

# **Maidstone Borough Council Communication Strategy**

*a strategy to  
inform, listen and engage  
with our stakeholders*



Version 2.1 – May 2009

## Contents

### Table of Contents

1. Preface.....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Context .....	7
4. Key Areas of Work .....	8
5. How will we achieve our aims? .....	11
6. Action Plan.....	17
7. Review of past performance .....	25
Appendix 1: Consultation Statement of Principles .....	29
Appendix 2: Public Relations and Editorial Policy .....	30

## 1. Preface

*"Good communication leads to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships. Evidence suggests a clear relationship between how well informed people are about their council's services and how satisfied they are with it overall (MORI 2006). There is also a relationship between Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)\* performance as measured by the Audit Commission and how effective councils are at communicating.*

*"Moreover, a 2006 study published by Communities and Local Government (formerly known as DCLG) – 'Perceptions of local government in England' – suggests that clearer, honest and transparent written communications would help to build trust among residents. The research also highlighted the fact that residents would trust their councils more if they felt their views were being taken on board.*

*"With the current emphasis on devolution and a move to local area working, the recent Lyons Inquiry into Local Government (Lyons 2006) emphasised the need for local authorities to demonstrate the ability to engage with local people to understand their views and to inform decisions, if more responsive and effective public services are to be achieved."*

### **Improvement and Development Agency**

\* Now Comprehensive Area Assessment

## 2. Introduction

**The Council's aim is to provide effective communication and engagement of all stakeholders regardless of race, age, gender, faith, sexual orientation or disability throughout Maidstone Borough Council and the wider community.**

### **Purpose**

This strategy sets the overall context and approach to how the council communicates. Central to communication is not just conveying messages and ideas, but also listening and acting upon what people tell us.

As a public body funded by taxpayers money we need to make sure that we not only provide Value for Money but that we let people know what services are available to them, how they can access them and also let them have a say in how we 'shape' services. It is important to allow time for communication; to involve people in decision making and to be an accessible and democratic organisation.

In Maidstone we have a vision for the Borough and have wider goals linked to the Kent Partnership (setting out an overall strategy for Kent). As a council we set a Strategic Plan on an annual basis containing a range of priorities, aims and objectives.

This Communication Strategy is a key document underpinning delivery of the Strategic Plan and sets out our approach to staying an effective organisation that learns and uses information to improve service delivery. See also the section relating to key work that informs what we do.

### **Knowledge**

Effective communication is ensuring that people know what is going on:

- That councillors, staff and managers who make key decisions, are kept informed of what is going on.
- By knowing what is going on we are able to better formulate policy and our direction (such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Strategic Plan) and ensure that services are delivered in everyone's best interests.
- Consulting, listening and feeding back to people on changes that have been made. To be effective we need to involve all of our stakeholders, including those who do not have regular contact with us or find us easy to approach.

## **Good communication**

For many years the council has embraced the principles of open and accountable government. As a leader and focal point for the community, the Council needs to be able to communicate effectively with all its citizens, local businesses and stakeholders.

Good communication can lead to:

- Increased satisfaction with the council and its services.
- Equal access to the council's services.
- Increased take up of council services.
- Well informed staff and public.

Communication is a two-way thing; listening as well as informing. This strategy sets out how people can provide ideas, views and feedback on services and how the council can communicate the latest news and developments.

In particular we want to:

- Ensure citizens are aware of local issues such as the Kent International Gateway and that they have a sense of place.
- Create a high profile for the council as a dynamic, progressive, efficient and business-like organisation at local, regional and national level.
- Ensure consistency, plain language and total quality in all communications with the public.
- Encourage and enable our staff to understand, support and deliver the council's vision and priorities adhering to the ethos summarised in our core values (STRIVE).
- Engage and empower staff to feel confident in communicating with the council's stakeholders – customers, councillors, partners, contractors etc.
- Build greater awareness of council services and policies, and involve and engage stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of their aspirations to inform council policies.

## **Wider implications**

It is clear that the Communications Strategy is closely linked to a wide variety of other services and work such as the IC & T Strategy, Human Resources and knowledge management. It is not practical or desirable to cover everything the authority does in relation to communications in this document. It therefore sets out key work and a clear way forward. At work and at home every member of staff and councillor has an impact on the council's public image. Well informed councillors and staff members are more likely to be advocates for the council. The challenge lies in building understanding and ownership of the council's vision, priorities and core values.

