

Orkney Islands Council

**Communications Strategy
September 2015 to September 2016**

Chief Executive's introduction

What we do as a Council touches the lives of everyone in Orkney. We provide a broad range of services for our community. We employ around 2000 staff. We have 21 Elected Members representing wards throughout our islands.

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

Good communications should underpin the work of the Council, our Elected Members and our staff, explaining what we do and why. By communicating clearly, openly and accurately we build trust and goodwill. Our residents are more aware of the services the Council provides and better understand decisions taken by Councillors. Our staff are better informed. 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.

This strategy sets out how we plan to manage our communications activities in the year ahead. It also explains how we will take on board views and ideas from within and outwith the organisation to help us adapt and enhance the way we communicate. There will a range of opportunities to do this and I would urge you to engage in dialogue with us. This will shape an updated version of this strategy in 12 months' time.

Alistair Buchan, Chief Executive Orkney Islands Council

Communicating the Council's ambitions

Our Plan (Wur Plan) 2013 – 2018 describes the Orkney Islands Council's ambitions and how these are interwoven with the Council's principles and priorities. You can view and download a copy from the OIC website at

<http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/Performance/council-plan.htm>

The Council's Values:

- Promoting survival to support our communities.
- Promoting sustainability to make sure economic, environmental and social factors are balanced.
- Promoting equality and fairness, encouraging services to provide equal opportunities for everyone.
- Working together to overcome issues more effectively through partnership working.
- Working with communities, involving community councils, community groups, voluntary groups and individuals in the process.
- Working to provide better services to improve the planning and delivery of services.

The Council's Priorities:

- Care and support for those who need it.
- Promoting successful, thriving communities.
- Housing to meet the needs of Orkney's people.
- A low carbon Orkney — renewables, energy and opportunity.
- Orkney's economic development.
- Orkney's transport networks.

Effective communication is important in explaining how the Council fulfils the aspirations of Elected Members and how the Council's priorities, along with the day-to-day work and projects undertaken by the organisation, benefit our community.

Communication aims

Through our communications activities we seek to:

- Keep residents, staff and other stakeholders well informed.
- Raise awareness of the Council's aims and activities.
- Promote what the Council does well.
- Address negative or 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
- Enhance opportunities for two-way dialogue with our community, staff and 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.

The strategy in context

Experience suggests that the better informed people are about their Council and the services it provides, the more satisfied they are likely to feel about the organisation and its activities. 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 with stakeholders – the people we serve, our staff, and our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

Our stakeholders

Stakeholders are people, groups and organisations that can affect or be affected by an organisation's activities and objectives. The Council's stakeholders have varying needs – an important consideration when communicating with them. 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.

What do we communicate?

- As an organisation we provide information about:
- How the Council works.
- Council policies and how they are decided.
- 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 stakeholders can engage with the Council and provide feedback on policies, decisions and our day-to-day activities.
- How to contact the Council and its Elected Members.
- The Council's role in our wider community.
- Success.

Communications 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.

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 developer. The team has responsibility for external communications. This includes responding to media enquiries, issuing news releases, managing, updating and providing content for the OIC website, developing the Council's social media channels, providing content for these channels, developing and supporting campaigns, and audio casting Council and Committee meetings. The team also contributes to internal communications with staff.

Communicating in a time of change

The ways in which councils communicate with residents and staff are both changing and expanding. At the heart of this is a growing expectation that communication should be a two way process. More traditional channels of communication remain important, but in the age of social and other digital media, we need to consider how we as an organisation meet this expectation. This is one of a number of communications challenges this strategy seeks to address.

Communicating change

With further reductions in funding for local government anticipated in future, the Council has established a Change Programme to help us plan ahead. A key aim is to improve efficiency in the way the Council provides services and in the internal running of the organisation. A range of ideas to help us achieve this have been contributed by staff, Elected Members and the public. After thorough assessment, the Council is committed to putting the best of these into practice.

Change, as a result, is inevitable in the way we do things. Communicating this effectively is important in gaining the understanding and support of our staff and the people we serve. We need to explain why change is required, how we are addressing this, and what impact any changes made will have.

Strategy objectives:

- Continue to work with the Change Programme team to plan and develop communications activity that explains the need for change and how the organisation is tackling this.
- Ensure this activity is tailored to both internal and external audiences.

- Research and develop proposals for a public forum to assist the Council with consultation and engagement.
- Continue to build and update an “ideas lists” on the staff portal that itemises the ideas being assessed, those where business cases are being developed, and those that are being implemented.
- Consider publishing a similar ideas list on the OIC website.

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. The regional and national media provide regular coverage of Orkney matters and on occasions such as the launch of the Our Islands Our Future campaign, there can be media interest from as far afield as Australia.

In particular, Orkney’s local media plays an important role in scrutinising Council decisions and services 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 positive and informative news releases.
- Providing photo opportunities.
- Providing opportunities for broadcast coverage, both radio and TV.
- Responding in good time to enquiries from journalists.
- Defending the Council when coverage is unfair, not balanced and inaccurate.

Over the year ahead we will consult with media representatives, and carefully monitor media coverage, to help the further development of the Council’s communications strategy.

Council website

The Council website is an important channel of communication for the organisation. The website carries a broad range of information about the Council, its structure and the services it provides. It is also a tool at present for the delivery of a relatively limited range of online services. The public can use the website to report a range of faults, forms and other documents are available for download, and there is a facility for the payment of Council tax.

