

# 'Getting the message'

## Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Communications Strategy 2010 - 2013

DRAFT

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Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Passionate  
about communications



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## 1. Introduction

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is a complex organisation responsible for delivering more than 700 different services to support and improve the lives of our 190,000 residents. Many of our services, such as refuse collection, are used by all our residents, others are more targeted to specific groups.

Having such a varied role means that it can often be a challenge to get our messages across in the right way, to the right people at the right time.

That's why effective communications is an important focus for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

We recognise the need for all our residents and partners to understand what we do, so that people can have their voices heard and influence the decisions that we make on their behalf and are able to access the services we provide.

This Communications Strategy sets out how we will communicate to the many audiences that have an interest or a say in what we do. It explains the messages we want to give and also the various ways we intend to reach residents and our other partners.

As such, the Communications Strategy supports the Council's Consultation Strategy and our Engagement Strategy, both of which you can find on our website [www.stockton.gov.uk](http://www.stockton.gov.uk)

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council also plays an important role in helping promote the borough and portraying a positive image of our area. This is vital if we are to attract businesses to invest and grow here, visitors to come here to enjoy our leisure facilities, shops and events and people to move here.

As public sector funding becomes even tighter in the future, it's even more important that we communicate effectively with our residents so that they understand why difficult choices have to be made and can have their say.

That's why this strategy also explains how we aim to communicate more cost-effectively by doing things differently and always looking at ways to improve.





## 2. Summary & Principles

This Communications Strategy sets out:

- Our communications outcomes, methods and the audiences we want to reach
- Our key messages and campaigns
- How we work with partners to deliver public messages together
- The use of new media and technology to communicate better
- How we evaluate the effectiveness of our communications activity

A number of principles underpin this Strategy. They are to provide communications that:

- Are open, honest and timely
- Are accessible and appropriate to each audience
- Use language that is easy to understand
- Are cost-effective and efficient
- Support feedback and influence from residents and other audiences
- Use new forms of communications technology



### 3. What we want to achieve

Effective communications are essential to supporting the council's work and delivering the overall Council Plan.

This Communications Strategy aims to do this by delivering the following specific outcomes:

- Helping shape and improve services and to improve public understanding, support and confidence in the Council by providing information about our services, policies, decisions, and delivery achievements.
- To support the development of effective relationships with Council partners, and in particular the business community and national government.
- To support Council Members and Council staff to highlight their role, responsibilities and achievements.
- To encourage participation and involvement in the Council's work and decisions.
- To raise the profile of the Borough to a range of opinion formers, policy-makers, visitors, business investors and potential relocators regionally, nationally and internationally.



## 4. How far have we come?

Councils that perform highly most often have effective communication at the heart of all that they do. In these councils effective communication is central to the business. It is not an 'add on' that is used to get the message out after decisions on policy are taken.

National research carried out by MORI shows that residents who feel informed have greater levels of satisfaction in their council and the services they provide.

To support this aim a review of Stockton Borough Council's Communications function was carried out in 2009. The purpose of this was to improve the way we communicate, to become more efficient and cost-effective in the way we communicate and to make better use of new technology such as social media.

The review was carried out by the Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee of Stockton Council. The Committee concluded that there was a need for better coordination of internal communications functions and a clearer strategic focus in the way we communicated.

As part of this review we consulted with a number of different groups. These included: Local councillors, our Viewpoint Panel that represents the views of local residents, our young people's panel and our staff and trade unions.

We also worked with the national organisation that supports improvements in local councils – the IDeA – to learn from other councils across the country and adopt some best practice ideas.

The review resulted in the development of a centralised communications unit, bringing together all the press office, marketing, internal communications and website all in one place with a Head of Communications providing strategic leadership.

This review of Corporate Communications in Stockton has meant we are much clearer about who we want to reach, what we want to say and how we are going to say it in the most effective way.



## 5. Who we want to reach

The varied nature of the Council's work means that we need to communicate with a wide variety of different communities and interest groups. While the borough's 190,000 residents are our main audience there are also a number of important groups that we need to reach.

