

**The Highland Council**  
**Communities and Partnerships Committee**  
**9 June 2016**

Agenda Item	7
Report No	CP 13/16

**Corporate Communications Strategy Update**

**Report by Corporate Communications Manager**

**Summary**

A 2 year Corporate Communications Strategy was agreed in March 2015, which identifies 12 core objectives and a number of themes for achieving these objectives. Members are asked to note the progress made.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Corporate Communication Strategy 2015-17 is to support delivery of the Council's programme and to ensure effective communications with Highland people and relevant stakeholders.
- 1.2 Twelve objectives were identified and an action plan was developed.

**2. Objectives**

- 2.1
  - 1. To ensure that the Council is promoted and represented in a manner which maintains, and wherever possible, enhances our reputation.
  - 2. To provide useful, informative and accessible information about council services and initiatives and promote the priorities of the council across a range of channels, including events and campaigns.
  - 3. To create and embed a new relationship between the Council and our Highland communities based on listening, trust, empowerment and participation.
  - 4. To work with community planning partners and partner agencies to communicate shared ambitions and promote the economic growth and wellbeing of the Highlands.
  - 5. To promote the Council's Digital First programme, demonstrating a modern and efficient organisation, encouraging use of online services, whilst practising digital inclusion.
  - 6. To ensure we promote principles of inclusive communication, through support for people who do not have English as their first language, making information available in alternative formats and to include ways of communicating with people who do not have access or skills to use digital communications.

7. To develop the use of social media channels to disseminate messages, increase understanding, promote the ambitions and work of the Council and warn and inform.
8. To work with partners to plan for and provide warning and informing in the event of a major incident or emergency, promoting business continuity and recovery.
9. To promote Gaelic language and culture in line with the commitments of the Council Programme and our Gaelic Language Plan.
10. To provide communication support and guidance for elections and referenda to all relevant stakeholders, whilst maintaining public confidence in the integrity of processes.
11. To provide strategic communications advice and training to assist members and officers who have responsibility for communicating Council initiatives, policies and decisions as well as agreed campaign activities.
12. To develop an internal communications strategy, ensuring access to information, training and an understanding of priorities amongst our staff.

### **3. Key achievements**

- 3.1 Progress against an action plan is appended. A number of key achievements are highlighted below.
- 3.2 Branding guidelines have been developed to ensure information is presented to consistent and high quality standards and in plain English. To date at least 38 members of staff have been identified for plain English training over the past 12 months through the Employee Development Review process.
- 3.3 Customer Service Excellence Award 2015: The report praised the range of information available to the public: "Full and meaningful information is provided in a variety of ways, including web-based facilities, electronic channels, social media and hard copy visual material. Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel."
- 3.4 Social media following has been substantially increased through consistent engaging and useful content. New twitter feeds for @HCHighlandRoads and @corranferry have been set up and training provided to staff and Members.
  - Facebook likes have increased to 12,041 at May 2016 (from 7,700 in March 2015)
  - Twitter follows have almost doubled to 14,700 at May 2016

5 Facebook chats held on various topics between March and June 2015 and 4 budget facebook chats were held as part of the consultation in the autumn of 2015.

Promoted posts are being used widely for a number of topics and events and have had significant success in recruitment and have saved money in advertising costs.

Two videos were produced in 2015 (Doorstep Crime & Stranger Smart).

- 3.5 Around 1000 press releases are issued per year and at least 2500 media enquiries per year are dealt with by the press office.

A Media Relations Survey was conducted (Sept 2015). Results showed:  
*84% (21) of respondents think our press releases are generally good, very good or excellent.*

*When it comes to rating our response and the service they get, 83.3% (20 out of 24 who responded) think the staff are professional and friendly.*

*66.6% (16 out of 24 who responded) find their enquiries are mostly responded to within deadlines.*

*50% (12 out of 24 who responded ) say we explain why if we can't respond within a deadline.*

*62.5% (15) feel the service is helpful and open.*

- 3.6 The most recent public satisfaction survey showed high levels of satisfaction (83% expressed overall satisfaction with council services) and almost all aspects of satisfaction with the Council website improved.