The Council has adopted a policy that all documents published on the website should be in a form accessible to all. This will be further developed over the year ahead. It will demonstrate the Council's commitment to equality and should result in more visits to, and downloads from, the website.

As evidence of this, local bus timetables are now provided in a new fully accessible form on the website. By 31 March 2015 there had been 8517 downloads of these (94%) compared to 511 (6%) downloads of a less accessible transport guide containing the same information.

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. The software can also visually translate text as it appears on the website, enabling this to be made available in many languages.

The Scottish Government is driving channel shift in the public sector, in response to an increasing expectation that services, where possible, are digital by default. The Change Programme public survey, carried out in late 2014, provided evidence of a growing demand for more web-based services among the public in Orkney. Of the responses received, 727 (98 per cent) were provided online, with just 16 paper copies submitted. The survey results indicate 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, including the OIC website.

The website is well used, in terms of hits per head of population, but requires further investment as a strategic platform for communication and interaction between the Council and the public, and for the delivery of more services online.

Strategy objectives:

As part of the Change Programme we will consider and make recommendations on how best to make improvements to the current website and further develop the online services it provides. This will include an assessment of how to increase opportunities for people to make payments and bookings online and make better use of the website to communicate and engage with the Council. We will also look at how best to simplify navigation of the website and enhance its search function. We will consult both within and outwith the organisation on this. Feedback received will shape recommendations on how to improve the website, and will be reflected in the updated communications strategy we publish in a year's time.

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.
- 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.
- Consult and engage.
- Direct “traffic” to the Council website.

As at 10 September 2015, OIC Updates Facebook page had 3295 likes, while the Orkney Council Twitter feed had more than 6450 followers. Both channels are regularly updated and monitored by the communications team.

In addition, the Council also provides a school transport Facebook page (1600 likes) and an OIC Roads Twitter feed (589 followers). The latter was set up earlier in 2015 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.

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.
- Develop the use of video and photographic content to promote Council activities.
- Assess and make recommendations on the potential use of social media by other Council services.

Audio casting

Audio casting offers the public the opportunity to listen in to meetings in the Council Chamber as they happen, raising awareness of the policy and decision making process and giving people a greater understanding of the work of the organisation.

In March 2015, two trial broadcasts were made from meetings of Council committees. Using an external live streaming service, an audio feed was made available via the OIC website, where listeners were also encouraged to complete an online survey about the experience. During the June 2015 committee cycle, five meetings were broadcast live, as well as the Special General Meeting of the Council in early July. In addition, a new listen-again facility was provided for each of the meetings via the Council website, with the relevant committee reports made available alongside the audio recordings of each meeting.

Strategy objectives:

- Assess the effectiveness of the live broadcasts; what works well and what modifications are required.
- Consider feedback from the public, Elected Members and officers.
- Develop audio casting guidance, guidelines and protocols for those taking part in meetings.
- Continue to provide a full live streaming service.
- Further develop the listen-again service.
- Assess and make recommendations on the future resourcing requirements of providing a full audio casting service.

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.

An e.coli awareness campaign involved partnership working with NHS Orkney and BBC Radio Orkney, with a week of broadcasts highlighting simple measures we can all take to reduce the risk of infection. (Find out more and listen to the radio features here: <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/E/ecoli-information.htm>)

A range of communications “tools” proved effective in publicising and promoting the visits to Orkney of the Olympic torch and the Queen’s Baton Relay. For the Baton Relay, the online audio distribution platform SoundCloud was used to provide audio clips on the OIC website in which 'weel kent' faces talked about the local heroes who inspired their love of sport. (These are available here: <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/S/glasgow-2014.htm>)

During the two-day visit a live Twitter feed conveyed the sense of excitement as the Baton Relay travelled through Orkney.

Strategy objectives:

- Undertake further campaign activity. For 2015-16, this includes a foster parent recruitment campaign.
- Develop the use of video content to promote Council campaigns.
- Assess and provide evidence of the effectiveness of campaign activity.
- Work with Council services to identify future campaigns.
- Make recommendations on future resourcing requirements.

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.
- Further develop the capability of our website and social media 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.

Communicating in partnership

The Council plays a lead role within the Orkney Community Planning Partnership (OCP) and in the delivery of Orkney's Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government. Agencies and organisations within the OCP are tasked with working collaboratively to improve the wellbeing of people and communities in Orkney. As in many other areas of Scotland, promoting the activities of the OCP has proved challenging, with the media often unsure of the precise role of community planning partnerships and of how to explain this in ways readily understood by their audience.

Strategy objectives:

- Work with partners to develop and put in place a new communications strategy for the OCP.
- Work with partners to identify opportunities – ideally based around individuals or communities – which demonstrate tangible benefits of partnership working.
- Work with partners to determine which communications channels are best suited to raising the profile of the OCP and its activities.

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 an internal communications strategy.

Strategy objectives:

- Work with Human Resources 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 review evolve.

Summary

As described, this strategy provides an overview of planned communications activity during the year ahead. It recognises that in a fast changing world we must continue to develop and improve our communications activities. The strategy outlines how we plan to do this and how consultation, within and outwith the organisation, will help us achieve this. Over the course of the year we will make recommendations on the next steps we need to take and, in 12 months' time, we will publish an updated version of the strategy.