

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Corporate Policies for Consultation (Draft Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Elected Members and Employees Draft Communications Strategy and Draft Action Plan)</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Corporate Policy and Resources Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Information and Consultation</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-2025)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them.
Lead Officer	Democratic and Central Services Manager

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES/NO</b>
Capital/Revenue	-
Code	-
Staffing Costs	

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/ <del>No</del>	Date: October 2021
	EQIA Required and Completed:	<del>Yes</del> /No	Date: N/A
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To present two draft Corporate Policies, (Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Elected Members and Officers and Communications Strategy and Action Plan), for Members' information and for consultation.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 Draft Gifts and Hospitality Policy**

- 2.2 In 2017-2018 the audit of Corporate Governance recommended: Priority Rating 3, that a *Gifts and Hospitality Policy should be put in place or a monetary limit for accepting gifts or hospitality should be defined and communicated to all staff and elected members.* A draft policy was presented in the 2017/2018 year to Trade Unions but was not accepted at that time. Further work has been done and a draft policy has been developed following internal consultation which has been approved by SLT. The draft policy will be presented again, as part of the consultation process, to Trade Unions.

### **2.3 Draft Communications Strategy and Action Plan**

- 2.4 Council approved a Communications Strategy in 2017 and this policy was due for review. The review has been completed and a draft Strategy and Action Plan have been approved by SLT.

## **3.0 Next steps**

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the content of both draft policies and provide any comments to the Democratic and Central Services Manager by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.
- 3.2 The policies will also be presented to Trade Unions for consultation.
- 3.3 Following receipt of comments the policies will be presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee for adoption in January 2022.

## **Recommendation**

- 4.1 **It is recommended** that the Draft Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Elected Members and Employees and the Draft Communications Strategy and Action Plan are noted for consultation purposes and Members provide comments to the Democratic and Central Services Manager by December 31<sup>st</sup> 2021.





# Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

## Gifts & Hospitality Policy

2021

### Document Control

No	Date Issued	Author	Status
0.1	9/9/2021	P Donaghy	Internal Draft 1
0.2	19/10/2021	P Donaghy	Internal Draft 2

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## Policy Statement

1. All Council Officers and Elected Members are expected to observe the highest standards of conduct and should at all times be guided by the Code of Conduct. The Council recognises that contractors, suppliers and other customers may extend from time to time offers of gifts and hospitality to Employees and Elected Members for our services. The Council also recognises that employees and members have a responsibility, in the interests of public confidence, to exhibit high standards of propriety. Elected Members and employees are advised that gifts are not accepted unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary.
2. In accepting any gift or hospitality, the individual and, if applicable, his or her line manager, must exercise judgement about how acceptance might be perceived, recognising that what at first sight might appear to be reasonable might nevertheless become the subject of unreasonable comment or criticism by external parties. The judgement made therefore needs to include an assessment as to whether the benefits gained by the Council through the acceptance of a gift of hospitality might be outweighed by adverse third party criticism, even when that criticism is not reasonable.
3. The Council requires that its employees and Elected Members should not use their official position to receive gifts, hospitality or benefit of any kind which might reasonably be seen to compromise the Council's position or the employee's personal judgment and integrity.
4. The guidance set out in this document was prepared with reference to:

Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Civil Service best practice as set out in the Department of Finance and Personnel DAO DFP 10/06 'Acceptance and Provision of Gifts and Hospitality'. The Dear Accounting Officer letter was revised again in 2009.

The Revised Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees adopted by Council in April 2021.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors.

5. The purpose of the policy is to:-
  - Outline for all Council Employees and Elected Members the guidelines and fundamental principles for the provision and acceptance of gifts and hospitality;
  - Provide advice on how hospitality either provided by or accepted by Council Employees and Elected Members should be approved and recorded;

- Outline roles and responsibilities for Employees and Elected Members at all levels within the Council.

## Aims of this Policy

6. The main aims of the Gifts and Hospitality Policy are to:

- Ensure consistency of approach when dealing with gifts and hospitality;
- Ensure compliance with Council policy and procedures including Codes of Conduct, the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy.
- Ensure compliance with the Seven Principles of Public Life and the Northern Ireland Assembly Five Principles of Conduct. (Appendix 1)
- Establish guidance for all Employees and Elected Members to follow to ensure that the Council can demonstrate that no undue influence has been applied by an external organisation dealing with the Council; and
- Protect Council Officers and Elected Members from criticism and misunderstanding and to protect the Council from allegations of impropriety. Compliance with the policy will help the Council demonstrate good governance and accountability.

7. In addition to complying with Council policy and guidance, where officers belong to a professional body, they should be guided by any rules of professional conduct set by that professional body.