Referrals to the website via social media have steadily increased over the past 12 months. A severe weather page has been created and is prominently linked during winter. A Traffic and Travel website was launched in 2015.

Prominent icons have been created for Pay, Report, Request and My Account and online forms continue to be promoted via social and traditional media in various campaigns.

- 3.7 The Staff survey received 3831 responses with a good overall response rate of 36% (a 2% increase on 2012). There was a positive trend in almost all the job satisfaction factors. 70% answered that they are very or fairly satisfied with their present job, a 3% increase since 2012 and a 7% increase since the first survey in 2000 and 51% of staff feel valued and recognised (up 7%).

- 3.8 Four issues of Highpoints have been produced to date and these have had positive feedback. They are a useful communication method for performance information and celebrating successes. They are also a vehicle for income generation through advertising.

- 3.9 Partnership Work: A North of Scotland Regional Resilience Group Communications Strategy was produced in partnership in addition to joint planning and preparation for a major multi-agency exercise.

## **4. Implications**

### **4.1 Resource:**

There is a very limited budget for Corporate Communications, which has been substantially reduced in the last Budget. The budget is largely funded by income generation. Staffing has reduced from 5.6 FTE to 3.8 FTE.

### **4.2 Legal:**

The Council has legislative duties under the Civil Contingencies Act, Freedom of Information and other Acts, as well as statutory duties to provide specific performance information to the public and the statute of the Public's Right to know. It is also an Audit requirement for the Local Authority to have a Communications Strategy. A number of public bodies have attracted criticism by Audit Scotland by not having adequate and effective communication plans in place.

### **4.3 Equalities:**

The Communication Strategy aims to reduce inequalities by delivering communications in a range of mechanisms to target a range of audiences including those with special needs. An example is to ensure that Plain English is at the heart of all our communications.

### **4.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever:**

The Communications Strategy aims to support Carbon Clever initiatives and to reduce printing costs.

### **4.5 Risk:**

Local Authorities are responsible for warning and informing during emergencies and for cooperating with partners to plan and prepare for as well as manage emergencies. The Communication Strategy aims to ensure that the Council meets its legislative and regulatory responsibilities with regard to communication.

### **4.6 Gaelic:**

The Communication Strategy addresses the Promotion of the Gaelic Language and Culture as set out in the Council Programme.

### **4.7 Rural implications:**

The Communications Strategy aims to deliver effective communications across a mix of urban and remote and rural populations and particularly to meet the Council Administration's Localism agenda. The difficult geography and infrastructure and dispersed population of the Highlands present particular challenges for communication; with varied internet access; long travelling distances to deliver or access services; social deprivation; and diverse communities and cultures.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked to note progress against the Corporate Communications Strategy 2015-17.

Designation: Corporate Communications Manager

Date: 30 May 2016

Author: Ruth Cleland

Background Papers:

Council Programme “Working together for the Highlands”,  
[http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/4611/programme\\_of\\_the\\_highland\\_council\\_2012\\_-\\_2017](http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/4611/programme_of_the_highland_council_2012_-_2017)

Gaelic Language Plan,  
[http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/283/community\\_life\\_and\\_leisure/335/gaelic/2](http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/283/community_life_and_leisure/335/gaelic/2)

Organisational Values  
[http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/695/council\\_information\\_performance\\_and\\_statistics/392/our\\_organisational\\_values](http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/695/council_information_performance_and_statistics/392/our_organisational_values)

