The Bracknell Forest Council
Communications and Marketing
Strategy 2012-15
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Introduction

The Council's vision is:

To make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive; living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment.

1.1 Bracknell Forest Council exists to serve and lead the local community; we place residents and businesses at the heart of everything we do and we take immense pride in the services we deliver as well as the community and business support we provide. This means being:

1. friendly and approachable - open, straightforward and clear about what we do and how well we do it
2. accountable – as a democratic organisation, we are accountable to Bracknell Forest residents and businesses, and take responsibility for our actions
3. efficient – providing value for money, quality services and use resources sensibly
4. fair – acting fairly with all residents, staff and businesses
5. innovative and forward thinking – coming up with new ideas and not being afraid of leading the way

1.2 Communicating well with our residents and businesses is central to delivering our vision. We aim to make Bracknell Forest the most business friendly authority in the UK. We will also make sure the council’s role as community leader is promoted effectively, and how we work as the servant of residents and businesses.

1.3 Effective marketing and promotion of services sits at the heart of our work. We recognise that some services compete in the open market, and that their customers can choose to go elsewhere. We aim to market and promote these services in particular, and to provide what the customers want at prices they can afford. We want to maintain high public awareness of all our services, and the quality and value for money they deliver.

Consultation

1.3 We consulted with a wide range of groups and individuals about the new strategy. This helped us to understand what people thought about our current communications performance. Appendix 1 outlines the people we spoke to and the issues they raised. The consultation also helped us to shape our priorities and the way we organise our communication and marketing activity. The people we spoke to included:

- Councillors on the Executive and on an Overview and Scrutiny working group
- The Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team, Directors, Departmental Management Teams and Heads of Service
- The Communications and Marketing team
- The Bracknell Forest Partnership
- Town and Parish Councils through their Liaison group
- Managers of front line operational teams and staff representatives

This document sets out:

- what we want to achieve over the next three years, 2012-15
- the principles we will use in all our communication and marketing work
• who we will communicate with
• how we will communicate
• the work we will deliver over the next three years

2 Aims

2.1 The Council’s Big Six priorities are to:

1. create a town centre fit for the 21st century
2. protect and enhance the environment
3. promote health and achievement
4. create a borough where people feel and are safe
5. sustain economic prosperity
6. provide value for money

2.2 Bracknell Forest is an economically buoyant borough at the heart of the Thames Valley. We want to be even more business-friendly, supporting existing large and small firms as well as attracting new companies to move into the borough.

2.3 Over the next three years our communications and marketing work will support delivery of the council’s six priorities by:

1. helping to develop trust and confidence in the Council among residents, potential investors and existing businesses
2. encouraging residents to use services through high quality marketing and promotion activities
3. promoting the reputation of the council as business-friendly, helpful and delivering excellent value for money
4. supporting our staff to be ambassadors for the council and the borough
5. working with partners (such as the Police and voluntary sector) on shared projects

3 Communication principles

3.1 We communicate and market Bracknell Forest in many ways and we want to be clear about the communication principles and standards that the community can expect from us. We will:

• promote the council’s vision, priorities and services whenever possible
• be open, honest, easy to reach, and accurate
• be clear, communicate in plain language and make our work accessible to all
• make the best use of council taxpayer’s money
• use the most effective channels for each audience, and maximise use of digital communication
• celebrate our successes
• apologise where we get things wrong and take steps to put them right
4 Who we will communicate with

4.1 We market, promote and provide services to a wide range of people and organisations across the borough.

4.2 The people and groups we will focus on over the next three years include:

- council taxpayers and their families including specific priority groups such as:
  - older people
  - parents and guardians
  - carers
  - young people
  - people with disabilities
- staff
- existing businesses/employers and business people
- inward investors and new businesses from within the UK and abroad
- partners, such as Government, the Police, voluntary sector or the health service
- borough, town and parish councillors
- the news media

5 How we will communicate

5.1 Our residents and businesses expect to get speedy and accurate information, and we want to give them the best service we can. In recent years, “social media” has grown into one of the more important ways to communicate. We will change the way we work to make even better use of Facebook, Twitter and other social media as the sector develops.

