

Corporate Communications Strategy

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1. Introduction

South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) is committed to continuously improving the quality of both its internal and external communications. To assist in achieving this improvement, a new communications strategy has been produced by the performance management and engagement service.

The council is committed to continuously improving and adapting its services to reflect the needs of its residents and customers, and has a vision and set of values and priorities to reflect this. To ensure their success, they must be clearly and openly communicated, firstly so that our residents and customers know what the council is aspiring to provide for them, and secondly, so that our staff and partners have a clear understanding of the councils vision and contribute towards delivery of services in this way.

2. The way we do things

We are committed to improving our services to reflect the needs of our residents and customers. Our vision, values and priorities reflect this and focus the attention of everyone at SKDC, forming the cornerstone for the development of our ambitions, corporate priorities, service delivery plans and actions.

In terms of this strategy, our vision and values are the blueprint of all our communications: from the information material we produce, the way we talk to our colleagues and our customers, to the many ways in which we show our commitment to clear, friendly and open communications.

Together, the vision and values reflect 'the way the council does things around here'.

Our vision, values and priorities

Our vision

“Shaping the future together with our partners and residents to develop a place where people really matter – and being recognised as a council that provides brilliant services”

Our values

We will be a council that remains open and honest at all times.

We will be a council that shows a passion for service.

We will be a council that gets things done efficiently and effectively.

Our corporate plan and priorities

Our key priorities have been identified from consultation with residents:

To further improve the quality of communication with residents.

To promote access to services and deliver good customer service to all.

To enhance the quality of life by reducing anti-social behaviour.

To further improve recycling and minimize waste.

To provide the catalyst for town centre regeneration.

To make the best use of resources at our disposal.

To enable the provision of quality affordable housing.

Our corporate plan for 2006-2009 sets out how we aim to deliver these.

4. Our stakeholders

To understand and define the complex environment SKDC operates in, we need to identify our key stakeholders. Each stakeholder group has different requirements in terms of information, context, presentation and timelines, and we need to know what these are, so that we can map out our communications activities.

The term 'stakeholders', refers to groups or individuals who have an interest or involvement in SKDC. They are:

Residents/service users (of which there are many subgroups)
Staff
Councillors (members)
Trade unions
Town and parish councils
Media – local, regional and national, specialist and ethnic minority media
Partners/partnerships, including Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), voluntary and community groups, religious groups, recipients of council grants, etc.
Other councils
Voluntary and community sector
Business sector
Suppliers
Government departments and agencies
Auditors and inspectors
National opinion formers, such as civil servants, ministers, MPs, think tanks

5. Why communication is important

Excellent communication, both externally with our residents, customers and partners and internally with elected members and officers is crucial for the council to deliver services that meet the needs and expectations of our residents.

We rely on accurate consultation with our residents and views of members so that we can shape and improve our services for the future. It is important that residents can fully appreciate the wide range of services that we provide via signage and corporate branding, and that they are aware of the quality and quantity of service that they can expect.

We must therefore listen, learn and deliver for our residents consistently and in doing so, they will gain confidence in their council.

6. Communicating well – a shared responsibility

For our communication to be effective, it must be owned and supported by all staff and members: members of staff and councillors have responsibility for communications in the way they answer the phone, write a letter or deal with a member of the public. Each leaflet or newsletter we produce, every letter we send out and our overall manner and tone of voice say something about our organisation and influence our reputation. Communication may be verbal, non-verbal, written or signed, but should always be clear, appropriate, and timely.

For this strategy to be effective, we must realise that this is a corporate strategy: each and every one of us has a role to play.

As this strategy affects the whole council, it is proposed that its delivery is a shared responsibility and a council-wide communications group will be formed in order to achieve this.

7. Aims of communications strategy

The aims of this strategy are:

- To ensure all our communications are fit for purpose.
- To promote the council's brand and corporate identity.
- To improve our reputation.
- To improve internal communications with staff and members.