### 3. Context

#### **Our Vision, Priorities and Core Values**

The council shares the vision for Maidstone taken from the Sustainable Community Strategy:

**We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations.**

To support this vision and ensure the objectives for Maidstone are delivered the Council has identified five priority themes that explain the issues we will concentrate on to help deliver the vision for Maidstone. We want Maidstone to be:

1. A place to achieve, prosper and thrive
2. A place that is clean and green
3. A place that has strong, healthy and safe communities
4. A place to live and enjoy
5. A place with efficient and effective public services

#### **Our Core Values (STRIVE)**

The Council has adopted six core values which crystallise our beliefs and behaviour:

- Superb customer service
- Teamwork
- Responsibility to deliver our promises
- Integrity and high standards of corporate governance
- Value for money and efficiency
- Equality within a diverse organisation

These core values were developed through workshops with councillors and staff.

## 4. Key Areas of Work

### **Reputation**

Maidstone council has signed up to the Local Government Reputation Project to deliver five core communication actions to further improve our reputation:

- Ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services.
- Manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council.
- Provide an A-Z guide to council services.
- Publish a regular council magazine/newspaper to inform residents.
- Step up internal communications so staff become advocates for the council.

Until 2009 the council sent an A-Z guide to every household. It is now available on request at the Maidstone Gateway and at our receptions, and on our website.

### **Assessing Resident Satisfaction**

The Council undertakes regular satisfaction surveys at service level and corporately. These include, for example, consultation on Borough Update and our budget plans.

In 2008 the government introduced a new biennial Place Survey to replace the triennial Best Value Performance Indicator Surveys. The new survey is based on a template provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In Maidstone, surveys were sent to 5,000 households and nearly 2,000 were returned. The survey aims to ascertain satisfaction with a local area and services, and the levels of civic participation. It suggests that:

- Most important in making somewhere a good place to live are:
  - The level of crime (49%)
  - Health services (43%)
  - Clean streets (38%)
  - Public transport (29%)
  - Affordable decent housing (28%)
  - Access to nature (26%)
  - Shopping facilities (26%)
  - Education provision (26%)
  - Parks and open spaces (25%) and
  - Level of congestion (24%)



- Most in need of improving in Maidstone Borough are:
  - Road and pavement repairs (48%),
  - Levels of congestion (47%),
  - Activities for teenagers (41%),
  - Public transport (25%),
  - The level of crime (22%) and
  - Clean streets (21%).
- 86% of people are satisfied with Maidstone as a place to live.
- 25% of people give unpaid help to local clubs, societies, community activities and charities.
- 82% of people think Maidstone is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- 60% would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area.

The Place Survey suggests that the council should concentrate on three areas and four services where satisfaction could be better when compared to our neighbours. Action plans will be prepared to improve satisfaction in these areas:

- NI 4: % who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
- NI 37: Awareness of civil protection arrangements in local area
- NI 139: The extent to which older people receive the support they need to live independently at home
- Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse
- Doorstep recycling
- Sport and leisure facilities
- Theatres and concert halls

The results for crime suggest that the statistical reduction in crime is not resulting in improved public confidence. The Safer Maidstone Partnership has established a Public Reassurance Group to work to address this.

### **Media evaluation**

For many years the council has measured the effectiveness of its media activity by the percentage of news releases used and the volume and value of coverage obtained. The Head of Communications has daily contact with journalists and seeks feedback on the range of services and materials offered.

### **Code of Conduct and Editorial guidelines**

The borough council does not believe in spin. All our PR and publicity will comply with s.2 of the Local Government Act 1986 and s.27 of the Local Government Act 1988, which prohibit the publication of material designed to affect support for a political party and we will have regard to the Code of

Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The code is available from the Department for Communities and Local Government website - [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

The code contains specific reference to the timing and content of publicity in the period between the notice of an election and the election itself:

*"41. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election."*

The council will not hide from publicising bad news or unpopular decisions or stories that people do not want to hear. All important decisions are risk assessed and this should include a communication plan. The council's PR and editorial policy for Borough Update, news releases, media events and responses to media enquiries is attached at **Appendix 2**.

### **Consultation, Involvement and Engagement**

In 2001-02 an Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at the council's consultation mechanisms. It emphasised the importance of consultation and made many suggestions to improve the council's consultation mechanisms. It agreed that consultation was two way and a process of asking for and listening to the views of stakeholders.