## Scope of the Policy

8. The fundamental principle is that no member of Employees or Elected Member should do anything which might give rise to the impression that he or she has been, or might be influenced by a gift or hospitality, or other consideration to show bias for or against any person or organisation while carrying out official duties.

9. All Council Employees and Elected Members must therefore apply the following principles in the conduct of their employment:

- they must not accept gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be perceived as compromising their personal judgment or integrity;
- they must not make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others;
- they must base all purchasing decisions and negotiations of contracts solely on achieving best value for money for the ratepayer;
- they must refer to their line manager when faced with a situation for which there is no adequate guidance;

- if in any doubt, they must seek advice from their line manager, or the Democratic and Central Services Manager. In the case of Elected Members advice can be sought from the Chief Executive.
10. Officers who fail to comply with this policy and guidance may be subject to disciplinary action. Elected Members who fail to comply with this policy may be investigated by the NI Ombudsman.
  11. The policy extends to include agency, secondees, consultants and contractors who may be working on Council's behalf. The receipt of gifts covered by this policy extends to immediate family of employees.

## Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality Offered

### Employees receiving hospitality

12. Employees must exercise careful judgement when accepting hospitality and if there a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council. All hospitality received in excess of **£15** should be recorded by the recipient on the Gifts, Hospitality and Interests form for Employees (Appendix 2) which must be signed and sent to Corporate Services for recording. Information must also be recorded in instances of decline of hospitality. The form must be sent within 30 days of receipt.
13. Invitations to conferences, formal lunches or dinners should be carefully considered and recorded on the register. Attendance at or invitations to events should also be also be carefully considered to ensure there is no political involvement either directly or indirectly.
14. Attendance at training courses, conferences and workshops outside the Council where hospitality is provided as part of the booking fee is acceptable and does not need to be recorded on the register.
15. Hospitality which is not acceptable would include invitations to frequent social functions where there is no direct link to official business in a professional capacity.
16. When deciding whether to accept hospitality, the following should be considered:
  - the reason for accepting the hospitality;
  - whether acceptance could be satisfactorily defended to ratepayers;
  - the value / scale of the hospitality (frequent, lavish, prolonged);

- the obligation that acceptance might appear to place on an Officer and Elected Members or the Council in terms of reciprocal hospitality, business dealings etc;
  - whether it provides benefits to the Council, which outweigh the risk of possible misrepresentation of the hospitality; and
  - the timing of the offer, bearing in mind decisions which the Council may be in the process of taking, affecting the provider of the hospitality, e.g. procurement, grant award, enforcement of regulations etc.
17. In the case of gifts, it is recognised that refusal of an invitation or offer of hospitality may cause embarrassment or appear discourteous. Refusal of the gift/hospitality should also be recorded.

### **Employees and Elected Members Receiving Gifts**

18. All Council Employees and Elected Members should conduct themselves with honesty and impartiality in the exercise of their duties. In this field, perception is as important as reality.
19. It is not possible to be precise as what constitutes an “acceptable” as opposed to “unacceptable” gift. Most gifts received of this type will have a modest pecuniary value and may, indeed, have no significant pecuniary value to another party.
20. Trade or discount cards, which permit employees and Elected Members to personally purchase goods or services at reduced cost, are also classified as gifts, and should therefore be refused and/or returned. Gifts of cash should not be accepted from private individuals or organisations that provide services or goods to, or are customers of, the Council. The Council is aware of the practice throughout the borough of some ratepayers giving small monetary or other tokens of appreciation to some Employees at certain times of the year e.g. Christmas. The Council does not wish to suspend this long-standing practice, causing embarrassment to Employees and ratepayers; however Employees must in all circumstances satisfy themselves that such gifts do not compromise their integrity, result in them showing any bias and ultimately bring the Council into disrepute. If Employees believe that accepting such gifts would compromise them they should tactfully and politely refuse the gift.
21. Employees and Elected Members should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors or members of the public and outside suppliers where this could be perceived as in anyway compromising the professional relationship. Gifts given as a ‘thank you’ over the estimated value of **£15** should be recorded by the recipient on the Gifts, Hospitality and Interests Form for Employees (Appendix 3) which must be signed and sent to the Corporate

Services for recording. Elected Members should record receipt of gifts estimated over **£15** in on the Gifts and Hospitality form for Members (Appendix 2) and send to Corporate Services for recording on the register. Such items as pens, diaries, chocolates can be retained by the employee and not recorded on the register where the value is estimated at under **£15**.

