



---

Waveney District Council  
Serving the Community

---

# Communications Protocol

2008 - 2011

Waveney District Council

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Communications Protocol provides a framework and direction for the Communications Team and Council to deliver communications objectives to all audiences over the next three years. The Communications Team will use this document, to feed into their Service Plan, as the basis for work action plans.
- 1.2 The Protocol will be updated annually to ensure it is relevant, promotes the Council's Strategic Direction and therefore supports the Executive's priorities each year.
- 1.3 The main purpose of the Protocol is to:
- establish and reinforce a clear identity for the Council.
  - defend and promote the reputation and brand of the Council to different audiences
  - ensure consistency of message to both external and internal audiences
  - to provide communications guidance to Members and Officers
  - to promote the Strategic Direction of the Council;
  - to promote and support the Cabinet's priorities each year;

The Protocol will also link to strategies and policies that impact on communications and the way we deliver key messages to stakeholders. These include:

- The Community Engagement Strategy
- The Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Local Strategic Partnership Marketing Strategy
- Internet/Email Policy

- 1.4 Although the Communications Team will drive activity, successful implementation of the protocol is in the hands of all elected Members and officers. The team cannot change perceptions of the Council in isolation. However, the team does have a role in promoting good practice and skills across the whole organisation.
- 1.5 The priorities in terms of communications vehicles and messages will be revised annually. For example in 2008, external communications and media relations will be the priority area.

## 2. Vision for Communications

Waveney District Council is aiming to be a progressive Council, recognised by the Audit Commission, the general public and its own staff.

Externally, the public and partners will be aware of the Council's priorities and be involved in informing decisions that are taken and their views will be measured through annual satisfaction surveys.

Internally, staff will have a greater understanding of the Strategic Direction and its associated projects to deliver tangible benefits and will feel more informed about, and involved in, their organisation. The annual staff survey will be a benchmark for improvement.

The Council is aiming to demonstrate that, over the next three years, awareness, recognition and satisfaction among key audiences will have increased and there will be clear measures in place that can track this. The Council will use customer and staff surveys to demonstrate an improvement in the attitudes of everyone and to show that everyone feels more informed and involved in the organisation and community.

### **3. Objectives for Communications**

- to ensure all communications actions and campaign work towards achieving the targets within the Strategic Direction
- to increase public understanding, awareness, involvement and satisfaction with the services provided by Waveney District Council and its partners
- to ensure staff are fully informed and feel ownership of the activities of Waveney District Council
- to position Members as taking a leadership role in the community
- to establish a clear brand identity for Waveney District Council internally and externally
- to promote the reputation of Waveney District Council
- to support the Waveney Campus Project and other key strategic projects
- to promote Waveney as an area that offers opportunity
- to support the work of partner organisations where there are shared priorities

### **4. Principles of Communications**

- There will be consistent themes, messages, tone and style to ensure that there is a corporate look and feel to all communications from the Council whoever the audience is;
- Staff and Members should be told about Council initiatives first or simultaneously with outside audiences. They should not be surprised by what they hear about the Council from other sources e.g. the media;
- Honest and open two-way communication;
- All communication to be timely, accurate and reflect the corporate position of the Council;

- Use clear and plain English at all times where English is the first language of the audience;
- All materials used for communication internally and externally must reflect the corporate style and brand identity and be instantly recognisable as being from Waveney District Council;
- A wide range of channels will be used e.g. website, Radio, Press, TV, and internal & external publications.

## 5. The Council's Profile

The Council will take a proactive stance to communications, so it proactively sets the communications agenda rather than taking a reactive stance.

The Communications Team already work with Members and the Senior Management Team to ensure that the Council adopts a positive and confident approach to communicating our successes and innovations with all audiences both internally and externally.

Communications also has a crucial role to play in defending and enhancing the reputation of the Council. This means that there will be a focus on the use of the Council's brand through the look, feel and tone of communications.

To help achieve a high positive profile the Leader and Chief Executive, supported by the Cabinet and Strategic Management Team, will need to make the most of all appropriate opportunities to speak to the media, Staff also have a critical role to play in enhancing the reputation of the Council.

