

Communication FIRST

**Swale Borough Council's
Communications Strategy
2014/15**

Foreword from the Leader

Making Swale a better place – that is our purpose as a Council, what the Council stands for. It is our strapline and so will be used to frame all our communications.

We aim to deliver quality services to our residents that are value for money and relevant to peoples' needs.

In 2013, 76% of our residents were satisfied with Swale as a place to live, 56% were satisfied with the way Swale Borough Council ran things, and 36% agreed that we provided value for money. Whilst these statistics show an improvement from 2012, there is still room for further improvement and for the Council to do more.

We are committed to listening to residents and acting on their concerns. Effective communications is pivotal to this – informing people of the services we provide and promoting the fact that we are doing a good job builds trust in us as an organisation.

Communication FIRST – Swale Borough Council's Communications Strategy sets out how we intend to ensure our communications are as effective as they can be in 2014/15.

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Introduction

In order to deliver high quality, cost effective services that meet the needs of residents and communities, the Council must engage with people and enable them to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Good and effective communication is pivotal to this - ensuring that people know what the Council is doing, and making sure the Council is listening and letting people have their say.

Communication FIRST, Swale Borough Council's Communications Strategy for 2014/15 has been developed in order that the Council is clear in its approach to communicating the messages it should be relaying, and focussing on those services are a priority to residents. It has been informed by our 2013 Local Area Perception Survey (LAPS) results and also follows a comprehensive review of our communications service carried out in January 2014.

Our 2013 LAPS showed that:

- 76% of residents are satisfied with Swale as a place to live;
- 21% of residents volunteer at least once a month;
- 56% of residents are satisfied with the way the Council runs things;
- 36% of residents agree that the Council provides value for money (VFM);
- 63% of residents agree that the Council is trustworthy;
- 42% of residents feel the Council listens to their views;
- 45% of residents agree that the Council acts on their concerns;
- 57% feel well informed;
- Residents feel that levels of crime, clean streets, health services were the most important services in making somewhere a good place to live; and
- Road/ pavement repairs, job prospects, activities for teenagers and clean streets are most in need of improvement in Swale.

There is a strong correlation between levels of satisfaction with Council services and communication. So, by focusing on promoting the good services that we deliver, and showing how we listen and act on residents' concerns, we will build on the trust that residents already have in us, improve satisfaction in our services, and enhance the Council's reputation.

We are clear that **communication is the responsibility of everyone who works and represents Swale Borough Council**, not just the Communications Team. As such, this strategy should help inform the way our staff provide services and how Members champion the services in their communities. It will be supported by guidelines (brand, web, and writing style).

Some of our services are within a shared service arrangement, being delivered across more than one Local Authority. In these instances we will ensure that when we are communicating there is a consistent message and a joint approach.

We want to ensure that our purpose, values, and priorities are clearly understood by local people, our workforce, elected Members, our partners, local businesses, and other stakeholders.

Our purpose and values

The Council's purpose is simply **making Swale a better place**. This is our strapline, and so will be used to frame our stories and design our messages.

The Council has adopted a set of values for its staff and elected Members:

- **Fairness** - being objective to balance the needs of all those in our community;
- **Integrity** – being open, honest and taking responsibility;
- **Respect** – embracing and valuing the diversity of others;
- **Service** – delivering high quality, cost effective public service; and
- **Trust** – delivering on our promises to each other, customers and our partners.

Our Communications Strategy will use these values and integrate them in the messages the Council will now relay.

Our priorities

The Council has agreed three corporate priorities for 2014/15:

- Embracing Localism
- Open for Business
- Healthy Environment

Services are provided in order to deliver these priorities, based on the needs of residents. Our Communications Strategy will focus on these priorities, and target its communications and resources against them.

Communication FIRST Vision

Our vision is that the Council has a clear and consistent voice and identity. As a consequence, residents are more involved, informed, aware, and satisfied with Council services. They recognise that they receive value for money, and trust us to

do a good job. Ultimately, that people feel the Council is making Swale a better place.

Communication FIRST aims

In order to deliver good and effective communications, we will:

- inform and engage people in a variety of ways;
- promote our services and tell our story using the Communication FIRST strapline and messages;
- ensure a two-way dialogue so people can get involved in shaping decisions;
- improve internal communications with staff and elected Members so they feel involved and engaged in the work of the Council and act as advocates in our community; and
- bring the corporate priorities to life in the eyes of residents through targeted campaigns.

Communication FIRST messages

The following messages will be promoted in Council proactive communications:

- we are proud of Swale and to serve its residents;
- we deliver value for money and are cost efficient;
- we deliver excellent services focusing on what matters to residents;
- we are fair, show integrity and can be trusted; and
- we listen, respect and respond to people.

Communication FIRST communication priorities

The Council has limited resources available for communicating. As such it must be focused on Council priorities and what services residents feel are important to them and most need improving when communicating. Its resources will be predominately allocated to delivering the priority campaigns. There will be approximately 20% resource left for other non-campaign activities. The following targeted campaigns will be delivered in 2014/15:

- Regenerating Swale and Swale Open for Business;
- Opportunities to develop and get involved locally – volunteering, citizenship, community projects;
- Safeguarding Swale's environment;
- A safer, healthier Swale; and

- Improving internal communications.

Appendix I sets out our priority campaigns in more detail. These will be backed up by detailed communication action plans developed by the Communications Team in conjunction with service areas.