5.2 We will also focus marketing efforts on promoting Bracknell Forest as an exceptional place to do business and to live.

5.3 We will:

- be pro-active
- make sure our residents and businesses know how to get the best from our services
- explain the value we add to the lives of residents and the success of businesses
- check that we are communicating well

5.4 We will use a range of channels to communicate and market the Council and individual services. These include:

External communication and marketing

Electronic media

- website [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk)
- Facebook – corporate and service pages
- Twitter – corporate and service accounts
- news releases and statements issued by email
- targeted email marketing
- digital notice boards
Printed media

- Town and Country – our magazine published three times each year and distributed to 99% of homes in the Borough
- Service information – leaflets, booklets, consultation documents, newsletters
- Posters

Internal communication

- Chief Executive briefings for staff
- Forest Views staff newsletter
- Corporate messages/team briefing systems
- Intranet (BORIS)
- All user emails

6 Our work over the next three years

6.1 We will:
- make our communication and marketing an important part of strategic planning and management
- involve our communications team when projects are being planned so that we are giving a clear, consistent message
- build the council’s vision and key objectives into our messaging work
- make maximum use of social (and other digital) media when planning communications

Key targets 2012-15

This is what we want to achieve over the next three years:

Digital communication and marketing (channel shift)

- integrated work between communications and marketing, customer services and the web team to develop and then maximise online advice, service information, news and support to residents, businesses, partners, councillors and staff.

External communication and marketing

- all communication and marketing work promotes the Council’s vision and six priorities
- the single Bracknell Forest Council brand has primacy on all council and contractor property and communication channels, with contractor brands given prominence but no dominance. This will help to ensure residents and businesses are clear about the wide range of services we provide
- use clear and easy to understand language in all our communication and marketing work
- all communication is designed to be accessible to all parts of the community
- build and maintain a positive reputation with residents, partners and businesses
Internal communications

- make councillor communication activity integral to all communication plans and actions
- ensure that our staff perceive the Council as a good place to work, understand our vision, and priorities, and take pride in know how their contributions makes these a reality
- support managers to ensure that they communicate effectively in their leadership and management roles, so that staff are fully informed of what they need and want to know.

Conclusion

6.2 How well we communicate with residents and businesses has a central role to play in delivering the council’s vision and priorities for the borough. Effective promotion and marketing of the Council and its role as a community leader and community servant is crucial to sustaining and further improving our reputation with key audiences.
## 7. Action plan

The specific actions required to deliver the Council’s communication and marketing aims are:

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| 1   | Produce an annual communications plan identifying the major projects and campaigns to be delivered in support of Council priorities, setting out required resources together with evaluation measures | • consult with DMTs to identify project and campaign requirements for 2013/14  
• assemble draft plan, edit and report to CMT for approval  
• implement from January 2013                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | HoC&M/ACE          | January 2013 |
| 2   | Conduct a full review of the communications and marketing function and make recommendations for change to deliver a communications and marketing team shaped to lead delivery of the strategy | • identify core skills and experience required to deliver this strategy and review/validate  
• consult with HR and produce report with recommendations to CMT by January 2013  
• Implement recommendations from March/April 2013                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | HoC&M/ACE          | March 2013   |
| 3   | Identify and assess all communications and marketing resources across the organisation; implement systems to ensure staff and financial resources are deployed together on major campaigns and communication projects | • Combine this work with that in action 1 so that the CMT report includes analysis of all resources available together with the major projects they will be required to support                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | HoC&M/ACE          | January 2013 |
| 4   | Develop and implement a clear member communication and information system led from the communications team with support/guidance from Democratic Services | • Complete the discussions initiated with Democratic Services and Members  
• Produce and have agreed the recommendations  
• Implement with 3 month review period built in                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | HoC&M/HoDS         | January 2013 |
| 5   | Implement a new internal communication and staff engagement/research framework to supersede existing processes. The framework to consist of a managed and concise set of communications channels, delivering monthly employee social and business news and information. Develop an intranet resource for members and employees that is modern and easy to navigate. | • Identify best practice examples from other LAs; with HR consult, review, and then report with plan and recommendations to CMT by January 2013  
• Hold information sessions for managers and staff  
• Phase implementation between February and April 2013                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | HoC&M/HoCHR        | April 2013   |
| 6   | Build upon the new web presence through a review of future requirements from the web site for reputation management, information transmission, effective channel development and marketing communications. Integrate web operations with broader reputation, communications and marketing functions and allocate resources accordingly. | • Produce detailed action deliver plan  
• Implement actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | HoC&M/HoCS         | January 2013 |