8. How to communicate well

Communication can be described as "the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing, or signs".

Good communication is necessary to support our service delivery and promote good working relations.

When communicating we should consider:

- Whatwe are trying to achieve, is action needed or understanding
- Who.....is the recipient, and what are their needs and understanding
- Why.....do we need to communicate
- Where.....shall we
- When.....timing
- How.....the most appropriate format, for example, letter, email, website, telephone; in person

9. Our reputation

Our reputation within the community we serve is important to us. MORI's research consistently shows that councils with the highest service satisfaction ratings among their communities are the ones that best demonstrate they provide value for money in the services they deliver, communicate well and listen to their communities. These findings are backed up by other national surveys which show that

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there is an increasing demand for better information and consultation from councils.

This is not only done by consistently delivering good services, but also by effectively informing and communicating.

The council has signed up to the Local Government Reputation Campaign, which highlights 12 actions, which when done well, have been proven to have a positive impact on a council's reputation. Seven of these actions relate to a cleaner, safer and greener environment and five of these relate to communications.

Five communication activities to improve SKDC's reputation:

- ❑ Manage the media effectively to promote and defend SKDC.
- ❑ Provide an A-to-Z guide to council services.
- ❑ Publish a regular SKDC magazine or newspaper to inform residents.
- ❑ Ensure SKDC's brand is consistently linked to services.
- ❑ Communicate well with staff so they become advocates for SKDC.

These areas will be the focus for the communications unit and the new council-wide communications group.

10. Our brand

A brand should be synonymous with the vision and values that we have. Residents' perception of our brand and what it means to them will often have to be based on their first impression of us and the way we deliver our services.

By building a brand, residents' will be clearer about which services we deliver. As a result, it is necessary to transform our current mix of styles to one corporate identity, which will be instantly recognisable to our residents.

The guidelines:

- ❑ All letters, brochures, leaflets, posters, promotional items and presentations should follow the corporate identity. The communications unit will advise on the application of the corporate identity and help with any transition.

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- ❑ All subsidiary brands should be brought into the corporate brand.
- ❑ Buildings and assets where there is no signage should undertake to introduce signs in the corporate identity on these assets e.g. car parks, parks, etc.

A corporate identity manual is currently being produced by the communications unit.

11. Where are we now?

In 2004 our CPA report acknowledged that we were responding positively, but it also highlighted the need to improve our communications, externally and internally.

Since then we have:

- ❑ strengthened our communications unit
- ❑ relaunched our residents' magazine (SKtoday)
- ❑ improved our website
- ❑ reviewed our brand and corporate identity.

We recognise that there is still a great deal to be done to continuously improve and adapt to meet residents' expectations.

The SWOT analysis below identifies future opportunities to do this.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Cabinet member & SMT member responsibility ❑ Launch of internal newsletter, relaunched SKtoday ❑ Communications promoted to 'A' priority ❑ New corporate identity approved and being implemented ❑ Sign-up to Local Government Reputation Campaign ❑ Professional communications team strengthened & aligned with consultation & performance management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Communications is not always a priority for service deliverers ❑ Our leaflets, letters and website are not always tailored towards the customer ❑ Customers are often not aware of the service standards they can expect ❑ Customers are not always aware of services SKDC provide in relation to other councils and partners ❑ Little knowledge of and engagement with hard-to-reach groups in South Kesteven.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Develop council's branding to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Unforeseen events

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<p>instantly recognisable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Implementing Local Government Reputation Campaign's actions should improve SKDC's reputation□ Communication 'Guidance and Protocols' will help officers and members be aware of what is expected and allow us to measure success.□ Training in Plain English currently being rolled-out.□ Communications strategy to be owned and implemented by a communications group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Communications needs to be a shared responsibility of all to be effective□ Sensationalised national media coverage of local government news.
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11.1 Residents survey 2007