The council's adopted principles for consultation are attached at **Appendix 1**.

The council has set aside funds for its annual consultation on the budget and has used many different types of quantitative and qualitative mechanisms to test council priorities, spending options and tax levels.

Consultation on the Local Development Framework Plan will be an issue throughout much of the life of this strategy.

We also involve and engage stakeholders. For example during the formulation of the Sustainable Community Strategy we consulted and we involved residents, exchanging information and seeking their views at focus groups and through the 'Stick up for Maidstone' campaign.

## 5. How will we achieve our aims?

The council uses many different communication channels. There isn't a one size fits all solution. The council will use many channels in its communications plans and to fulfil its overall communication aims. Consultation has shown that residents want local information tailored to their needs. Borough Update has three areas and together with the ICT strategy we will look at personalisation of our website.

### **Media - Local Media**

Maidstone borough is served by two regional television stations, five local newspapers, two commercial radio stations and one BBC radio station. The Council publishes its Borough Update magazine in the monthly Downs Mail newspaper.

Our objective is to improve local media coverage and evaluation.

### **Media - Local Government and Trade Press**

In addition to the local media, the council needs to use the local government and national press widely.

Our objective is to improve reporting in the local government and national press. We will seek to publicise our awards and achievements and our responses to consultations.

### **Borough Update**

The council's eight page colour magazine was refreshed in 2007. It is published six times a year in the Downs Mail newspaper, which is delivered by Royal Mail to most Maidstone households. We carry out annual satisfaction surveys in the magazine. The budget is £24,000.

Downs Mail is published 12 times a year and we publish a single page newsletter in the issues which do not include Borough Update.

Our objectives are to maintain high levels of satisfaction with the publication, to consult and provide feedback on consultations, and to report important information about the council and its services.

### **Council Performance**

As a public organisation funded by taxpayers' money, it is essential that the Council is accountable to its citizens for the performance of services and the

value for money and management of resources offered. All citizens deserve equal access to this information. In using Council resources wisely it is important to look at the communication needs of the local population and demographic information. Demographic information is obtained from a range of sources in order to capture the latest changes in the make-up of our borough. This includes the national census 2001, index of multiple deprivation, and employment, health and crime data. The information below is based on the latest census data available; the demographics will have changed since 2001 and we await the next census (see fig 1).

### **Hard to Reach Groups**

Many of the Council's services work on a daily basis with hard to reach groups such as – the minority ethnic community, young people, single parents, people with disabilities and the elderly.

In 2006 the Council's Recreation and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee published the findings of its investigation into access to the Council's services. The report included a number of recommendations to improve communication with hard to reach groups.

A visual impairment communication guide has been produced and is available on the council's intranet. The council wants to ensure that people with visual impairment receive information in an accessible format and will continue to work closely with Kent Association for the Blind to improve communication with blind people.

Road shows, budget consultations and other events must be accessible to everyone – physical access to the venue and access to information is important. We have gone out to meet hard to reach groups at venues and in ways that encourages them to contribute to our budget consultations.

Deprivation and poverty is an issue in some wards in our borough and linked to this can be low levels of literacy. The challenge is to provide accessible documents and effective communication. Documents must be written in plain English with pictures and illustrations. The Gateway signing is a good example of accessible communication.

Religious festivals should be considered when planning events and consultations so not to exclude some groups in our community. A calendar of primary sacred times is available online at - [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org).

Our objective is to improve communication and consultation with hard to reach groups.

As part of the development of this strategy we have undertaken an Equalities Impact Assessment.