However, it is important that the Council is clear about how it wishes to be viewed by the public, opinion formers and the media. The Council does not wish to be viewed as powerless, complaining or unable to manage itself properly. Therefore the tone of communications should be of an organisation that is efficiently run, able to cope with the challenges thrown at it and reflecting the Council's values and culture at all times.

## 6. Responsibility and Implementation

- 6.1 To achieve impact, communications needs to be supported by everyone in the Council. Beyond the Communications Team itself, who retain overall responsibility for the delivery of the Communications Protocol and the day to day management of key communications issues, those with specific roles to play are:

**Strategic/Corporate Management Team** – the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service can help drive the Communications Protocol by actively and demonstrably applying its principles in all aspects of their work.

The Strategic Management Team will communicate their decisions and the strategic thinking behind them clearly and promptly to the Principal Officers and other officers.

Heads of Service are responsible for implementing a cascade of information from the Strategic Management Team and Cabinet.

Heads of Service and Principal Officers will help instigate work with staff and the Communications Team to enable forward planning of major communications campaigns and prioritise use of communications resources.

**Cabinet** – The Communications Team will work with the Cabinet to ensure all key decisions are communicated in a co-ordinated and clear way to Members, staff and the media. This will include background briefings for all to increase understanding of Council business.

The Communications Team will work closely with the Cabinet to promote attendance of the media and public at all the Council's meetings i.e. Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny. This will include pro-actively speaking to the media beforehand on issues that will be discussed, publicising information on the web and following up with possible interviews. The team will also arrange regular briefings and meetings enabling key Members to regular meet with the press and media to build up awareness of the Council's priorities.

## 7. Media Relations

The main message from recent 'Suffolk Speaks' (SS) and Best Value (BV) Triennial surveys is the importance of the local media. 41% of respondents in the BV survey said they use this source. The top source in the SS survey was Newspapers. Interestingly Newspapers were also top in the SS question, which asked what sources of information have most influence on your opinion of your local authority. This is a consistent theme in the SS survey, which underlines the importance of getting communications right and making best use of this medium.

### 7.1 Objectives

- Protect and enhance the reputation of Waveney District Council
- Raise the profile of Waveney District Council through pro-active media contact at both a local and national level
- Increase positive media coverage – especially at a local level.

### 7.2 Approach

- Increase pro-active media relations activity highlighting good news items to the press
- A campaign-based approach to media relations through focussed work packages supporting priority areas

- Ensure media activity is supported through online news both internally and externally

### 7.3 Measures

- Monitoring and recording the quantity and quality of media coverage through locally developed performance indicators
- Checking public perception of media coverage regularly

### 7.4 Overall Approach

A major principle of all media relations will be a pro-active, campaigning approach and to provide stories for the media rather than taking a broadly reactive stance to media relations.

The media (alongside our residents' magazine) is the main source of information about the Council for most people, particularly newspapers and the radio.

The Communications Team will be responsible for offering basic media relations services to the Council. For example:

- providing a regular report to the Community & Operations PTM on media issues and coverage achieved (both good and bad news) scheduling of press stories to ensure proactive approach to Council performance
- news stories highlighted online on the Council's external website and internal intranet.

To support this there will be on-going information meetings between the media, the Communications Team and the Chief Executive.

### 7.5 Spokespeople

Wherever possible, Portfolio Holder Members and the Leader will be the spokespeople, having been briefed and supported by the Communications Team, SMT, Portfolio Managers or Principal Officers.

However, the Communications Team will provide comment for factual, non-political media enquiries and will maintain a list of key spokespeople who will receive on-going briefings and media training. In the spirit of being an open and transparent organisation, the Council does not seek to prevent people from speaking to the media but instead to give them clear guidance on areas for comments etc. Nevertheless, it is important that Members should be the 'first port of call' to provide comment wherever possible.

The Council has Media Protocols for both Officers and Members which provides helpful guidance and advice for handling media enquiries and asks that in the first instance anyone receiving an enquiry from the press or media contacts the Communications Team for advice.