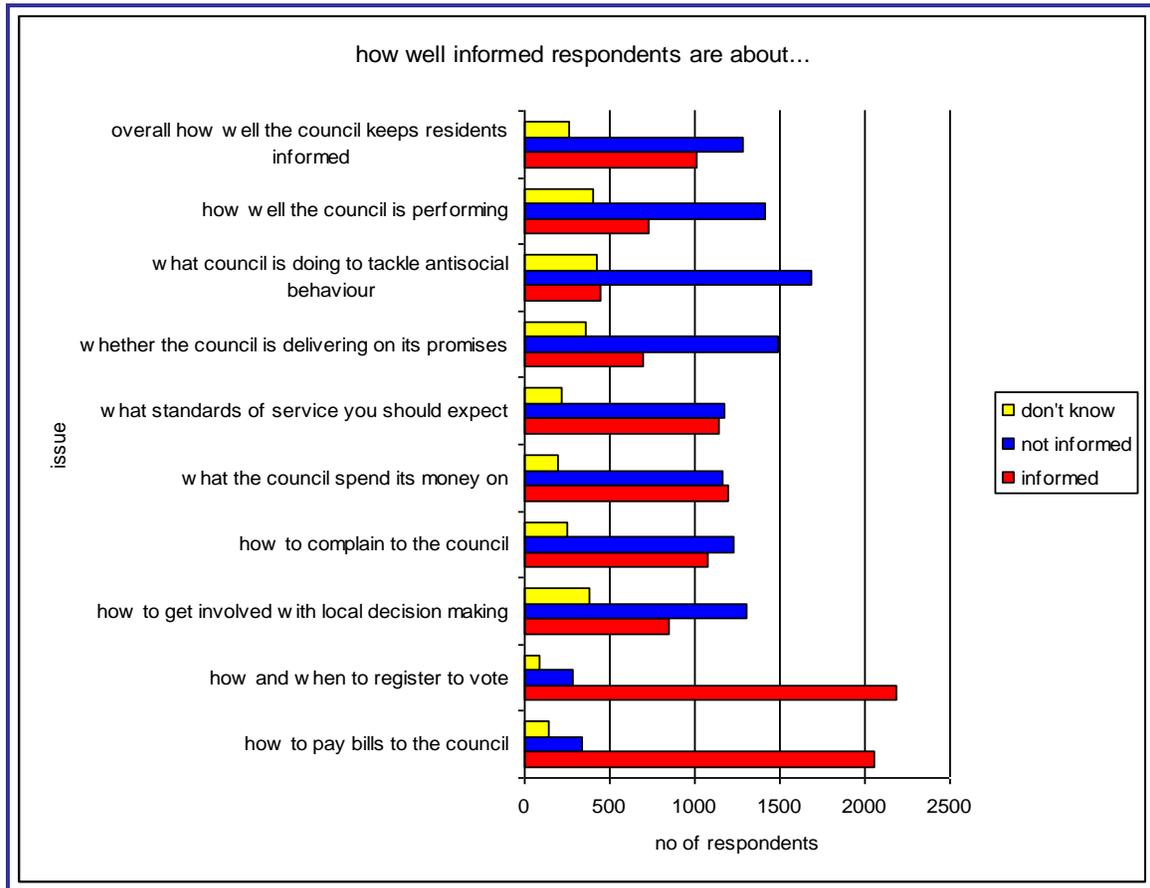
There is a clear link between the level of information provided to residents, and their satisfaction ratings with their council (MORI).

Our residents receive many different forms of communications from services. The findings from the residents survey conducted in September 2006 indicate that there is a large variation in how well-informed respondents feel about various issues:

- 47% of residents feel very or fairly well informed on how the council keeps them informed overall
- Respondents appear to be well-informed regarding how to pay bills (81%), or how to register to vote, (85.5%).
- Just over half (53%), feel well-informed about how SKDC spends its money.
- They appear to be less well-informed about if we are delivering our promises, (35%). In 2003 respondents were asked a similar question and responded more favourably.