These include:

### External

- Local residents
- Local businesses and business groups ie CBI, North East Chamber of Commerce
- People working and studying in the Borough
- Voluntary sector groups, BME community groups and other representative groups
- Geographical groups ie Parish Councils, Community and Residents' Associations
- Partners ie Police, other councils, Health trusts, Job Centre Plus, Tees Valley Unlimited
- Media
- Central Government
- Businesses, visitors and potential relocators from outside the Borough

### Internal

- Council Staff
- Council members
- Trade Unions
- Contractors and service providers





## 6. What we want to say

Stockton Council has developed a vision statement that underpins all its communications activity. It is a theme that runs through all that we do and has been developed through consultation as part of our communications review.

Our vision is:

***We are passionate about creating a clean, green and vibrant place  
Where people are safe, healthy and happy.  
We are ambitious, open and fair.  
We deliver great services for your money.***

From this overall statement we have developed a series of key messages and campaigns that we will focus on in the year. By focusing our communications activity and resources primarily on these key messages we hope it becomes easier for people to understand what we do and also be more efficient in what we spend on communications.

Each year we will review these key messages to make sure they reflect the priority areas for the council that year.

Our 16 campaigns and key messages for 2010/11 are:

1. Borough-wide investment programme  
***"Major investment by private businesses in partnership with the Council is helping to spearhead regeneration across the borough"***
2. Employability, learning and skills  
***"We're investing in the people and businesses of our borough to support economic growth"***
3. Town Centre improvements  
***"We're investing in the towns of Yarm, Thornaby, Billingham and Stockton to improve facilities for local residents, visitors and businesses"***
4. Road and Pavement repairs  
***"We're improving the state of our roads and pavements damaged by the winter weather"***
5. Housing Stock Transfer  
***"£600m investment in homes and housing services"***
6. Entente Florale, Parks and Green Spaces  
***"Stockton is a clean, green and vibrant place and we care about our environment"***
7. Carbon Reduction  
***"We aim to reduce carbon emissions across the Council and the Borough"***





8. Schools investment

***"We pledge to transform learning opportunities and attainment levels for all children in the Borough"***

9. Fostering and adoption

***"Fostering and adoption brings rewards to both parents and children and Stockton Council wants to support these new families"***

10. Youth Services

***"There's lots of great things for young people to do in Stockton"***

11. Fair Access to Care

***"As the population ages there is a growing demand for adult care services. We want to improve the ways in which we offer care, targeting those in the greatest need"***

12. Health and Wellbeing

***"We want to improve the health and well-being of people in Stockton and to reduce health inequalities"***

13. Safer Stockton

***"Stockton is the safest borough in the Tees Valley, safer than it's ever been. We are committed to safeguarding children in our care and also vulnerable adults in our community"***

14. Community Engagement

***"Involvement in your community is rewarding, fun and worthwhile. We want to play our part to support vibrant communities"***

15. Our Council and what we do

***"We are ambitious, open and fair and offer good value for money"***

16. New Executive Arrangements and Referendum on Alternative Voting System

***"Do we want to change the way our Council is run?"***

In addition to these 16 campaigns the Communications Unit also provides support to help promote the many events that run across the Borough throughout the year. These include the prestigious Stockton International Riverside Festival, The Infinity Festival, Stockton Sparkles and Take To The Tees.

A strapline 'Passionate About'... links our key messages and campaigns.

Developed by One North East as part of its 'Passionate People, Passionate Places' campaign, Stockton Council has adopted the phrase as a way of capturing our overall mission and to become one of the official 'ambassadors' for this North East England campaign.



## 7. How are we going to say it

There are a number of communications channels that we use to reach our various audiences. The choice of channel often depends on what we want to say and the audience we want to reach – but in most cases a number of different activities will be used to support our campaigns and key messages.

However, with the increasing importance of the internet and social media and its relative cost-effectiveness as compared to more traditional communications methods, the Communications team are focusing more on using on-line communications in our campaigns.

The following communications methods will be used to reach our various audiences.

