



Communications and Engagement Strategy

2018 to 2020

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Chief Executive's foreword

What we do as a Council has an impact on everyone in our islands. Our 21 Elected Members represent wards throughout Orkney. We provide a broad range of services and, with around 2000 staff, we are the county's largest employer.

The way we communicate and engage makes a difference to us as an organisation and to people and communities across Orkney. It is important that those we serve are well informed about the Council's policies, activities and events, and that they can share their views and ideas with us.

Good communications should underpin the work of the Council, explaining what we do and why. By communicating clearly and openly we build trust and goodwill. Our residents are more aware of the services the Council provides and better understand the decisions we take. We build stronger relationships with our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors. And we play our part in promoting Orkney as an attractive place to live, work, invest and do business.

The first version of this strategy was adopted by the Council in October 2015. As well as setting out how we planned to manage our communications activities, it set objectives for the Council's Communications Team. These have since been put into practice, road tested and adapted where necessary. The strategy itself has been scrutinised by a Member Officer Working Group, whose deliberations included discussion with representatives of Orkney's local media. The MOWG's recommendations have played an important role in shaping this updated version.

In just over two years much has changed. We are making far greater use of social media. Meetings in the Council Chamber are routinely broadcast online. Videos produced in-house help us promote events and explain what we do.

The way we communicate as an organisation is evolving to meet changing needs and expectations, as does the way we engage with our community. This strategy reflects this and will itself continue to evolve as we as an organisation move forward.

Alistair Buchan

Chief Executive
Orkney Islands Council

Introduction

Effective communication is important in explaining how the Council seeks to fulfil the aspirations of Elected Members, staff and people we serve, and how the Council's priorities, along with the day-to-day work and projects undertaken by the organisation, benefit our community. Through effective engagement, those we serve have opportunities to express their views and make representations to us.

Experience suggests that the better informed people are about their Council, the more satisfied they are likely to feel about the organisation. Communications that are clear, honest and transparent help build trust among residents. Good communications can therefore lead to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships the people we serve, our staff, and our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

This updated strategy, developed with guidance from a Member Officer Working Group, explains how we plan to communicate and engage with our stakeholders and the steps we are taking to ensure this, whenever possible, is a two way conversation.

Communications aims

Through our communications activities we seek to:

- Keep residents, staff and other stakeholders well informed.
- Raise awareness of the Council's priorities and activities.
- Enhance opportunities for two-way dialogue with our community, staff and stakeholders.
- Promote what the Council does well.
- Address negative, inaccurate and potentially damaging information about the Council and its services.
- Support Elected Members in their role as community leaders.
- Promote the Council as an employer of choice.
- Reach all sections of the community.
- Embrace digital and other technological advances in ways which support our Council and community.
- Promote respect and trust between the Council and its stakeholders
- Promote Orkney as a place to live, work, invest and do business.

We aim to ensure our communications activities are:

- Relevant and appropriate for their target audience.
- Readily available in different formats.
- Easily understood by people throughout our community.
- Consistent.
- Honest and accountable.
- Timely.

What do we communicate?

As an organisation we provide information about:

- How the Council works.
- Council policies and how they are decided.
- How stakeholders can engage with the Council and provide feedback on policies, decisions and our day-to-day activities.
- Elected Members and their role.
- Council services.
- Where and how to access these services.
- Changes to services.
- How to get help and advice.
- Events and activities.
- How to contact the Council and its Elected Members.
- The Council's role in our wider community.

Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement provides residents and other stakeholders with the opportunity to have a say in the planning, prioritising and development of Council services.

As will be detailed later in this document, the way we do this embraces modern and traditional methods of consultation and engagement. The Council has adopted guidelines and good practice developed by the Orkney Partnership and these are available [here](#).

The Orkney Partnership's Communications and Community Engagement Strategy can be found [here](#).

Our stakeholders

Stakeholders are people, groups and organisations that can affect or be affected by an organisation's activities and objectives. They include:

- Residents of Orkney.
- People and organisations who use the Council's services.
- Elected Members.
- Our staff.
- Partner organisations in the public and voluntary sectors.
- Local businesses.
- Community councils.
- Visitors to Orkney.
- The local, regional and national media.

