



Being Informed Forum

Being Informed Challenge Forum GOOD COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

1.0 Aim

Good quality, effective communication should not only be central to the day-to-day work of every individual organisation, but also to the Community Planning Partnership itself.

Effective communication is vital if agencies are to manage and explain change; influence events and policy both within and beyond Aberdeen, and motivate employees and the wider public.

Hence, strong communication is not just about the availability of accurate information. It is about involvement, attitude and dialogue.

This Communications Guide aims to make communicating with each other – and the public - integral to the functions of the Community Planning partnership. It sets out a series of principles and standards of communication and creates a framework to deliver them.

It will ensure that partners, their staff and the public understand why and how we propose to communicate our visions and values.

Benefits may include:

- raising awareness of and explaining the role of Community Planning in the city's future and responding to criticism
- promoting and publicising the Community Planning process and its outcomes, providing information and highlighting achievements
- promoting and encouraging the involvement of individuals and communities in decisions affecting the city
- informing and involving staff, to ensure that they have access to high quality information in whatever way they find most appropriate, and can therefore influence decision making
- setting a minimum standard in communication
- working together - creating efficiencies .

The power of communication should not be underestimated. Good or bad communication can have a subtle but serious impact on public confidence and staff morale.

The challenge for us as partners is to ensure we practise what we preach.

2.0 Background

Within the Community Plan, each Challenge Forum sets itself targets. One of the targets of the Being Informed Challenge Forum is to produce a guide to good communication across the Community Planning partnership.

3.0 Context

3.1 The National Context

Community Planning is a statutory requirement within Scotland. There is a strong recognition within that broader context that partners in Aberdeen must become better at communicating core values, actions, strategies and achievements.

However, the promise of customer-focused services must not merely be a slogan, but a reality if our efforts are to be credible.

3.2 The Local Context

The local context for this Communications Guide is the Community Plan, The Aberdeen City Alliance and also the internal strategies already in place.

The Community Plan provides the framework and actions that partner will follow to improve services for Aberdeen.

It sets out our major priorities and highlights areas where significant change or a shift is required.

Effective communication – internal and external is critical to the credibility and the deliverability of these targets.

4.0 Objectives

The Community Planning Partnership recognises the important role of communications and will develop and support a culture of good, corporate communication at all levels through the Being Informed Challenge Forum.

To achieve this, the following objectives are required:

4.1 High-quality communication will be normal practice within partner agencies

- All plans and strategies will include consideration of communication and public involvement issues, in accordance with internal policy.
- Information on city, NE and national issues, or those likely to have an impact on other members of the Community Planning partnership, will be shared at the earliest practicable opportunity with all other appropriate bodies.
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4.2 Existing communications will be developed

- A Community Planning website, with public and password-protected areas, has been developed, allowing partners to share documents and providing a record of Community Planning in Aberdeen. A development plan for the website has been agreed.
- We encourage all partner organisations make information available to those for whom English is not their first language, breaking down any barriers to access.
- We have developed a framework for sharing elements of internal briefings, creating a Core Brief for the City. Partners are encouraged to use this arrangement to inform employees of developments in Community Planning.
- We will maintain an accurate list of PR and communications staff within partner agencies, including contact details and basic information on each individual's specific responsibilities. This will be available via the Community Planning website.
- We encourage the use of industry standards for communicating to the public. For example the use of plain English, minimum font size for text, (RNIB guidelines), translation services, web standards.
- We will determine what, if any, PR support is required by The Aberdeen City Alliance – and how this can be provided effectively without compromising partner agencies.

4.3 Public understanding and awareness of Community Planning will increase

All partners need to publicly demonstrate their commitment to Community Planning in order for the process to have any credibility within the city.

5.0 Basic principles

5.1 Principles

The Aberdeen City Alliance endorses the use of the principles detailed below and encourages partners to monitor compliance through existing performance monitoring arrangements.

The Community Planning Partnership's communications will be underpinned by basic standards. Communication will be:

Open

The reasoning behind decisions is clear and accessible. When information cannot be made available, a reason is given why this is the case. Questions are welcomed and answered promptly.

Clear

Information is accurate and in plain English, with minimal use of jargon. Acronyms and specialist information are always explained and all written communication is clear and concise.

This applies to all communications, from minutes and reports to press releases and public information.

Credible

Briefings are responsible, realistic and trustworthy.

Timely

Accurate and relevant information is provided at the time it is needed, and should be easily understood by all.

Planned

Where possible, communication is proactive and planned to ensure the right messages reach the right audiences at the right time.

Consistent

Communication messages are clear and consistent within organisations and, where partnership working is concerned, between agencies.

A dialogue

Within organisations and across the partnership, staff and the public are supported to contribute ideas and give feedback.

5.2 Implementation and Monitoring

Clearly, these standards will have different implications for different parts of the Community Planning Partnership.

As such, it would not be meaningful to attach strict values on what is timely, for example.

However, each Forum and The Aberdeen City Alliance should seriously consider what the above headings mean for their work.

For example, some community representatives have suggested that somewhere between one and two weeks before meetings would be an appropriate timescale for the receipt of reports or consultation documents.

While all contributors to Community Planning will tend to monitor their own performance in a number of areas, it is important there is a procedure for dealing with failures to meet our targets for good communication.

Where anyone considers the above aims have not been met, they should, in the first instance, inform the individual or group responsible for issuing the information. In cases where it is felt information is unclear, for example, this may allow the problem to be remedied.

Concerns should also be passed to The Aberdeen City Alliance, so it can consider if there are ongoing issues that need to be addressed.

6.0 Internal and External Communications

6.1 External

PURPOSE

- to raise the profile of Community Planning in Aberdeen
- to promote understanding of the Community Planning process and partners' roles within it
- to develop good relationships with stakeholders
- to utilise a range of communication methods to suit different audiences
- to respond timeously and effectively to enquiries from the media
- to work proactively with the media around Community Planning issues

METHODS

- Press releases and photo opportunities
- Briefings
- Internet
- Events, exhibitions
- Posters, leaflets
- Talks, presentations, Open days

6.2 Internal Stakeholders

PURPOSE

- to encourage openness and participation

- to involve staff in decisions about their work, the services they provide and their contribution to Community Planning
- to ensure that staff understand the significance of their individual and collective contribution to the process
- to ensure staff have regular and timely access to news and information about Community Planning
- to ensure that there are opportunities for employees to express their views, to make suggestions and to influence decisions about services
- to support staff to develop the communication skills necessary to perform their roles

METHODS

- Team Briefings
- Staff newspapers
- E-mail
- Intranets
- Induction programmes

7.0 Delivering good communications

This document reconfirms the Being Informed Challenge Forum's role in developing and implementing communications guidance for the Community Planning Partnership.

The reality is, however, that effective communication is the responsibility of every member of staff, whatever their role or in whichever of the Community Planning partners they work. Responsibility is, therefore, corporate and success depends on the creation of a culture where communication is valued and prioritised – in practice as well as in principle.