# The Highland Council

## Communications Strategy 2015-17

### Action Plan

- **Listening:** We will listen and respond to our communities, value their diversity and treat everyone with respect, developing new mechanisms to hear people's views
- **Open:** We will be fair, open and accountable. We will explain our decisions and be honest about our challenges
- **Valuing:** We will value our staff, look for the positives and celebrate our successes
- **Improving:** We will be efficient and effective in our communications and seek improvement by evaluating what we do
- **Supporting:** We will support our staff ensuring they have access to the information they need. We will support people in our communities to have equal access to information and services
- **Partnering:** We will work in partnership with communities and with other agencies to communicate shared initiatives and achieve common aims
- **Delivering:** We will aim to achieve the best outcomes through effective and efficient communication across a range of channels

## Objectives

1. To ensure that the Council is promoted and represented in a manner which maintains, and wherever possible, enhances our reputation.
2. To provide useful, informative and accessible information about council services and initiatives and promote the priorities of the council across a range of channels, including events and campaigns.
3. To create and embed a new relationship between the Council and our Highland communities based on listening, trust, empowerment and participation
4. To work with community planning partners and partner agencies to communicate shared ambitions and promote the economic growth and wellbeing of the Highlands
5. To promote the Council's Digital First programme, demonstrating a modern and efficient organisation, encouraging use of online services, whilst practising digital inclusion
6. To ensure we promote principles of inclusive communication, through support for people who do not have English as their first language, making information available in alternative formats; and to include ways of communicating with people who do not have access or skills to use digital communications
7. To develop the use of social media channels to disseminate messages, increase understanding, promote the ambitions and work of the Council and warn and inform
8. To work with partners to plan for and provide warning and informing in the event of a major incident or emergency, promoting business continuity and recovery
9. To promote Gaelic language and culture in line with the commitments of the Council Programme and our Gaelic Language Plan
10. To provide communication support and guidance for elections and referenda to all relevant stakeholders, whilst maintaining public confidence in the integrity of processes.

11. To provide strategic communications advice and training to assist members and officers who have responsibility for communicating Council initiatives, policies and decisions, as well as agreed campaign activities.
12. To develop an internal communications strategy, ensuring access to information, training and an understanding of priorities amongst our staff.



## ACTION PLAN

Theme	Actions	Outcomes	Objectives	Progress	RAG
<b>Corporate identity</b>	Produce Guidelines	Enhanced corporate identity and reputation	1,2,5,9,12	New corporate branding and revised logo implemented on several publications and projects Draft Guidelines are in place and will be rolled out in 2016	<b><u>G</u></b>
	Develop key messages			Key messages are developed as part of communication plans for all key initiatives eg. Budget, West Link	
<b>Listening Culture</b>	Hold workshops Identify tools for analysis	Listening culture	3,7	Services asked to consider how Listening can be improved	<b><u>G</u></b>
<b>Media relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide media briefings to explain complex projects and issues</li> <li>• Generate a flow of positive and informational news stories</li> <li>• Defend the council by rebuttal of inaccurate</li> </ul>	Accurate and balanced media coverage	1,2,6,10,11	<p>Media Briefings have been provided for key issues and initiatives eg Budget and West Link</p> <p>Circa 1000 press releases issued per year and a Forward Media Plan is produced monthly</p> <p>Regular meetings are held with key media representatives</p> <p>Two media training sessions were held for Members and media training materials have</p>	<b><u>G</u></b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>coverage</li> <li>• Being open and transparent</li> <li>• Providing media training for staff and members</li> <li>• Implementing online tools to effectively manage media requests and evaluate coverage</li> <li>• Building relationships and consulting with the local media to improve media relations</li> </ul>			<p>been provided online</p> <p>Vuelio Media Bureau implemented (May 2015)</p> <p>Media Relations Survey conducted (Sept 2015)</p> <p><b>84% (21) of respondents think our press releases are generally good, very good or excellent.</b></p> <p><b>When it comes to rating our response and the service they get, 83.3% (20 out of 24 who responded) think the staff are professional and friendly.</b></p> <p><b>66.6% (16 out of 24 who responded) find their enquiries are mostly responded to within deadlines.</b></p> <p><b>50% (12 out of 24 who responded ) say we explain why if we can't respond within a deadline.</b></p> <p><b>62.5% (15) feel the service is helpful and open.</b></p>	
<b>Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An effective search engine</li> <li>• A school closures page linked to social media</li> <li>• Prominent access to committee meeting information</li> <li>• A twitter feed on the home page</li> </ul>	<p>Increased customer satisfaction</p> <p>Increased website visits</p> <p>40% of transactions delivered online by 2017</p>	2,5,8,9	<p>The website search engine was improved in spring 2015</p> <p>A school closures page was successfully implemented in winter 2014/15 (This won an award in the Quality Awards 2015)</p> <p>Access to committee meetings is prominent on the home page</p> <p>Our twitter feed has been placed on the home page and a new twitter feed has been created for @corranferry</p>	<b>G</b>