### 7.6 Evaluation

The Communications Team will measure the number and take up of press releases, the speed of response to enquiries and the amount and balance of press coverage - to measure the on public views and perceptions of the Council. The

Communications Team will also undertake surveys with local media to measure their view of our service.

## **8. Internal Communications**

Internal communications for the purpose of this document includes Members and employees of Waveney District Council.

### **8.1 Objectives**

- To inform Members and staff about Council activity and to ensure they are fully informed about the business of – and issues that affect – the District Council

### **8.2 Approach**

- Ensures that consistent messages are shared and expressed through a variety of different communications channels providing clear opportunity for feedback and opinion

### **8.3 Channels**

#### *Attitude Survey*

The Staff Attitude Survey is an annual survey of staff 'opinions' on a range of topics relating to working life as an employee of Waveney District Council. On the basis of a thorough analysis of results, Waveney District Council undertakes to produce an action plan which seeks to address concerns and make improvements to benefit staff and improve productivity.

The survey is compiled by the Council's Human Resources team with input from the Communications Team. The Communications Team will help ensure that the survey is designed to engage staff and will actively market the survey to ensure as many take part as possible. The survey will also instruct the Communications Team about the effectiveness of communications within the Council.

#### *Intranet/WIRED*

Waveney District Council's intranet service is called WIRED (Waveney's Information Resource Electronically Delivered) and provides a range of news and information about the Council, specifically relating to issues that directly affect staff.

Currently, WIRED is managed by the ICT team who retain overall responsibility for layout and manage the 'uploading' of news and documents to the resource. The Communications Team will play a greater 'hands on' role in the management of WIRED as a key communications function for the Council

#### *Insight Magazine*

Insight Magazine is the bi-monthly newsletter produced for staff and members of Waveney District Council. It is produced wholly in-house, with editorial, design and layout the responsibility of the Communications Team. Support is provided by an Editorial Board which currently lacks sufficient membership and requires

strengthening to provide representation of staff wishes and ideas across the authority. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the newsletter has been well-received, but the Communications Team will seek to undertake a survey of readers to formally ascertain their views and ideas for the publication.

#### *Staff Forums*

A brand new bi-monthly staff forum was introduced in July 2007, replacing the quarterly staff meetings hosted by the Chief Executive. WDC staff have expressed a desire for senior management, specifically the Chief Executive & Corporate Directors to engage with staff and be more 'available' and this new format will enable staff to ask questions directly to senior management in an open forum, on a more regular basis than the current model. Each forum will include a panel made up of the Strategic Directors and Chief Executive (Chief Officer Group) and one Head of Service (on rotation)

The Sessions will be marketed and promoted thoroughly with advertising on noticeboards, WIRED, Insight etc. There will be active encouragement to pose questions and feedback all questions and answers will be logged to form the basis of further action plans designed to help improve staff engagement and morale.

#### *Notice Boards*

The Communications Team will monitor the use of internal noticeboards for the distribution of important information and will regulate the amount of personal material and 'clutter'.

#### *Cascades*

Portfolio Managers are expected to 'cascade' news and information from Portfolio Team Meetings as an additional method of ensuring staff are updated on matters of importance.

#### *Communication with Members*

The Communications Team will work closely with Committee Services to ensure that the Council is as effective as possible at communicating with Members. The team will also look at ways of enhancing the profile of Members' work including media training and support for an improved profile on the internet and intranet (WIRED).

#### *Joint Union Group*

The Communications Team will seek to work effectively with recognised trade unions when communicating with employees.

## **9. Corporate Identity/Brand**

### **9.1 Objectives**

- To establish a clear brand identity for Waveney District Council internally and externally and to revitalise the Waveney District Council brand in advance of the Waveney Campus Project and any subsequent effect arising from the Local Government Bill.