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**HoC&M/ACE**

**HoC&M/HoDS**

**HoC&M/HoCHR**

**HoC&M/HoCS**
|   | Integrate web and social media activity (website, Twitter, Facebook) and manage and direct them seamlessly alongside other channels to deliver on the Council's priorities | Produce detailed action deliver plan  
Implement actions | HoC&M/HoCS | December 2012  
April 2013 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | Ensure that the physical Council brand has primacy in all usage so that it identifies and promotes the Council and the services it is responsible for. Cease all use of previous (pre-2008) logo existing on gateways, signs and buildings etc. | Confirm current brand as the single identity  
Propose means to strengthen the physical presence and appearance of current brand through improved use of colour, size and brand outline  
Identify all pre-2008 logos and implement programme of removal/replacement | HoC&M/CMT | September 2013 |
|   | Implement a set of performance measures and reporting procedures for all communication and marketing activity | Using the CIPR/LG Comms and LGA identify a set of standard performance evaluation measures  
Set up performance evaluation and reporting system wef March 2013 | HoC&M/ACE | March 2013 |
|   | Design and deliver a programme of accessible/plain language training across all services | Identify training delivery mechanisms and provider  
Establish programme to start April 2013 | HoCM/HoCHR | April 2013 |
|   | Annual strategy implementation reports to go to CMT and Executive as part of the forward plan. CMT and Executive to review the strategy annually and agree any revisions required to ensure continued value and relevance (as part of the forward plan) | Agree dates and insert into forward plan  
Produce reports and recommendations to meet the review requirement | HoC&M/ACE | January 2013/14/15 |
Appendix 1

Report of the consultation

In developing this new strategy, a wide range of groups and individuals with a stake in the council’s future success were consulted with to understand broad perceptions of current communication performance, and to help shape future priorities and the direction of communication and marketing activity. This included consultation with:

- Executive members
- Overview and Scrutiny through a panel of members
- The Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team, Directors, Departmental management Teams and Heads of Service
- The Communications and Marketing team
- The Bracknell Forest Partnership
- Town and Parish Councils through their Liaison group
- Managers of front line operational teams and staff representatives

Desk based analysis included the results of recent research on internal communication among managers and staff, as well as feedback from manager events where communication was a topic for debate and discussion. The feedback received is set out under the following headings:

- getting our message across
- being efficiently and delivering value for money
- integrating digital and social media
- Pride in what we do
- communicating in a competitive world
- honest, clear and consistent
- prioritise to succeed

Getting our message across

- Significantly more value will be derived from existing high levels of communication activity (internal and external) across the organisation through implementing change to unify communication so that it projects a clear and consistent narrative with themes and messages centred on the Council vision and strategic priorities.

- By looking ahead further and planning better for both positive and negative issues we can be more effective in managing service reputation and emphasising and promoting the positives.

- We deliver a lot of good work but we don’t tell people that so the Council isn’t valued. Look at some of our most high profile and attractive services and tell us how you know it is BFC delivering it – it’s no wonder what we do isn’t
recognition.

**Being efficient and delivering value for money**

- Communication resources and activity exist across most services, are (artificially) managed separately as media, public relations, marketing, customer service, website, social media and policy etc. Each component of our communication is capable of delivering much more through being deployed in a concerted way and working together to develop an integrated strategic approach to communication and marketing.

- The new strategy is not about doing or spending more but about doing things differently to deliver more. We know very little about the impact of our communication and marketing work, nor whether it delivers value for money.

- For the future support provided from the centre to services/departments in areas such as communication planning, news and media, crisis and issues management, internal communication and professional advice must be continued and developed.