<b>Fig 1 - Demographic information</b> (Source - ONS 2001 Census)	<b>Maidstone</b>	<b>South East</b>	<b>England</b>
2001 Population: All people	138948	8000645	49138831
2001 Population: Males	68350	3905155	23922144
2001 Population: Females	70598	4095490	25216687
% People stating religion as Christian	76.31	72.78	71.74
% People stating religion as Buddhist	0.23	0.28	0.28
% People stating religion as Hindu	0.48	0.56	1.11
% People stating religion as Jewish	0.12	0.24	0.52
% People stating religion as Muslim	0.53	1.36	3.1
% People stating religion as Sikh	0.11	0.47	0.67
% People stating religion as Other religions	0.52	0.36	0.29
% People stating religion as No religion	14.33	16.5	14.59
% People stating religion as Religion not stated	7.38	7.46	7.69
% General health: Good	71.2	71.5	68.76
% General health: Fairly good	21.85	21.38	22.21
% General health: Not good	6.95	7.12	9.03
% People with a limiting long-term illness	15.23	15.47	17.93
% People aged 16-74: Economically active: Employees Full-time	43.87	43.22	40.81
% People aged 16-74: Economically active: Employees Part-time	12.67	12.2	11.81
% People aged 16-74: Economically active: Self-employed	9.75	9.58	8.32
% People aged 16-74: Economically active: Unemployed	2.19	2.31	3.35
% People aged 16-74: Economically active: Full-time student	2.36	2.71	2.58
% People aged 16-74: Economically inactive: Retired	13.49	13.4	13.54
% People aged 16-74: Economically inactive: Student	3.1	4.17	4.67
% People aged 16-74: Economically inactive: Looking after home / family	6.78	6.55	6.52
% People aged 16-74: Economically inactive: Permanently sick / disabled	3.29	3.45	5.3
% People aged 16-74: Economically inactive: Other	2.48	2.41	3.1
% People aged 16-74 with: No qualifications	25.52	23.92	28.85
% People aged 16-74 with: Highest qualification attained level 1	18.5	17.13	16.63
% People aged 16-74 with: Highest qualification attained level 2	22.51	21.18	19.36
% People aged 16-74 with: Highest qualification attained level 3	8.34	9.2	8.34
% People aged 16-74 with: Highest qualification attained level 4 / 5	17.69	21.75	19.9
% People aged 16-74 with: Other qualifications / level unknown	7.44	6.82	6.92
All Households	56454	3287489	20451427
% Households with no cars or vans	17.37	19.43	26.84

This strategy makes clear that the council will provide information on finance and performance as part of the Annual Report, on the website and as appropriate.

Our approach is to provide information in available formats on request and this has proved an effective (and cost effective) method of ensuring accessibility and high levels of satisfaction.

## **New forms of communication (including Digital Maidstone)**

Over the past decade the way that people gather news and information has changed and in the future it is likely that there will be a higher degree of personalisation of access to information. Recent examples of facilities that have changed the way people operate include blogs and Facebook. There will be opportunities for the Council to take advantage of new communications channels, but this must be assessed on a case by case basis through risk and cost assessment. It is not the Council's practice to adopt new technology for the sake of it.

Consultation has shown that residents want to keep up to date with the work of Councillors by email and website.

In 2007 Digital Maidstone was completely overhauled with a complete new look, information architecture and navigation system. Much old and redundant content was removed and the challenge will be to ensure that the site remains current and that it becomes more interactive. Plans for the development of the site are contained in the council's IT strategy.

This strategy deals with editorial matters. Our objectives are to make sure the internet is up to date, interesting and well used, and to promote good email and internet etiquette.

Consultation on this strategy has shown a desire by residents to be kept informed about our services by emails, telephone and the website. This will be progressed through this Strategy and through the Council's ICT Strategy.

## **Media Emergency Plan**

The council - in partnership with Kent County Council and the emergency services - is responsible for dealing with major civil emergencies or disasters. The council has a major emergency plan and a media emergency plan that sets out how communication and especially the media should be handled in emergency situations.

Our objective is to maintain and improve the media emergency plan and ensure that key personnel are trained in its use.

## **Internal Communications**

Council employee's interaction with residents and customers is a critical element of how the council is viewed. Our customer care policies and training set standards for service delivery.

Communication plays an equally important role to make sure that our staff members are aware of council policies and decisions and its vision, priorities

and values. The Wakey Wakey staff newsletter, Cabinet Bulletins and the STRIVE awards contribute to this work.

Our objective is to maintain and improve internal communications.

### **Corporate Identity**

The Strategic Plan continues to recognise that consultation and communication is important to the Council. However, some forms of publicity such as corporate events and external accreditation have been recognised as areas which are not important. Research shows that there is a direct correlation between high levels of satisfaction and awareness of services that are actually available (and awareness can help to improve service take-up). Not providing this information can disenfranchise some groups of people who should have access to services. As an organisation that provides a wide range of services that are important to the community, working with and for the community, there is a great deal for the Council to celebrate.

What we say about our own organisation matters. Encouraging Councillors, managers and staff to think more about the key messages we would like to get across can have an effect on the way people view the Council as a whole, providing an ideal context for constructive partnership and communication.

The way the Council presents itself at its offices, in documents and on its websites or at public and stakeholder meetings has a significant impact.