Communication FIRST communications channels

If we are to communicate successfully and be confident that we are getting our messages across to people, both internally and externally, we need to ensure that our communications channels are diverse, appropriate, and tailored to the specific/targeted audience needs. The range of communication channels available are changing and expanding - what suits one audience may not suit another, but there is increasing choice and preferences are changing.

The Council needs to recognise this and adapt accordingly. We will look to pilot new approaches and shift to new and emerging channels to ensure our communications are appropriate moving forward. Appendix II sets out how we communicate, now and in the future.

Communication FIRST audiences

Swale is a diverse place with diverse communities. As such the strategy recognises we will be communicating with many different people with a variety of needs. We will ensure that all our communications are relevant, clear, and accessible. We will work with partners and other agencies working as conduits to help get our communications across. What we are seeking to communicate will determine the audience we are targeting. Appendix III details our key audiences.

Communication FIRST delivery

The Council's Communications Service will deliver this strategy working in conjunction and dialogue with service areas to ensure the strategy is implemented through 2014/15. The service is small so will focus its capacity on the aims, messages, and communications set out in this Strategy. The Communications Service will take a more proactive and integrated approach to communications, ensuring opportunities for synergies across campaigns are realised.

Communication FIRST performance and success measures

We will look to improve our performance in 2014/15. We will know if we have achieved our vision and that the Council has successfully put its **Communication FIRST** by achieving the following outcomes:

- the reputation of the Council has improved;
- our strapline is recognised and our voice is being heard;
- satisfaction with our services has increased;
- trust and confidence in the Council is stronger;
- there is a more positive perception of value for money and efficiency;
- more people are engaged and feel they have influence over the Council's decision making;
- our staff feel more involved and are advocates in promoting the Council's brand; and, ultimately
- **Swale is a better place.**

We will use our annual LPAS to track our progress against these outcomes based on current performance. This will also be supported by data from our staff survey, project evaluation, MOSAIC (a customer classification programme that puts customers into categories based on their consumer habits) , data insight, and monthly communications data monitoring of channel performance.

Communication Campaign Priorities

A more detailed communication action plan supports this list and is available on request.

PRIORITY	Campaign
Regeneration	Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration project - spades in ground by May 2015
	Neighbourhood Planning Referendum Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan
Open For Business	Putting Swale of the Map/ Swale means business – creating a positive perception of Swale as place in which to visit, invest and do business eg Small business Saturday/ pop up shop project
	Business support service – encourage take-up of the service
	TIGER - encourage take-up of the loan products
	Apprenticeships – encourage provision of apprenticeship placements and increase interest and take up
	Local First - more local jobs for local people, encouraging local procurement
	Market tender and relocation of Sittingbourne market
	Campaigns to encourage channel shift
Opportunities to develop & get involved	Volunteering - promotion of opportunities and supporting voluntary and community sector organisations
	Community Engagement – Local Engagements Forums, Rural Forum, Member grants
	World War One centenary project and grant fund promotion. VC days promotion
	Individual Electoral Registration - the way you register to vote is changing
	Managing Local Election process - 7 May 2015
Safeguarding Environment	Environmental promotion - enforcement, prevention, changing people's behaviour eg recycling , dropping litter
	Waste Contract (Food)
	Street Cleanliness
	Recycling
	Swale's natural assets and tourism offer

Safer and Healthier Swale	CSP - promote crime reduction initiatives
	Health and physical activity promotion campaigns and signposting
	Raising awareness of the council's housing service
Internal Communication	Employee and member engagement campaigns eg understanding and promoting Local First

Communication Channels

External
Inside Swale – the council newsletter delivered to all households four times a year
Council website www.swale.gov.uk and other websites eg visitswale, investinswale (under development and name subject to change)
Online consultations
Council meeting webcasting
Social Media networking and mobile; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Live online Chat (Chat TP), RSS feeds, SMS text messaging, Apps, email marketing (developing)
Press/ media releases, statements and briefings
Newspapers, journals, magazines
Radio and television, broadcasting (in development)
Community meetings e.g. Local Engagement Forums, Rural Forum, Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, BEAT meetings
“You said, we did cards” through doors (Environmental Response Team)
Neighbourhood surgeries
Token boxes in receptions getting residents to vote on service suggestions
Events, conferences, roadshows
Specific consultation events/ meetings
Billboards, posters, flyers, leaflets, community notice boards, public notices, public reception areas
The Leader’s video blog
Partner, stakeholder, community groups, town and parish council newsletters
Through school assemblies, newsletters
National/ regional government journals
Annual Local Area Perception Survey and other service specific surveys
Council tax leaflet annually, annual report, statement of accounts
Internal
Council’s Intranet
Team Talk – Council’s internal newsletter

Staff briefings – three times a year
Unison
Team meetings/briefings
All staff emails
Posters
Desk top screen promotion
Email footers
Staff induction
Staff Survey – annually
Swale Stars – annual council awards evening
Swale Voice – staff panel
Information Boards
Media matters
Members’ despatch – weekly
Members’ briefings and training

Our Audiences

Residents
Prospective residents
Staff
Prospective Staff
Cabinet Members
Ward Councillors
Local MPs
Businesses, retailers
Prospective businesses, retailers and investors
Visitors and commuters
Town/ Parish Councils and councillors
Community groups
Specific groups e.g. rural communities, ethnic minority groups, gypsy and travellers, disability groups
Other local authorities e.g. Kent County Council and neighbouring district councils
Central Government
Partners in the borough e.g. AmicusHorizon, the Police, KCC wardens, Swale CVS, Clinical Commissioning Groups
Schools and colleges
Utility companies
Local, regional and national media