The graph on page 11 demonstrates how well informed respondents are about various services.

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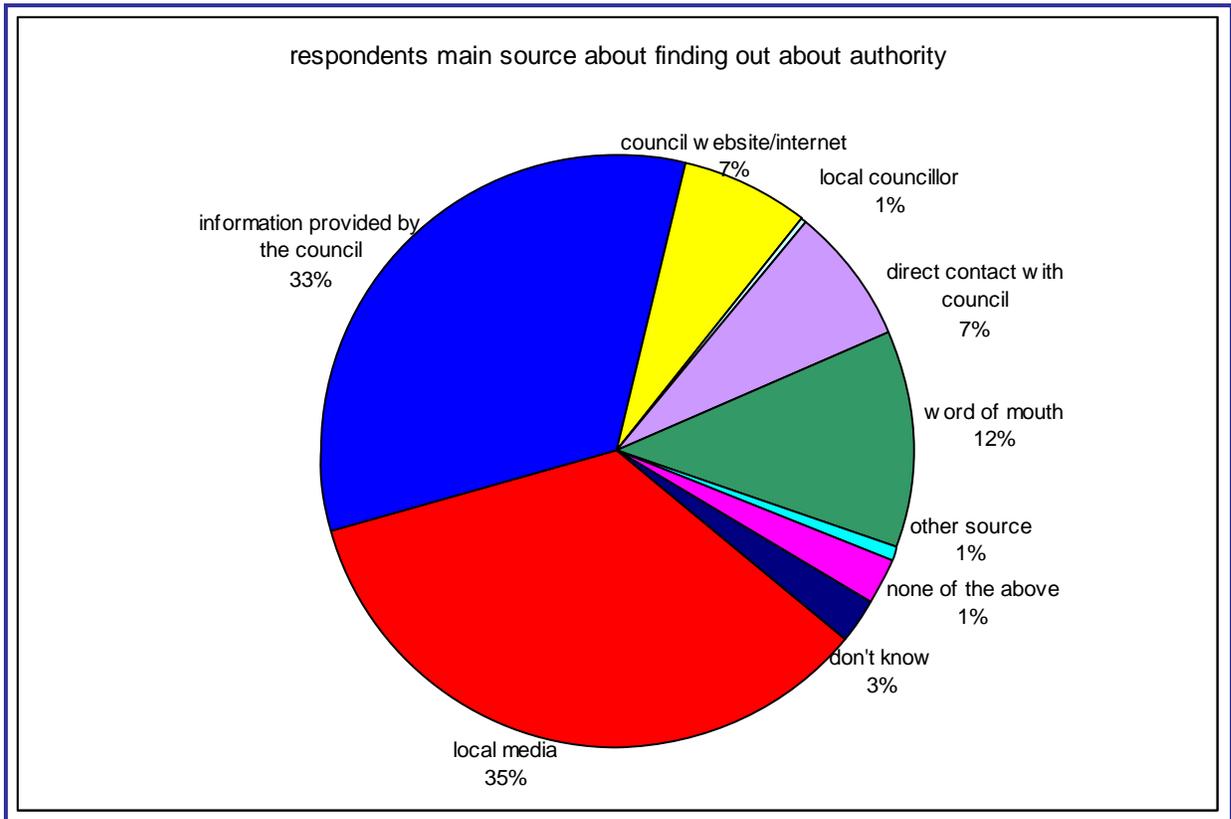


The following chart shows the main source respondents use to find out about SKDC. Respondents were only allowed to choose one option. The main sources are:

- The local media - chosen by 35% of respondents.
- Information provided by the council - chosen by 33% of respondents.
- Word-of-mouth - chosen by 12% respondents.

It is therefore important that our residents receive communication that is timely, accurate, and available in a variety of formats, and that informs them of the level of service that they can expect.