22. Employees should also consider that smaller repeated gifts possibly under the £15 limit, could have a cumulative trigger eg £100. If this is the case this should be declared and nothing further should be accepted over this cumulative value.
23. When considering whether or not to accept gifts employees and Elected Members should be sensitive as to timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking e.g. Tender Process or funding applications and no hospitality or gifts should be accepted 3 months before tender advert and after tender award in these circumstances. This will ensure no criticism can be made regarding bias to a particular company or supplier. The Elected Members Code of Conduct states that declarations should be made within 28 days of receipt.

## The Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

24. A table at Appendix 4 provides details for acceptance of gifts and hospitality offered to Council Employees and Elected Members.
25. If an Employee or Elected Member is unsure as to whether to accept or reject an offer of hospitality or a gift they should seek advice and guidance from their Line Manager or the Democratic and Central Services Manager. In the case of an Elected Member advice can be sought from the Chief Executive.

## Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

### Justification for providing hospitality

26. The primary consideration for the justification of expenditure on gifts and hospitality is that the gift or hospitality should be in the direct interest of the Council. The scale of the gift or hospitality provided should be proportionate to the needs of the occasion and the status and number of guests.

## External Hospitality

27. The Council will normally meet expenditure for the provision of hospitality to visitors which has been given prior approval and should not generally exceed **£20** per head.
28. Where an outside facilitator is requested to provide training for Council Employees and Elected Members, hospitality may be provided. Costs should be kept to a minimum and generally should not exceed the subsistence rates set. Caterers should be booked in accordance with Council procedures.

## Mayor's Business

29. The Mayor's hospitality is not governed by this policy. Mayor's hospitality is covered with Council's Standing Orders.

## Involvement and attendance at external hospitality events

30. In 2018 Council adopted a Business Case to be used for Council's involvement and attendance at external hospitality events. The Business Case is attached at Appendix 5. It is not required for events / activities which are at no cost to Council, and as such are recorded in the Hospitality Register. This Short Business Case is not relevant for attendance at meetings, events and activities which form part of routine business, which may or may not include hospitality.

## Gifts and Hospitality Register

31. Democratic Services will maintain a register to record all offers and acceptance of gifts and hospitality for Elected Members and Employees. The purpose of the register is to counter any possible accusations or suspicions of breaches of Codes of Conduct by Employees or Elected Members. Completed forms will be submitted to Corporate Services to file the relevant details and update the register.
32. Registers will be maintained and updated on a regular basis and subject to scrutiny and periodic reviews by internal and external Audit. The Elected Members' Registers is also open to inspection by the public and other organisations on request.

## Roles and Responsibilities

33. Elected Members should:

- familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct for Elected Members, and any updates that are issued;
  - comply with this policy and guidance;
  - consult with the Chief Executive if in doubt as to the application of this policy and guidance; and complete the documentation for the register of gifts and hospitality.
34. Officers, agency, secondees, consultants and contractors who may be working on Council's behalf. should:
- familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct for Council Employees, and any updates that are issued;
  - comply with this policy and guidance;
  - consult with their line manager or Democratic and Central Services Manager, if in doubt as to the application of this policy and guidance; and complete the documentation for the register of gifts and hospitality.
35. Directors should:
- Ensure that employees, agency, secondees, consultants and contractors who may be working on Council's behalf are completing the register for gifts and hospitality; and carefully consider and where appropriate, advise on the acceptance and provision of gifts and hospitality in line with policy and guidance.

## Policy Review Date

36. The policy will be reviewed biannually or sooner to ensure it remains reflective of legislative developments.

## Equality Screening

37. Having screened the Gifts and Hospitality Policy the decision is that it should not be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) with no mitigating measures required.

## Information Governance

38. Personal information provided to Council regarding declarations in relation to gifts and hospitality will be securely processed and held in accordance with Council's data protection obligations. Please refer to Council's Privacy

Statement (<https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/footer-information/privacy-statement>) for further information.

## Related Policies

- Anti-Fraud Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Raising Concerns Policy

INTERNAL DRAFT

# The Seven Principles of Public Life

## The Northern Ireland Assembly Five Principles of Conduct

### The Seven Principles of Public Life

*The Seven Principles of Public Life articulated by the Nolan Committee*

**Selflessness** - Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

**Integrity** - Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity** - In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability** - Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness** - Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**Honesty** - Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership** - Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

### The Northern Ireland Assembly Five Principles of Conduct

**Public Duty** – A duty to uphold the law and to act on all occasions in accordance with the public trust placed in them; act to the interests of the community as a whole.

**Equality** - You should promote equality of opportunity and not discriminate against any person by treating people with respect regardless of race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, marital status and whether or not a person has dependents.

**Promoting Good Relations** – You should act in a way that is conducive to promoting good relations by providing a positive example for the wider community to follow and that seeks to promote a culture of respect, equity and trust and embrace diversity in all its forms.