- For the future it will be more difficult to compete should we continue to focus on the news media, and more specifically, printed newspapers, as the primary channel of importance because their influence is declining.

**Integrating digital and social media**

- Social media is a channel of choice for increasing numbers of businesses, residents, social groups and staff. Maximising the value and benefits derived from social media will require a major shift in resource management and allocation – and may offer significant cash savings.

- The website, and our social media presence, could work much more effectively if deployed with communication and marketing resources activity. Web and social media activities can too often be afterthought.

- The low level use of social media is not only inefficient in its duplication of systems and costs, it risks us losing touch with residents, businesses and particularly young people, all of whom are already embracing these channels as the only way to communicate and network.

**Pride in what we do**

- The unique democratic role of the Council as the community leader, together with the role of Members, as well as parish and town councils, should be made integral to communication and marketing activity via operational communication activity around key Council and partner messaging.

- By raising our game, being more upbeat, forward looking and confident, we will strengthen our ability to lead and deliver success for Bracknell Forest. In
the past we have too often appeared content to sit back and let others be successful. Now is the time to operate at the cutting edge and deliver for future generations

- The information and communication needs of Members required to carry out their role effectively remain largely undefined and recorded across the organisation. This issue needs to be addressed and resolved urgently for all Members to be able to operate effectively both as ward councillors and decision makers

Communicating in a competitive world

- A view that came across strongly from a range of sources is that the Council brand is failing to compete in a market and society where brand awareness and positioning is key to success. The contractors we pay to deliver our services benefit from much more brand visibility than we ever do. Through recognising we are in competition, with other communities, business areas and local authorities, we can achieve more and be more successful for everyone in Bracknell Forest

Honest, clear and consistent

- Our communication about the challenges we face and how much we do could be more honest and straightforward and avoid hiding behind council-speak or being defensive. This way we will be trusted even more and believed when it is most important

- The findings of the most recent staff survey highlight good performances as well as a need for continuing development in key areas such as face to face communication, engagement and feedback channels, and how staff inputs are given consideration. There is scope to develop internal communication so that members and staff are and feel more involved in and understand more about where the Council wants to go, their role in delivering that, and have the information required at their fingertips.

- The importance of the organisation speaking in crystal clear language which is relevant to each audience is not widely understood, and certainly not followed. Success will evade us should we continue to communicate in ways which are alien to residents, businesses, and all audiences

- Relevant, timely and face to face communication on matters directly affecting teams and colleagues, together with information about how we are all doing, will help much more than emailed and corporate based messaging

Prioritise to succeed

- Our current communication plans and activities only reflect in part what the Council says are its priorities for delivery (the six priorities). We are failing to
have a clear and consistent narrative. Through becoming clear on what we are about, and having a clear story to tell, we will win more support and compete in ways that deliver ultimate success.
Appendix 2

Communications and Marketing key achievements 2009/12

Campaigns delivered

- Modernisation of Older People’s Services
- New website launch and promotion
- Fostering and adoption awareness raising
- Twitter Day
- Flexible working (internal)
- Information security (internal)
- Introduction to personalisation
- My HomeBuy
- You Said We Did Neighbourhood Campaign
- Place Survey results communication
- Staff survey communications (internal)

Events delivered

- Olympic Torch Relay
- Link to China visit
- Royal visit to South Hill Park
- Opening of Garth Hill College/Royal visit
- Ministerial visit to Jennett’s Park Primary School Opening
- Annual Career events

Major work programmes

- 2000 plus media enquiries answered
- 1500 news releases issued
- Town and Country reader satisfaction scores raised
- Review of Design and Print Services completed
- Annual severe weather communications programme
- Swinley Forest Fire communications
- Assumed responsibility for the BFC website front page and promotions, as well as the BFC social media presence and sites
- Year on year increases in Twitter followers and FB fans
- Business Guide & Street Map publication
- Translation and interpretation guide
- Your Guide to Bracknell Forest
- Quarterly newsletters for schools
- New 2012 media protocol produced
- Photography Guidelines updated