### **9.2 Approach**

- To provide information in a consistent and clearly branded way
- To establish a 'family' of publications from 'In Touch' to service pledge leaflets
- Individual portfolios will be promoted in a way that supports the overall brand of Waveney District Council
- The Council will always adhere to the Corporate style guide and Plain English guidelines and will ensure effective communication with those for whom English is not a first language

### **9.3 Measures**

- Completing an audit of publications, identifying issues and setting targets
- Monitoring how staff perceive working for Waveney District Council through the annual staff survey
- Monitoring awareness of brand and image – community survey through Suffolk Speaks and annual customer services survey

#### **9.3.1 The Brand**

The Waveney District Council brand does not simply mean the logo – it is the organisation's 'personality' ie: a reflection of our values and culture as well as the structure of the organisation. Its perception is increased or reduced by every contact that people have with the Council by whatever means.

All teams have received brand guidelines, templates for use on letterheads, comps slips, memos and how to handle customers through the Corporate Customer Service Standards.

During 2008 the Communications Team will undertake to seek a refreshment to the brand identity of Waveney District Council, utilising the move to the Waveney Campus site as the key opportunity to bring it up to date. Staff and members will be consulted about ideas for a new logo but also for their own personal views on what the Waveney 'brand' means to them.

## **10. Public Relations**

### **10.1 Objectives**

- To promote the reputation of Waveney District Council
- To offer greater understanding of the services provided by Waveney District Council
- To provide 'opinion formers' with information to provide a greater understanding of Waveney and the issues it faces

## 10.2 Approach

- To take a campaigning and high profile approach to major local issues on behalf of the residents of Waveney
- To ask the public how they prefer us to communicate with them.
- To educate and inform the public and third parties about the District Council

## 10.3 Channels

### In Touch Magazine

To ensure that the Council's reaches the people living and working in Waveney it publishes a newsletter 'In Touch' for all Waveney residents. In Touch provides residents with a wide variety of 'good news' stories about service performance and also the Communications Team have overseen the introduction of a third edition per year and have now assumed overall management of the sourcing and delivery of editorial content. The magazine has undertaken a 're-design' for 2007 and the Communications Team will seek to survey residents in a forthcoming edition to ascertain their opinions of the magazine and suggested improvements.

### Suffolk Speaks

Monitoring on-going public perception of Waveney District Council and the service it provides by using a survey based approach mechanisms such as Suffolk Speaks. This will provide a benchmark for improvement and enable us to set targets

### Communication Consultation

The Communications Team will play a role in the delivery of the Community Engagement Strategy, helping to raise community awareness and understanding of the existing consultation and engagement mechanisms as well as new ones as they are developed. The team will work with all services to ensure consultation mechanisms, eg Suffolk Speaks, Area Forums, Youth Forums, customer surveys are fit for purpose. The team will also play a role, alongside colleagues, in providing guidance for how the Council communicates with vulnerable groups

### Internet/waveney.gov.uk

The website is an outstanding resource for promoting the Council, its brand online and its e-service objectives. It is the aim of the Communications Team to contribute to improvements to the site which will boost traffic and online transactions and provide greater awareness of the Council to all residents and visitors to the District.

The Communications Team will provide direct input on all matters of design and content and will also seek to undertake an audit of the site, its content, navigation and delivery.

The Communications Team is also playing a role in the delivery of Member websites.

## 12. Evaluation

Currently there is some evaluation of the work carried out within Communications for some projects or specific pieces of work but the Council is keen to increase this further. It is the Team's intention to formalise feedback arrangements and to ensure the team continues to share learning within the Council to continually improve its approach to communications, particularly externally.

It is not proposed that the team introduce additional surveys but whenever possible use existing vehicles and introduce questions about the effectiveness of our communications service.

The team will also use feedback from stakeholders as part of the performance management process within the Communications Team.

The team will work the Chief Officer Group and Heads of Service on an on-going basis to measure the effectiveness of communications messages and vehicles

Existing activities that will be used to gather information regarding the quality of communications include the staff survey, and community surveys from Suffolk Speaks, in addition to feedback from the Council's website.

The Communications Team will continually benchmark themselves and the services offered against other local authorities, looking for opportunities to further improve.

November 2007

Phil Harris  
Communications Manager  
Waveney District Council  
[Phil.harris@waveney.gov.uk](mailto:Phil.harris@waveney.gov.uk)