	<p>to enable access to the latest news</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A severe weather page with useful links to warn and inform</li> <li>• Easy access to services through prominent icons</li> <li>• A traffic and travel page with access to up to the minute travel information</li> <li>• An increased number of accessible user-friendly online services</li> <li>• Use of social media and traditional media to signpost to online services</li> <li>• Increase website referrals to digital services via social media</li> </ul>			<p>A severe weather page has been created and is prominently linked during winter</p> <p>A Traffic and Travel website was launched in 2015.</p> <p>Prominent icons have been created for Pay, Report, Request and My Account</p> <p>88 forms can now be accessed online and these continue to be promoted via social and traditional media in various campaigns</p> <p>Referrals to the website via social media have steadily increased over the past 12 months</p>	
<b>Social media and Online</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signpost to available online services, or other services as</li> </ul>	15,000 Facebook likes by 2017 (1,300 Sept 2014)	1,2,3,4,5,7,8	<p>Facebook likes have increased to 12,041 at May 2016</p> <p>Twitter follows have increased to 14,700 at</p>	<b>G</b>

<p><b>presence</b></p>	<p>appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop social media use</li> <li>• Establish a Linked In presence</li> <li>• Utilise social media monitoring and analytical tools to evaluate</li> <li>• Engage on a range of topics by holding facebook chats</li> <li>• Use promoted posts for key topics to reach a wider audience</li> <li>• Develop the use of video and photographic content to promote council messages</li> <li>• Provide staff training</li> </ul>	<p>15,000 Twitter followers by 2017 (9,000 Sept 2014)</p>		<p>May 2016</p> <p>Linked In is planned for 2016</p> <p>5 Facebook chats held on various topics between March and June 2015 and 4 budget facebook chats were held as part of the consultation in the autumn of 2015.</p> <p>Promoted posts are being used widely for a number of topics and events and have had significant success in recruitment and have saved money in advertising costs</p> <p>Two videos were produced in 2015 (Doorstep Crime &amp; Stranger Smart)</p> <p>Social media training materials have been completed and published on Intranet. Ward Mgrs, Comm Serv Mgrs and Corran Ferry staff. 2 Directors trained have received training.</p> <p>Social Media Training was provided to Members (Feb and Sep 2015)</p> <p>Twitter feeds for @HCHighlandRoads and @corranferry have been set up</p> <p>Employability team sites have been set up and training provided</p>	
<p><b>Communicating in partnership</b></p>	<p>Develop Highland communications planning group</p>	<p>Shared communications plan for major campaigns</p>	<p>4,8,9</p>	<p>Linked In Group for Highland Association of Communicators was established 2015 and multi-agency social media training was held in Dec 2015.</p>	<p><b><u>G</u></b></p>