Communication and engagement - roles and responsibilities

In a broad sense, communication is not just the responsibility of one Council service, but is part of everyone's role across the organisation. Media enquiries to staff, however, should always be referred to the Communications Team within the Chief Executive's Service.

Decisions on when to carry out consultation and engagement exercises, and on the methods to be used, are a matter for individual services, with support from the Communications team.

Methods used include face-to-face conversations, public meetings, online surveys and Facebooks chats. The Council recently established Orkney Opinions, a public consultation group, whose volunteers members can be consulted when a range of views is sought on a given topic.

The Council's Consultation and Engagement Officers Group brings together representatives from each service, who share good practice and take steps to ensure exercises are timed whenever possible in ways which avoid 'consultation fatigue' among those we consult and engage with.

The Communications team

Part of the Chief Executive's Service, the team is made up of a full-time communications team leader, two press officers (both 0.6 FTE) and a full-time web co-ordinator.

The team has responsibility for external communications. This includes responding to media enquiries, issuing news releases, managing, updating and providing

content for the Council's website and social media channels, developing and supporting campaigns, and providing support for the audio casting Council and Committee meetings. The team also contributes to internal communications with staff.

Communicating and engaging in a time of change

The ways in which councils communicate and engage with residents and staff continue to evolve and expand. At the heart of this is an expectation that communication should be a two-way process. More traditional channels of communication remain important, but social media and other digital channels offer greater opportunities to meet this expectation.

The Council faces twin challenges, with funding from Government expected to reduce further in future, while demand for many services continues to grow. By 2022, this is predicted to create a 'funding gap' of £12 million.

There is an ever present need to build awareness among the public and staff of the financial pressures the Council has to respond to, how these are being addressed and the likely impact on services, jobs and our community. This is a key communications challenge for the organisation.

Strategy objectives:

- Continue to build understanding of financial situation the Council faces, the difficult choices that need to be considered, and how the budget setting process works.
- Highlight the proactive steps the Council is taking to reduce the requirement for service cuts. These include pressing for fair funding for internal ferry services, taking an entrepreneurial approach to income generation, empowering communities to deliver local services, and finding ways to spend less and operate more efficiently, through Change Programme Reviews.
- Help achieve a better awareness of the importance to OIC and our wider community of the Council's reserves, and the need to ensure their ongoing sustainability.

Media relations

Orkney is fortunate in having an active local media, with a weekly newspaper and BBC radio station broadcasting daily five days a week. BBC Radio Orkney also provides radio and TV news coverage for BBC Scotland. STV is represented by a freelance cameraman and the regional and national media provide regular coverage of Orkney matters.

In particular, Orkney's local media plays an important role in scrutinising the Council's decision-making process and in providing information about Council activities and events to their audience.

Strategy objectives:

To maintain and enhance good media relations by:

- Providing a flow of photo opportunities and positive and informative news releases.
- Providing opportunities for broadcast coverage, both radio and TV.
- Identifying and promoting opportunities for regional, national and international media coverage of Council involvement in innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives.
- Helping to increase awareness of the role and work of Elected Members: through 'Around the Chamber' slots on Radio Orkney, for example.
- Responding in good time to enquiries from journalists.
- Defending the Council when coverage is unfair, not balanced and inaccurate.
- Continuing to consult with media representatives – and monitor media coverage - to help the further development of the Council's communications strategy.

Social media

Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are increasingly the communications channels of choice for many in our community, reflecting exponential growth in the use of social media. As a result it has become increasingly important for the Council to use the most popular social media platforms to communicate and engage with the public.

Social media provides the opportunity to:

- Communicate directly with the public.
- Consult and engage.
- Provide information.
- Target this information to the most relevant audience.
- Promote Council activities and events.
- Warn and inform before and during disruptive weather conditions and in the event of a major incident or emergency.
- Direct 'traffic' to the Council website.

A strong social media presence is important for the Council. In the event of severe weather or a major incident or emergency, it is crucial that we have channels people know they can turn to and trust when they need accurate and up to date information.

