidence from the following sources:

- National requirements;
- In-house knowledge, information, data and views;
- Other local knowledge – e.g. from partners, other providers, those potentially affected;
- Knowledge of what works elsewhere and what has failed elsewhere, e.g. from external input to the Board;
- External challenge, this could be from the engagement with those affected and/or by independent views brought to the Board.

Communication Strategy Objectives

1. To describe the need for redesign and decision-making processes
2. To engage with stakeholders in a range of ways and gather their views
3. To involve staff and Unions in the process using a range of mechanisms
4. To ensure effective communications with all stakeholders throughout the project, decision-making and implementation stages
5. To manage the reputation of Highland Council through open, transparent, honest and inclusive processes
6. To apply the existing values and principles of the Council, pending the development and agreement of new values. The strategy and approach should be in line with the agreed principles within Council Corporate Communication Strategy.

Action Plan

- To identify external and internal stakeholders
- To identify a range of methods to communicate with and engage all audiences
- To develop key messages which support the Board's objectives
- To identify relevant facts and figures to support messages
- To publish a webpage for the Redesign Board
- Plan and deliver news releases and media briefings and photo opportunities
- Arrange regular meetings with key reporters – offer background briefings at key stages
- Identify and Support lead spokesperson/s
- Monitor and evaluate coverage
- Gather and report back on feedback from stakeholders

Internal Communications

Just under 10,000 staff work for the Highland Council. They, together with their families, represent a considerable percentage of the Highland population.

Effective communications with staff and Union representatives will be vital to any organisational redesign or restructuring process. All staff should be regularly informed of any actions and outcomes of the Board and as any proposals or recommendations are made, groups of staff who may be directly impacted should be directly engaged at that stage.

Staff are experts in their own fields of service and therefore are valuable sources of information and ideas when considering change and new ways of delivering those services. It is important to remember that staff are also service users.

Methods of communicating information and involving staff in the redesign process:

- Trade Unions are to be directly involved in the work of the Board through nominated staff side representatives.
- Updates in monthly In Brief newsletters which line managers are encouraged to make available to all staff who do not have digital access
- Chief Executive emails to all staff will be used for any important or urgent updates.
- Access to Board agenda and papers, workshop materials and presentations via the Council website
- A staff panel similar to our citizens' panel will be set up, with a random sample of staff to take part in surveys and focus groups.
- A new staff Facebook Group page will be created which will be used to share up-dates and gather views on the Redesign work in addition to news on other Council matters and staff benefits
- Staff focus groups will be held across the Council area to gather views on the early stage of the Board's work.
- All managers and Heads of Service will be involved in the management briefings and meetings and some in depth review of functions.
- New digital platforms will be explored to gather views at various stages of the Board's work
- Board Members will be invited to shadow some front-line staff to help them understand job pressures, achievements, how current systems work and to get insights into how things might be done differently.
- Staff Partnership Forum between elected members and Trade Unions

External communications

External stakeholders include the public of the Highlands and service users, Community Planning partners, arms length organisations, funded bodies, the media,

COSLA and the Scottish Government. The Board has identified young people and disadvantaged people as particularly important audiences to reach.

As the work of the Board progresses, specific groups of service users or potential service providers, will require more information and to be engaged in the process.

Creating awareness of public participation opportunities and the work of the Commission on Highland Democracy is also important to increase involvement of the public in decisions affecting them about services and the use of public resources.

Methods of informing and engaging the public and stakeholder groups will include:

- Website information http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20003/committee_information/696/re-design_of_the_highland_council_board
- Board meetings – These will be held in public where decisions will be made. The Board will also consider ideas and options in workshops and briefings which are open only to all elected Members. Recommendations from the Board will be made to the Council and these meetings are webcast.
- The Media – Reporters may attend the public Board meetings. News releases will be issued on key matters and spokespersons/interview opportunities will be made available where there are papers and issues which would benefit from further explanation. Media briefings will be held to ensure a greater understanding of complex proposals, concepts or recommendations.
- There will be a short break between public and private Board sessions to enable the Convener and Vice Convener to speak to any reporters present, explain issues and give interviews or soundbites
- Meetings will be set up with Editors and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board
- The use of the Citizen's Panel to gauge the views of the general public on key issues
- Citizens' juries may be held which can enable a group of citizens to deliberate on a difficult issue and reach a reasoned position where changes are controversial.
- The council's social media platforms will be used to disseminate information and to engage the public. Facebook chats and polls have been successfully used during the development of budget proposals, where people are less likely to go to a physical meeting and this is a mechanism which may be used for the redesign work
- Updates to Council meetings

- Focus groups and presentations to specific community groups
- New digital platforms will be explored to engage the public and specific community groups in the redesign work

Key Spokespersons

The lead spokespersons will be the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board. Lead officers for clarification on processes and technical information will be the Chief Executive, the Head of Policy and Reform and relevant Directors.

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes from the successful implementation of a communications strategy would include:

- Clearer understanding by staff and the public of the need for the redesign
- Willingness of staff and the public and specific groups to be involved and contribute to the process and to consultation methods
- Balanced coverage in media reporting
- At least sustaining staff morale and avoiding any increase in staff absence.

A number of 'hard' and 'soft' measures can be used to assess the impact of communications, bearing in mind that evaluation methods can be resource intensive and therefore may not always be possible to the full extent. These can include:

- Media and social media monitoring
- Staff feedback through various mechanisms
- Sickness and staff turnover levels
- Public consultation surveys and feedback
- Complaints from service users or pressure groups