

Transformation : Communication and Consultation Strategy

Background

The Government Spending Review and the need to save £68m over the next three years presents crucial challenges to the Council. Councillors have identified what the key priorities are for the Council and as a result there will be a significant impact on the services the public receives. The Council has been, and will continue to be, open and transparent with the public about the impact of the budget reductions and all proposed changes to services. Consultation with service users has also already commenced in relation to changes in services. There is a recognition that the speed of the transformation, and the frontloading of the required budget savings, means that there is often limited opportunity for consultation with service users and where it does take place, a shorter timescale in which to consult. Where timing is tight due to emergency measures all reasonable approaches should be adopted to enable the public to receive the relevant information and have an opportunity to give their views on things that they can influence.

This brief strategy explains the principles for public communication and consultation with regard to changes to council services. Knowing when we should provide information/communicate and when to consult will enable us to have a clear distinction of what is appropriate and when.

Informing

When is it appropriate?

- When you want to tell the public what has been decided or is planned. (i.e. that the decision has been made that a service/activity will cease or there are plans to change a service)
- At the start of a consultation exercise to raise awareness and promote involvement
- To keep the public informed and updated
- To provide information of alternative services

Consulting

When is it appropriate?

- When there is scope for the public to offer feedback that can be taken into consideration when making decisions (i.e. reducing or re-designing a service)
- When there might be options they can exercise a view on (i.e. reduction in opening hours)

When is it not appropriate?

- When decisions have already been taken and the public cannot influence this (i.e. to cease a service)

In progressing this strategy the following **Key Principles** will be adhered to :

We will :

- Be open, honest, succinct and cost-effective
- Be clear if we are 'informing' or 'consulting'
- Inform and/or consult with all the right people
- Provide accessible information on reasons why the decisions have been taken and / or what the public can influence
- Provide sufficient accessible information on the process and timetable
- Keep a record of our actions

Review

We will review this Strategy and associated action plan on a regular basis.

Transformation Programme : Communications and Consultation Action Plan

1. Objectives of Transformation Programme

The Programme aims to achieve a range of interrelated benefits, including but not limited to:-

- Financial savings;
- Service improvements within available resources; and
- Efficiency gains.

2. Objectives for Communications and Consultation

- Engage stakeholders and build awareness of the programme and its objectives amongst a wide but defined group of audiences and staff. Communicating the process is a key responsibility of all managers and they must own the message.
- Prevent poor, uncontrolled communication resulting in misleading rumours circulating amongst staff and the public. If any rumours do emerge it is imperative that they are nipped in the bud, whilst legitimate concerns are taken on board.

3. Principles for Communications and Consultation

- Communications will be open, honest, succinct, and cost-effective.
- Communications will be active because they will speak in the active voice, positive because they will focus on what is being done and credible because they provide examples.
- We will only consult with the public when there are options they can exercise a view on. If there is no option for the public to exercise a view on we will inform them rather than consult.
- The Trade Unions will have an important role in communications and the intention is that this will be done in the spirit of partnership.
- Communications with the media, including public relations, reputation management and press briefings will be managed by the Corporate Communications Team.
- Internal communications, including the employee intranet 'Informing Sefton' will be managed by the Corporate Communications Team.

- All communications, information and records will be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and will comply with the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

4. **Key Messages**

- Budget Gap is real – need to develop and maintain an affordable and sustainable position.
- The shape of the organisation will change.
- We will deliver fewer services in the future.
- This will have an impact on staff. There will be less people working in the organisation
- We will strive to enhance service quality and improve outcomes within available resources.
- We will keep the public, staff and partners informed of decisions and will consult when appropriate

5. **Actions**

- 5.1 We will communicate and consult (when appropriate) with employees, trade unions, partners, Elected Members and the public

Target audience	Preferred/appropriate channels of communication	Key Dates
Strategic and Service Directors, Heads of Service, Managers	<i>SLT & Strategic and Service Director Meetings</i> Senior Manager meetings, workshops, briefings, presentations, awareness raising of support mechanism for employees.	Recurring

Target audience	Preferred/appropriate channels of communication	Key Dates
Employees	SLT employee briefings, Departmental Team meetings, one to ones, Chief Executive's personal message, Personal letters, Informing Sefton newsletter(Intranet), Internet, transformation frequently asked questions, awareness raising of support mechanism, payslip messages, e-mail ideas/suggestions to Transformation Team	Recurring November 2010
Elected Members	Workshops, Cabinet Reports, Council Reports, Leaders Group, Chief Executives Briefings, Member Overseeing Groups, Memo via e-mail, Informing Sefton news letter	December 2010 January 2011 And on-going
Partners	Council Reports, face to face meetings, letters, briefings, workshops, presentations	Recurring
Trade Unions	Regular meetings, Informing Sefton newsletter, Intranet, Internet, Chief Executive's personal message, SLT employee meetings	Recurring
Media	Press Briefings, Public Relations, responding to media enquiries, Press Releases, web information, radio and TV interviews	Recurring
Public/ Stakeholders	Media, Council web site and social media (where available), Council Agenda's and Minutes (website), Consultation when appropriate, face to face meetings when appropriate, letters, Elected Members,	Recurring

- 5.2 We will strive to remove leaflets, posters or web information about services which are no longer delivered by the Council, or have changed, to avoid conflicting information being present in the public domain.

<u>Key Activity</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Remove out of date leaflets, posters, web information	Service Directors	After budget been set and on-going from April 1 st 2011
Conduct audit to ensure only up to date information is available	Communications Board Members	3 rd week in April 2011
Routine review by service of leaflets, posters and web information including the monitoring of the production of any new public information	Service Directors and members of the Communications Board	May 2011 and on-going

- 5.3 We will develop a single message approach for front of house services and the Customer Contact Centre/One Stop Shops

<u>Key Activity</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Produce scripts for Customer Contact Centre / One Stop Shops around service cessation and change/reduction to services	Service Directors	Immediately after all Council decisions on services