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12. Action plan 2007 - 2009

To help meet the challenges of the SWOT analysis and ensure we focus on the five core elements of the Local Government Reputation Campaign, an action plan for the next two years has been developed. Its implementation will be overseen by the new council-wide communications group. The action plan will follow the five areas recommended in the Local Government Reputation Campaign.

12.1 Managing the media effectively to promote and defend SKDC

	Action	Time-scale	Costs £	Lead officer(s)	Outcomes
1	Proactively generate good news stories showing impacts on people in the community.	Monthly	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Improved reputation
2	Develop directory of council spokespeople on subjects to ensure media enquiries can always be responded to in good time. For internal use.	April 2007	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Media responses always available
3	Provide public relations defence against inaccurate allegations/ reporting.	As required	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Public awareness of accurate facts
5	To develop a corporate annual diary of opportunities to drive the communication unit's activities.	April 2007	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Proactive planning
6	To continue to develop good media relations via meeting with media.	Every 6 months	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	To maximise awareness of SKDC services

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7	Attendance at relevant meetings to prepare internal/external coverage of events.	As required	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Proactive communication coverage
8	Provide media training to cabinet/committee chairs following consultation, SMT, OMT, service managers & appropriate members of staff.	June –Sept 2007	£8.5K or £11k for 4 or 5 days. Max 12 per day	Human resources manager	Trained staff/members available to respond to media
9	Staff educated to field all media enquiries through the communications team to ensure protection of staff, reputation and consistency of messages.	March / April 2007	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Staff protection, reputation & consistent message
10	PR guidelines to be developed informing staff of newsworthiness & media requirements.	June 2007	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Increase staff awareness
11	Press cutting service – SKDC stories in the media on intranet.	June 2007	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Library of stories

12. 2 Provide an A-to-Z guide of SKDC's services

	Action	Timescale	Costs £	Lead officer(s)	Outcomes
1	To produce a bi-annual A-to-Z of SKDC's services, delivered to each household.	Bi-annually	£12,000 per issue	Communications manager	Improved customer knowledge
2	To liaise with service managers to ensure that the A-to-Z section on SKDC's website is up-to-date.	6 monthly	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Improved customer knowledge
3	Include LCC services in A-to-Z to increase residents' understanding of multi-tier responsibilities.	Bi-annually	As above Item 1	Communications manager	Improved customer knowledge
4	Produce welcome pack for new residents, including A-to-Z, welcome letter from CE, councillor info, etc. (Tie in with customer services)	June 2007	Mostly use existing material. Est. £2000 for new leaflet/postage	Communications manager	Customer initial contact information
5	Develop welcome area on website similar to welcome pack above.	2007	Staff time within team	Communications unit/business transformation	Customer initial contact information

12.3 Publish a regular SDKC magazine or newspaper to inform residents

	Action	Time-scale	Costs £	Lead officer(s)	Outcomes
1	Produce SKtoday bi-monthly in line with future developments in SKDC and local communities.	Bi-monthly	£9,200 Per issue	Communications manager	Better informed residents
2	Monitor distribution and readership of SKtoday	Bi-monthly	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Ensure distribution achieved satisfactory
3	SKtoday to include pages on the voluntary and community sector, village spotlight and the arts.	From April 2007	Within 1	Communications manager	Provide coverage for partners and the arts. Show diversity of SKDC
4	Circulation to include LSP, voluntary and community groups, hard-to-reach groups, etc.	From July 2007	Within 1	Communications manager	Provide information for voluntary/community groups etc
5	Continue to improve design, contents of SKtoday e.g. using imaginative ways of communicating what services SKDC offers/provides for council tax collected.	Ongoing	Within 1	Communications manager	Increased resident awareness of services
6	Enter SKtoday in national communication awards competition.	2007	Staff time and £100 entry fee	Corporate head of partnerships & organisational improvement/com munications manager	National recognition