### Marketing

- Monthly e-bulletin to the Borough's business community
- A-Z of Council services
- Marketing materials: posters, leaflets and flyers
- Information boards on key developments and council vehicles
- Road signage and street-level information
- Targeted advertising and advertorials
- Support for events
- Special readers panel established to check accessibility of documents
- Use of members, community and parish newsletters to convey key messages

### Public Relations

- Regular news releases, features and editorials about the Council's work, the services we provide and about the Borough.
- Spokespeople to talk about the Council's work, the services we provide and the Borough
- Effective and efficient response to media enquiries
- Regular editions of Stockton News (including audio version)

### Internal Communications

- Developed and updated intranet
- Weekly electronic internal newsletter 'Keeping You in Touch'
- Who's Who in the Council internal directory
- Oversee a 'Communications Champions' Group

### Website and social media

- Development of the website to include better search facilities and dedicated sections for specific audiences
- Increased use of Facebook, You Tube and Twitter for specific campaigns and to support consultations
- Development of Customer Relationship Management system to enhance targeting of campaigns to specific audiences



## 8. How we work with our partners to deliver messages

There are a number of issues such as: crime, safety and health that impact on society in general and are therefore the responsibility of a number of different agencies. That's why Stockton Council works with a range of partners to get a combined message across to the public.

Regular campaigns include Alcohol Awareness Week, "Think before you Drink" and Crime & Disorder where we work together with the Police, Fire Service, Health Trusts and other local authorities to deliver a range of communications activities under a single banner.

By coordinating communications efforts in this way we aim to provide a clearer message, reduce duplication and cost and increase the reach of our campaigns.

## 9. Have we got our messages across?

Measuring and evaluating the impact of our communications activity is important, particularly when planning future campaigns and investment. We also need to demonstrate that we are achieving Value for Money.

The Communications team measures the effectiveness of its communications activities in a number of ways. These include:

- Visitor numbers to events and their feedback
- Analysis and follow-up of people who don't attend events
- Response to direct marketing ie leaflets, posters or mailshots
- Participation in consultation projects
- Press and broadcast media coverage
- Enquiries via the website and requests for newsfeeds
- Followers on 'Twitter'
- Readers' feedback on Stockton News
- Residents surveys
- Staff surveys
- Inspection and assessment visits by external organisations

More detailed analysis is collected after key events ie Stockton International Riverside Festival and Take To The Tees to inform future activity and targeting of particular visitors.





## 10. Delivering the Strategy

A detailed communications plan has been developed for each of the 15 key campaigns listed in Section 5. These delivery plans set out the main objectives of each campaign, the calendar of activity and the resources and budget needed to support them. They also evaluate the success of each campaign.

Each year the key campaigns and messages will be reviewed to ensure they reflect the council's priorities for the year ahead. However, many messages, such as investment in the Borough and support for the economy will be themes that carry forward for a number of years as we help raise the profile of the Borough as a great place to live, work, study, visit and do business.

### Getting in touch

#### Communications Team

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## English

If you would like this information in any other language or format, for example LARGE PRINT or audio, please contact

## Arabic

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال 'بدايفرستي تيم' على هاتف رقم (01642) 527309

## Chinese

欲要這份資訊的其它語言版或其它版式例如大字體印刷/錄音帶，請致電 (01642) 527309 接洽 '多元化隊'

## Farsi

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسیتی (گوناگونی) (01642) 527309 با شما ره Communications به تماس شوید

## Kurdish

نه گهر جهزت لێ به ئەم زانیاریه به دهستت بکهوێت به زمانه کانی تر یان به شیوهیهکی تر بۆ نمونه چاپی گهوره/یان به تیبی تو مارکراو تکایه په یوه ندی بکه به 'تیمی دایفیرستی' Communications له سهه ژماره ی ته له فون (01642) 527309

## Puniabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ Communications ਟੂ (01642) 527309 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

## Urdu

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا اندازہ مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ میں حاصل کرنا چاہیں، تو 'ڈاؤن ریڈی ٹیم' (01642) 527309 کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے

## French

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