As at October 2017, OIC Updates Facebook page had 5,139 likes, while the Orkney Council Twitter feed had more than 8,514 followers. Both channels are regularly updated and monitored by the Communications Team.

The Communications Team increasingly makes use of video content, filmed and edited in-house, to highlight the work of the organisation. Made available through YouTube and Facebook, the films have noticeably increased our social media following and proved particularly effective when used in support of campaigns.

The Council also provides a School Transport Facebook page (1,791 likes) and an OIC Roads Twitter feed (1,112 followers). The latter was set up in response to requests from the communities in South Ronaldsay and Burray for a dedicated feed carrying updates on potential and actual closures in bad weather of the Churchill Barriers.

Live Facebook 'chats' have taken place on subjects as diverse as health and care services, an arts strategy for islands, and ways to encourage recycling. These have proved to be an effective way to engage with people and communities across Orkney.

The Communications Team provides advice and support when services are considering setting up their own social media channels: a recent example is the Orkney - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Facebook page. In addition, a number of senior managers are now making good use of their own work-related Twitter accounts. As had been shown with OIC Updates, the key to success is informative, attractive and regularly updated content.

Strategy objectives:

- Continue to develop our use of social media.
- Further increase our social media audience.
- Develop and publish social media guidance and guidelines for people who engage with our channels.
- Develop guidance for the communications team – and other staff where required – on how, when and in what circumstances to respond to unfair and inaccurate posts on our Facebook and Twitter channels.
- Use social media monitoring and analytical tools to evaluate the reach and effectiveness of our channels.
- Further develop the use of video and photographic content to promote Council activities.
- Continue to use Facebook 'chats' for consultation and engagement.

Council website

The Council website is an important channel of communication, offering a wealth of information about the organisation and the services it provides. The site has 3,500 pages and provides access to more than 6,000 downloadable documents. Over the

course of a year the site receives 1.2 million page views and a similar or higher number of document downloads (e.g. bus timetables).

As part of its commitment to equality, the Council has adopted a policy that all documents published on the website should be in a form accessible to all. A further improvement has been the introduction of software that can read aloud website content in English, as well as a wide number of other languages. This is of benefit for people with visual impairments as well as people who do not speak English as their first language.

A public survey, carried out in late 2014 as part of the Change Programme, provided evidence of a growing demand for more web-based services. Of the responses received, 727 (98%) were provided online, with just 16 paper copies submitted.

The survey results indicated that residents wish to retain traditional methods of contacting and engaging with the Council. But they also show that significant numbers would like to make greater use of electronic means of communication.

A Change Programme project is underway to improve the website. The aim is to modernise the current design, enable more online interaction with the Council, and ensure the site is readily accessible on a wide variety of devices.

The website currently provides a relatively limited range of online services: people can use the site to report faults and pay their Council Tax. The Customer Service Platform (CSP) project will allow far more services to be provided online. The website will serve as the 'gateway' to the CSP. From the home page people will be able to 'pay it', 'book it', 'report it' and 'request it' – with each of those categories offering a number of options that will expand in number as the project develops.

Strategy objectives:

- Put in place a new design for the website, following surveys of Council staff and the Orkney Opinions public consultation group.
- Make it as easy as possible for users to access the information and services they need - the new design will make the user experience simpler, clearer and faster.
- Use attractive imagery to give the homepage a distinctly Orkney 'feel'.
- Develop a 'mobile-friendly' version of the site, in recognition of the ever-expanding growth in web browsing using tablets, smart phones etc. The aim is for the website to be fully accessible and easy to navigate on any device.
- Integrate the new-look website with the CSP system.

Audio casting

Audio casting offers the public the opportunity to listen in to meetings in the Council Chamber as they happen – or to recordings at a time convenient to them.

It was first trialled by the Council in March 2015, when two committee meetings were broadcast live over the internet. It has been a feature of each committee cycle since

June 2015. The intention is to bring the work of the Council, and discussion in the Council Chamber, to a wider audience. Audio casting is beneficial for people who live in Orkney's more remote communities, as it means they do not have to attend in person to hear a Council meeting.