12.4 Ensure SKDC's brand is consistently linked to services

	Action	Time-scale	Costs £	Lead officer(s)	Outcomes
1	To further develop and implement corporate identity & apply to all letters, leaflets, etc.	Throughout 2007	To be met from service budgets	Communications manager	Corporate identity becomes readily recognisable
2	Produce a corporate identity manual for service managers & advise upon usage. Manual to include 'Are we clear' guidelines.	August 2007	£550	Communications manager	Service Mgrs clear regarding corporate identity & plan accordingly
3	Ensure website reflects corporate identity.	June 2007	Staff time within team	Bus. transformation & info mgmt service mgr/communications unit	Website reflects recognisable corporate identity
4	Branding of signage on buildings, facilities and vehicle livery.	2007/08	To be est.	Service manager assets & facilities	SKDC services/buildings recognisable
6	Welcome to South Kesteven signage on main road entrances to area.	2007/08	£10,000 Dependent on no.	Comms unit/ asset & facilities	South Kesteven area becomes recognisable
7	Maximise use of corporate presentation template and plain English training	March/ April 2007	£300	Communications manager	Staff aware of plain English principles & adopt them
8	Gain Crystal Mark accreditation for all major publications	2007	£8000	Communications group	Clear and useful documents produced
9	To continue to promote SKDC's commitment to equality and	Continuous	Staff time within	Communications manager	Inclusion of all our residents

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	diversity principles and manage the provision of alternative formats and languages within SKDC. To be reflected on the internet.		team		
10	All publications produced by SKDC to be designed according to the corporate identity guidelines and to come through the communications unit for advice, support.	As required	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Publications have consistent corporate identity & key messages
11	To produce a customer-centered DVD, reflecting SKDC's core values and key messages.	2008	£8000	Communications manager	
12	Develop a corporate area on SKDC's website, including corporate plan, vision, values, etc.	June 2007	Staff time within team	Bus. transformation & info mgmt service mgr.	Key documents easily accessible to users

12.5 Communicate well with staff so they become advocates for SKDC

	Action	Time-scale	Costs £	Lead officer(s)	Outcomes
1	To promote council's mission, values and priorities so that everyone understands and knows how they contribute towards these principles.	March 2007 and ongoing	£500	Communications manager	Consistency and understanding regarding key message
2	Continuously reinforce our mission, values and priorities through a variety of channels.	As required	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Consistency and understanding regarding key message

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3	To continue to produce Skoop! newsletter 6 times a year and encourage all to contribute to its contents.	Bi-monthly		Public relations manager	Communication form for staff
4	To work towards a staff rewards scheme.	2007/08	To be est.	SMT/ OMT	Staff motivation
5	To produce top 10 achievements this year and promote this through PR and SKtoday.	Annually	Staff time within team	Public relations manager	Staff recognition
6	To work together with a representative group of staff to identify their intranet requirements.	May 2007	Staff time within team To be est.	Project officer business trans. & info. mgmt	Fit for purpose intranet
7	To advise on intranet contents and manage procedures.	2007/08	Staff time within team	Project officer business trans. & info. mgmt	Fit for purpose intranet
8	To actively promote and encourage staff suggestion scheme and feedback on action.	Quarterly	Staff time within team	Performance management and engagement officer	Staff consulted for improvement suggestions
9	To continue to deliver the core brief, and review regularly.	2008	Staff time within team	Communications manager	Informed & consulted staff
10	To work with staff and HR on improving the induction process. To pull together corporate information on procedures and other topics, for the intranet and the employee handbook.	August 2007	Staff time within team	Human resources manager	Improved induction process

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11	To produce a graphic overview of newly elected members in an attractive, easy to use format.	June 2007	£500	Communications manager	New councilors communicated
12	To produce a contacts list of who does what.	June 2007	Staff time within team	Consultation & engagement officer	Informed staff & members

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Plain English Campaign**
Committed to clearer communication

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