Our objective is to present a strong corporate image that is consistent with our core values.

### **Consultation, Involvement and Engagement**

Involving people in the decision-making process is at the heart of good governance. We believe that the defining feature of consultation is that it is a two-way process. We aim to let people know at an early stage what changes or initiatives are proposed so that they have ample time in which to voice their views.

We have produced a consultation handbook with advice on alternative methods and costs of consultations. In line with Government directives major consultations give residents at least 12 weeks in which to respond. Other consultations are completed in shorter time frames.


Consultations are coordinated by the communications team. Consultations are placed on our website together with the consultation timetable, evaluation and feedback – as recommended by Overview and Scrutiny.

Consultation on this strategy revealed that residents want to keep up to date with consultations via the website and email as well as via more established means.

In future the council will involve and engage even more with stakeholders. The council will respond to the Communities in Control White Paper which encourages councils to look at innovative ways to get people involved such as participatory budgeting, citizens’ juries, local boards and citizens’ panels.

A citizens’ panel could be provided with the members of the local strategic partnership. This would be cost effective and improve coordination of participation and communication.

The following table shows a ladder of public engagement and examples of the council’s work so far to involve and engage with stakeholders.

<b>Level of Participation</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Partnership</b>	<b>Most Active</b>	<b>The Mid Kent Improvement Partnership.</b>
<b>Engagement</b>		<b>Planning Forum and Make Maidstone Happy.</b>
<b>Involvement</b>		<b>Sustainable Community Strategy focus groups.</b>
<b>Consultation</b>		<b>Budget Simulator – the council’s online budget planner.</b>
<b>Information</b>		<b>Borough Update and media releases.</b>
	<b>Most Passive</b>	

Our objectives are to maintain and improve coordination, evaluation and feedback of participation.



## 6. Action Plan

The Head of Communications is responsible for the delivery of these targets assisted by the officers named below.

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
<p>1. Ensure citizens are aware of local issues such as the Kent International Gateway and that they have a sense of place.</p>	<p>Issue news releases.</p>	<p>150 per year with a 94% success rate.</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer</p>
	<p>Evaluate newspaper coverage in terms of positive, neutral and negative impact.</p>	<p>Establish a system to evaluate newspaper coverage in terms of positive, neutral and negative impact 2008-09.</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer</p>
		<p>Establish a baseline for newspaper coverage in 2008-09 and improve performance from 2009-10 onwards.</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer</p>
	<p>Media training for Cabinet Members, Overview and Scrutiny and other Committee Chairmen and council officers.</p>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Head of Communications</p>
<p>Meet the council events for the media with senior councillors and officers</p>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Head of Communications</p>	

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
	<p>Councillor web pages/social networking sites.</p> <p>A media plan to highlight the council's work and achievements – using the strategic plan and forward plan to capture the work of the cabinet and overview and scrutiny. This will include communication plans for unpopular as well as popular decisions.</p>	<p>2009-10</p> <p>Annually</p>	<p>Public relations officer/Democratic Services Manager</p> <p>Public Relations Officer</p>
<p>2. Create a high profile for the council as a dynamic, progressive, efficient and business-like organisation at local, regional and national level.</p>	<p>Articles in the local government and national press highlighting the work of the council/ Maidstone. We will encourage officers to enter awards and publicise applications and successes. We will publicise our responses to Government consultations.</p> <p>The production of a vibrant annual report feature in Borough Update celebrating the Council's achievements. This supplement will be circulated to key stakeholders such as MP's and the Government Office South East.</p>	<p>4 per year</p> <p>Annually</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer</p> <p>Marketing Manager/ Overview &amp; Scrutiny and Policy Manager</p>

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
	To maintain and improve the Council's style guide.	Annual review – to consider new advice on standards for people with learning disabilities.	Marketing Manager/ Marketing Co-ordinator
		To provide a briefing note/training on the style guide and communication to all new staff.	Marketing Manager/ Marketing Co-ordinator
	To ensure compliance to the council's style guide.	All important corporate documents.	Marketing Manager/ Marketing Co-ordinator
	To ensure compliance with the council's street-scene branding for Environmental Services and Parks and Open Spaces.	100%.	Marketing Manager/ Marketing Co-ordinator
	To improve the clarity and presentation of the Council's websites through coordination of the Information Champions group and Plain English Society training.	100%	Marketing Manager/ Marketing Co-ordinator
	To publish financial information and other important information about the Council's performance in Borough Update and on our web site.	Annual information about the borough's council tax.	Head of Communications/ Overview & Scrutiny and Policy Manager