The committees currently broadcast are Education, Leisure and Housing, Development and Infrastructure, Orkney Health and Care, Monitoring and Audit, Policy and Resources, as well as General Meetings of the Council and Orkney's Integration Joint Board. As well as the live broadcasts, a listen-again service is provided via the Council website.

BBC Radio Orkney regularly broadcast 'clips' recorded when meetings are audio cast. This has added a new dimension to their coverage of Council matters, giving listeners a clearer insight into the decision-making process.

We have sought to make it easy for people using the listen-again service to find a particular item of interest to them, along with the relevant Committee reports.

An Audio Casting Protocol has been developed, covering areas such as the conduct of meetings and the cessation of the live feed when meetings go into committee. Now that audio casting is well established, we are carrying out a review of the service offered to date, looking at areas where improvements might be made.

Strategy objectives:

- Continue to provide live streaming of meetings and the listen-again service.
- Assess and make recommendations on future resourcing requirements for audio casting.
- Assess and make recommendations on whether other meetings, for example the Planning Committee, should be audio cast.

Campaigns

Successful campaigns deliver tangible benefits for the Council and our community. Working with other services, the Communications Team has helped develop and deliver a number of campaigns in recent years.

These include an E.coli awareness campaign involved partnership working with NHS Orkney and BBC Radio Orkney, the promotion of the visits to Orkney of the Olympic torch and the Queen's Baton Relay, encouraging nominations for the Orkney Sports Awards, encouraging widespread participation in the ActiveLife initiative, and a recruitment campaign for home carers.

As described earlier, video content used on social media has proved highly effective in getting campaign messages across.

Strategy objectives:

- Undertake further campaign activity.
- Further develop the use of video content to promote Council campaigns.
- Continue to assess and provide evidence of the effectiveness of campaign activity.
- Work with Council services to identify future campaigns.

Communicating in a crisis

As a Category One Responder, the Council is required by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to have in place emergency plans and business continuity arrangements. This includes a duty to communicate with the public prior to, in the event of and during recovery from an emergency.

Effective and timely communications are essential in such circumstances. The Council works closely with other Category One and Category Two partners through OLECG, the Orkney Local Emergency Co-ordinating Group. The Council Communications Team has responsibility for OLECG communications before, during and after a major incident or emergency. When required, the team also works alongside communications colleagues within the Highlands and Islands Local Resilience Partnership (HILRP) and the North of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership (NSRRP).

Strategy objectives:

- Continue to help in building resilience in our community by providing and promoting winter safety and other resilience information via the OIC website, traditional and social media, and other communications channels.
- Continue to make effective use of social media and other communications channels to warn and inform effectively in a major incident or emergency.
- Work with partners to further develop major incident communications plans for HILRP and NSRRP.
- Take part in learning, training and debriefing events.

Internal communications

Effective internal communication is essential in ensuring staff have the information they require to do their job and a wider understanding of the aims and objectives of the Council. It is important that staff feel they have a voice, that their views and ideas are valued, and that they can contribute to the decision-making process. Good internal communication is not a task for one particular team within the organisation; everyone connected with the Council has a role to play. Follow-up groups set up

after the 2014 Staff Survey provided invaluable feedback from staff which will shape the development of a separate internal communications strategy.

Strategy objectives:

- Work with services to help develop an internal communications strategy.
- Ensure feedback from the Staff Survey follow-up groups is used in the development of the internal communications strategy.
- Assess the effectiveness of current internal communications systems, trial alternatives, and explore ways to ensure more consistency in staff messaging.
- Recognise that not all staff have access to email and the portal and address this by exploring and assessing other communication channels.
- Seek and utilise further feedback from staff as the strategy and systems evolve.

Summary

This strategy provides an overview of how we as an organisation communicate and engage with our community. It recognises that in a fast-changing world these activities will continue to evolve and sets out the steps we will take to adapt and improve – in ways which benefit the organisation and those we communicate, consult and engage with.

We will now develop an action plan setting out how the strategy objectives will be achieved. This will be monitored regularly.