				<p>Stranger Smart campaign was done in partnership</p> <p>SFRS recruitment promoted</p> <p>Joint Refugee Planning</p>	
<b>Communicating in a crisis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will work with partners to develop a Resilience Partnership Major Incident Communications Plan</li> <li>We will review communications in all our Council Major Incident and Off-site Plans</li> <li>We will participate in learning, training and debriefing events</li> <li>We will continue to develop our website and social media capacity to enable us to effectively warn and inform in an emergency</li> <li>We will help to</li> </ul>	Increased resilience to the impact of emergencies	7,8	<p>Supported development of a NoSRRP Major Incident Comms plan (summer 2016)</p> <p>Held a Social Media training seminar (Dec 2015)</p> <p>A Linked In Group for North of Scotland Public Communications Group was established (Dec 2015)</p> <p>Contributed to several Debriefs: Pavidia, Severe Weather, Ebola and Local Radio conference</p> <p>Leading on Public Communications Group planning and training for major multi-agency exercise Delta52</p> <p>Twitter feed on home page of website, severe weather page, school closures page, retweets of emergency partners and Ready Scotland, and increased follows of our social media sites all help with building resilience</p> <p>Support Ready for Winter Campaigns</p>	<b><u>G</u></b>

	<p>build resilience in our communities and businesses through the promotion of resilience and business continuity information</p>				
<p><b>Access to information</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will promote the various support mechanisms that are available to help people access online information and services</li> <li>• We will provide information in a format that is easy for people to understand and that is suited to their needs</li> <li>• We will continue to work with traditional media to complement online information channels</li> <li>• We will consult with communities to find out how</li> </ul>	<p>Public satisfaction survey results improve</p>	<p>2,3,6,9</p>	<p>Citizens Online and social media seminar to members (Feb &amp; Sep 2015) and drop-in sessions May 2016</p> <p>Highpoints was used for performance information</p> <p>Promotion of plain English training and PRMS qtrly mgt reporting of staff identified at ERD</p> <p>Outcome of public survey Nov 2015 showed high levels of public satisfaction</p> <p>Customer Service Excellence Award 2015: Resources item 21 pg 241 (2.4) The report praised the range of information available: “Full and meaningful information is provided in a variety of ways, including web-based facilities, electronic channels, social media and hard copy visual material. Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>

	we can improve how we communicate with them				
<b>Plain English</b>	Make Plain English training available to staff  Make PE a core skill in EDRs	Increased customer satisfaction 20 staff trained in 2014-15 40 staff trained in 2015-16 40 staff trained in 2016-17	2,6	At least 38 staff identified for training to date	<b>G</b>
<b>Promotion of Gaelic Language and Culture</b>	To provide a bilingual Gaelic area on the website.	This will achieve a stated aim in our Gaelic Plan; that will enhance the profile of Gaelic and extend the use of the language on the Council's public website.	9	There is a Gaelic page with the intention of increasing the Gaelic language content over time. <a href="http://www.highland.gov.uk/gaelic">www.highland.gov.uk/gaelic</a>	<b>A</b>
<b>Celebrating Success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will proactively seek out local positive news about Council initiatives and successes</li> <li>Meetings now have an agenda item for positive news</li> <li>We will produce an online magazine called "Highpoints"</li> </ul>	Increased number of positive media stories  Increased staff satisfaction in survey	1,2,9	1000 press releases p/a 2500 media enquiries p/a  Increased levels of satisfaction in staff survey  Highpoints – several issues published and good feedback  2015 Awards held and reported in Highpoints and press releases	<b>G</b>

	<p>which highlights news and information and Council successes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will continue to hold annual Quality Awards to celebrate staff successes and show we value them</li> </ul>				
<b>Internal Communications</b>	Develop Internal Communications Strategy	Increased staff satisfaction in survey	11,12	Internal Communications Strategy under development during 2016  Staff facebook group page under development	<b><u>G</u></b>

### Evaluation – Measures of Success: Outputs and Outcomes

Communication can be a rather intangible thing to measure as improvement can affect other areas of service and outcomes across an organisation, however evaluation measures available include:

1. Citizens' Panel, Communities Panel Surveys
2. Public Satisfaction Survey
3. Employee Survey
4. Social media measures – Facebook and Twitter follower numbers and Reach
5. Website statistics (hits and referrals)

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[www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)