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
		<p>Annual information about the council's performance compared to national indicators.</p> <p>An annual summary of accounts</p>	<p>Head of Communications/ Overview &amp; Scrutiny and Policy Manager</p> <p>Head of Communications/ Overview &amp; Scrutiny and Policy Manager</p>
<p>3. Ensure consistency, plain language and total quality in all communications with the public.</p>	<p>An annual survey of satisfaction with Borough Update.</p> <p>To promote equalities and plain English training and Principles.</p> <p>To promote good email and internet etiquette.</p> <p>To maintain membership of the Plain English Society.</p> <p>To improve the clarity of council documents.</p>	<p>To maintain 90+ satisfaction with the publication.</p> <p>Annual promotions and regular reviews in Wakey Wakey.</p> <p>Annual campaign to promote the council's internet and email response policies and guidelines.</p> <p>To provide 50 online training courses a year.</p> <p>To crystal mark at least 5 important high volume letters or documents each year.</p>	<p>Head of Communications</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Head of Communications/ IT Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p>

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
	<p>To set style guidelines and training notes to ensure the council's internet sites are maintained to corporate standards.</p> <p>To insist on the use of Plain English throughout our websites.</p> <p>To monitor website usage reports and find out what users think about the content and usability of the website.</p>	<p>Annual review</p> <p>Every Information Champion to receive Plain English training.</p> <p>An annual on-line survey to establish and track user satisfaction with the website and an annual improvement plan to maximise satisfaction, online transactions and website visitors.</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer /IT Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager/Public Relations Officer</p> <p>Head of Communications/IT Manager</p>
<p>4. Encourage and enable our staff to understand, support and deliver the council's vision and priorities adhering to the ethos summarised in our core values (STRIVE).</p>	<p>To provide staff with visual guides and reminders of the core values.</p> <p>To publish core values in Wakey Wakey.</p> <p>To publish core values on the intranet.</p>	<p>Annually, dependent upon budget.</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Monthly</p>	<p>Marketing Manager/Public Relations Officer</p> <p>Marketing Manager/Public Relations Officer</p> <p>Marketing Manager/Public Relations Officer</p>
<p>5. Engage and empower staff to feel confident in communicating with the</p>	<p>To publish a 'Wakey Wakey' staff newsletter including links to council news releases.</p>	<p>Weekly – Electronically for most staff; in paper form for other staff.</p>	<p>Public Relations Officer</p>

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
council's stakeholders – customers, councillors, partners, contractors etc.	To hold staff forum meetings.	Every other month	Head of Communications/ Head of Human Resources
	To hold section manager meetings.	Quarterly	Head of Communications
	To issue policy and information briefing notes for managers.	Monthly	Head of Communications
	To broadcast a regular webcast to staff.	Monthly	Public Relations Officer
	To encourage 'two-way' communication between staff and management.	Annual campaign to encourage comments via the Reach the Summit performance management system and to highlight the Grapevine and to respond to important issues.	Head of Communications/ IT Manager/Overview & Scrutiny and Policy Manager
	To promote the availability of deprivation and poverty information.	Annually to highlight information on the MaidZone intranet and briefings to unit managers.	Marketing Manager
	To maintain and improve the council's preparedness for major emergencies.	An annual review of the media emergency plan to keep it up to date at times.	Public Relations Officer

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
		Annual briefing sessions for key personnel on the media emergency plan.	Head of Communications
6. Build greater awareness of council services and policies, and involve and engage stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of their aspirations to inform council policies	<p>To provide documents in alternative formats on request.</p> <p>To review the communications guide to visual impairment.</p> <p>To provide briefings to unit managers on accessible communications.</p> <p>To produce a new 'Guide to Consultation' for unit managers.</p> <p>To produce a timetable of major consultations and consider opportunities for collaboration between council services and other authorities.</p> <p>To maintain a public timetable of consultations on Digital Maidstone - with individual exercises, comment facility and results.</p>	<p>Whenever possible council documents will be published with a statement of the availability in alternative formats.</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>2008-09</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>100%</p>	<p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p> <p>Marketing Manager</p>

Objective	Action	Target	Responsible Officer
	To review and improve evaluation and reporting back of consultations with a view to providing a new corporate resource for service managers.	2008-09	Marketing Manager
	To provide information and feedback on the council's budget consultations in Borough Update and on the website.	Annually	Head of Communications
	To deliver the action plans arising out of the 2008-09 Place Survey	100%	Head of Communications/ Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager/ Heads of Service
	To coordinate the Safer Maidstone Partnership's Public Reassurance Group.	To be in the top quartile of Kent districts for Fear of Crime.	Head of Communications/ SMP Partners
	The actions agreed by the council in response to the Communities in Control white paper. These could include a citizens' panel or local boards to deliver services to engage with people locally.	To be set	To be identified



## 7. Review of past performance

**Aim One:** To build greater awareness of council services and policies and greater understanding of the aspirations of stakeholders to inform council policies.

<b>Communication Method</b>		<b>Comment</b>
<b>1</b>	The Borough Newsletter – continued improvement with stronger council branding and more council stories.	Borough Update has been updated and improved – satisfaction levels are consistently high.
<b>2</b>	Customer care and complaints policies for reception points and telephone answering etc.	Achieved.
<b>3</b>	Media events and partnerships such as <i>Pride in Maidstone</i> and <i>Maidstone Means Business</i> .	Many such events have been held.
<b>4</b>	Improved 'A-Z of council services' information – on the web site and in directories such as the BT Phone Book etc.	Completed - on website and as a standalone publication in each year 2006 to 2008.
<b>5</b>	Improving the taxpayers' understanding of the council's part of the annual council tax demand.	The council tax bill and leaflet has been improved and other publicity materials produced.
<b>6</b>	Provision of information for new residents.	Life events information has been provided on the website – currently deleted. A new residents pack will be published online.
<b>7</b>	An annual road show/series of appearances at events/public speaking engagements/parish council visits throughout the borough.	Ongoing.
<b>8</b>	Publicising the council's policies and work to tackle important issues identified by opinion surveys - crime and community safety, cleaner streets, litter, street lighting, vandalism, transport, highways, recycling etc.	Ongoing.

<b>9</b>	Continued development of the council's web site, DigitalMaidstone, to meet Implementing Electronic Government requirements and adding life events etc. Section Managers have completed an assessment of the information that they can	Achieved – most recent update in November 2007.
<b>10</b>	Annual publicity campaigns to promote key council policies such as the "Keeping Maidstone Clean" initiative 2002/03.	Ongoing.
<b>11</b>	Special 'question time' meetings for residents to question councillors about topical subjects.	Big Debates have been held on important topics.
<b>12</b>	Forward plan	Ongoing

**Aim Two:** To create a high profile for the council as a dynamic, progressive, efficient and business like organisation at local, regional and national level.

<b>Communication Method</b>		<b>Comment</b>
<b>1</b>	Pursue 'excellence' awards such as IIP, Charter Marks and ISO's.	Ongoing.
<b>2</b>	Campaign every March/April to encourage voting and involvement.	Ongoing.
<b>3</b>	Maidstone Youth Forum.	Ongoing.
<b>4</b>	New recruitment pack to attract high calibre people to the council.	Achieved.
<b>5</b>	Improved National Performance Indicators.	The council has consistently improved its performance.
<b>6</b>	Maintain application for City status.	The council applied for City Status in 2000.
<b>7</b>	Beacon authority status.	Ongoing.
<b>8</b>	Partnerships and building new partnerships with the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.	Ongoing.
<b>9</b>	High quality annual Maidstone promotional brochure/calendar/Christmas cards.	Ongoing.

<b>10</b>	Attendance and contribution to local government and other regional and national events.	Ongoing.
<b>11</b>	Cricket Week or County Show etc profile.	Currently Cricket Week is not held in Maidstone.
<b>12</b>	Meet the council events for local Media.	Ongoing.
<b>13</b>	Lobbying of decision-makers and influential people and organisations on matters of importance to the borough.	Ongoing.
<b>14</b>	A feasibility study into the web casting of council, cabinet and committee meetings and of online debates.	Most meetings are now web cast.

**Aim Three:** To ensure consistency and total quality in all communications with the public.

<b>Communication Method</b>		<b>Comment</b>
<b>1</b>	Professional handling of media enquiries.	Ongoing.
<b>2</b>	Media training for key councillors and officers.	Ongoing.
<b>3</b>	News releases.	Ongoing.
<b>4</b>	Establish a strong corporate brand for the council that promotes its core aims and objectives.	A Style Guide has been produced along with new branding of the council's streetscene operation and parks and open spaces etc.
<b>5</b>	Communications audits of internal and external communications including an assessment of plain English and accessible formats.	Ongoing.

**Aim Four:** To encourage and enable our staff to understand and support the council's vision, key values and objectives.

Maidstone Borough Council has recognised the importance of internal communication. It has been an integral part of the successful Investors in People accreditation of all four council directorates. In a service organisation people are part of the product and the council values the contribution made by its staff. Good internal communication will ensure that our staff know the council's aims and how they contribute to achieving them.

<b>Communication Method</b>		<b>Comment</b>
<b>1</b>	Continued development of Staff Matters newsletter – more daily and weekly updates between monthly issues and more interactive elements including attitude and awareness surveys.	Ongoing.
<b>2</b>	IIP and Personal Development Interview processes (which promote the council's corporate vision and plan).	Frequent ongoing development.
<b>3</b>	Reach the Summit and associated activity such as CE/Director congratulations on good work, walkabouts and monthly breakfasts with staff.	Ongoing – initiatives have included the CE webcast.
<b>4</b>	Create cultural change amongst staff to embrace projects like Reach the Summit and Employer of Choice etc.	Ongoing.
<b>5</b>	Best Value Reviews – staff input and involvement.	Ongoing.

**Aim Five:** To empower staff to feel confident in communicating with the council's various publics.

<b>Communication Method</b>		<b>Comment</b>
<b>1</b>	Sampling of letters to the public and promotion of the use of plain English.	Ongoing.
<b>2</b>	Promote the work and achievements of council staff – facilitating coverage in the media through news releases, jobs/recruitment features and partnerships.	Ongoing.
<b>3</b>	Involving council staff in consultation exercises as respondents and to help conduct research when appropriate.	Ongoing – e.g. budget consultations.
<b>4</b>	Provision of consistent information to frontline staff through Staff Matters etc.	Ongoing through Wakey Wakey and FAQs to contact centre etc.

## Appendix 1: Consultation Statement of Principles

### Consultation should be:

- **Inclusive** - Involving all sections of the community. When possible information should be available in a choice of formats.
- **Open** - With real choices.
- **Impartial** - It should not lead local people to a response.
- **Informative** - People must be informed to make reasoned decisions.
- **Involving** - It must enable people to really become involved in the development of proposals.
- **Understandable** - Plain English must be used.
- **Appropriate** - To reach all groups there must be a mix of quantitative and qualitative research.
- **Strategic** - To avoid 'tick box tiredness' consultation should take account of the council's partner's consultation exercises.
- **Joined Up** - Is it appropriate to combine consultation exercises?
- **Resourced** - Sufficient human and financial resources will ensure it is rigorous and reaches all parties.
- **Professional** - There must be confidence that the results are real and not massaged to produce the outcome favoured by the council.
- **Timely** - It should be at times people are likely to participate and built into the timetable for best value reviews.
- **Listened to** - It must be owned by Councillors and the results must provide them with real information on which to base decisions.
- **Reported** - Feedback on the results and how they have informed the decision will build confidence that views are listened to and acted on.

## Appendix 2: Public Relations and Editorial Policy

This appendix sets out the Public Relations and Editorial Policy for Borough Update, news releases, media events and enquiries, and Cabinet Road Shows.

- All the council's PR and publicity will comply with s2 of the Local Government Act 1986 and s27 of the Local Government Act 1988, and have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- The Council will only publicise and promote Council decisions (executive, committees and council), policies and services.
- Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen can be quoted in News Releases, Borough Update and media statements to explain decisions and policies and to promote Council services.
- The Council will hold photo calls and events to promote and explain decisions, policies and services.
- The Council will be represented at these events by Cabinet Members and Committee Chairmen.
- All Members of the Council will be informed of these events.
- News releases will be copied to all councillors at the same time that they are issued to the media.
- Ward Members and other Members of the Council will be able to attend events.
- Cabinet Road shows and similar Council road shows and events will not be held in wards where an election is due to be held within two months.
- Publicity and presentation materials for Cabinet road shows will be factual and non partisan.
- Ward Members and Group Leaders will be informed of Cabinet road shows as soon as the dates are fixed and invited to attend or send representatives.
- Cabinet Member presentations and answers must be factual and only explain and promote Council decisions (executive, committees and council), policies and services.
- Hospitality at Cabinet road shows and other events will be appropriate and modest.