**Respect** - It is acknowledged that the exchange of ideas and opinions on policies may be robust but this should be kept in context and not extend to individuals being subjected to unreasonable and excessive personal attack.

**Good Working Relationships** - You should work responsibly with others for the benefit of the whole community. You must treat others and with courtesy and respect. You must abide by your council's standing orders and should promote an effective working environment within your council.

**Gifts and Hospitality Form for Elected Members**

Elected Member Name	Date Gift/ Hospitality Offered	Company/ Organisation/Individual offering the gift	Description of Gift / Hospitality	Reason for Gift/ Hospitality	Gift accepted Yes / No

Elected Member Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Elected Member Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to xxxx or by hard copy to Corporate Services, Cloonavin. Please retain a copy of this form for your recor

**Gifts, Hospitality and Interest Form for Employees**

<p><b>Gifts, Hospitality and Interests Form</b>  <b>(Gifts, Hospitality, Personal, Financial/Other) for Employees</b></p>	
<p><b>To be completed by the employee making the declaration</b></p>	
<p><b>Employee's Name:</b></p>	
<p><b>Job Title:</b></p>	
<p><b>Department:</b></p>	
<p><b>Section/Team:</b></p>	
<p><b>Type of Declaration:</b></p>	<p>Other Employment <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Close Personal Relationship <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Gift and/or Hospitality <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Financial/Pecuniary Interest <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Business Interest <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Personal / Other Interest <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><b>Please provide as much detail as possible in relation to your declaration below.</b></p>	
<p><b>If the declaration relates to other employment:</b></p> <p>In the case of other employment, please include details relating to who the other employer will be, the nature of the role (including duties and responsibilities) and the times/days that you are proposing to work.</p>	

## Appendix 3

<p><b>If the declaration relates to a gift or hospitality:</b></p> <p>In the case of gifts and hospitality, please complete the table below.</p>					
Name	Gift/Hospitality offered	Company/ Organisation/ Individual offering the gift	Description of Gift/Hospitality	Reason for Gift/Hospitality	Gift accepted Yes/No (please specify)
<p><b>If the declaration relates to a close personal relationship as described in the Code of Conduct:</b></p> <p>In the case of a close personal relationship please provide details.</p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>					
<p><b>If the declaration relates to a financial/pecuniary or other interest please provide details below.</b></p> <div style="height: 150px;"></div>					
<p><b>Please sign and date and forward to your Line Manager for signature.</b></p>					
<b>Employee Signature</b>				<b>Name:</b>	
				<b>Date:</b>	

## Appendix 3

<b>Line Manager Signature</b>		<b>Name:</b>	
		<b>Date:</b>	
<p>The details from this declaration will now be recorded on the Register of Gifts, Hospitality, Personal, Business, Financial or Other Interests.</p> <p>A copy of the completed form should be sent to xxxxx. Please retain a copy for your records.</p>			

## Additional guidance on accepting gifts or hospitality

Gift/Hospitality/offered	Accept?	Further Action
Modest conventional hospitality (e.g. Working Lunch).	Yes	None Employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality, for instance during a tendering period of a contract for which the provider may be bidding.
More formal lunch or dinner, by prior invitation.	Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality. A check should be made in advance to ensure that the Council will not be over-represented at the function concerned.
Hospitality offered to a team.	Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality.
Commemorative event or trade promotion organised by contractor, consultant or supplier with a meal.	Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality.
Annual dinner of Professional Institute or Association. Where officer is a guest of the Institute or Association; and Where officer is the guest of a particular consultant, contractor or supplier.	Yes Yes Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality, for instance during a tendering period of a contract for which the provider may be bidding.
Cultural or sporting events as a guest.	No	Should be refused or returned. Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality.
Overseas visits to inspect manufacturers' products.	Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality
Occasional seasonal or modest gifts, (e.g. company calendars, diaries, inexpensive pens or stationery sets. (Value should not exceed £15).	Yes	None
Expensive gifts (Value of more than £15, including gifts of lottery tickets, cash, gift vouchers or gift cheques)	No	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality

## Appendix 4

Gift/Hospitality/offered	Accept?	Further Action
Trade or Discount Cards, or Air Miles through which an individual officer might personally benefit from the purchase of goods or services at a reduced rate.	No	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality
Gifts of alcohol from any source, including a contractor, or where a contractor relationship is being contemplated.	Yes	Record in Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality, for instance during a tendering period of a contract for which the provider may be bidding.

## Business case for attendance and involvement at external hospitality activities & events

<b>Event name</b>			
<b>Concept overview</b>	Succinctly describe the engagement event.		
<b>Link to Corporate Plan</b>	Reference strategic priority / objectives.		
<b>Benefits of attending this event</b>	What outcomes are anticipated to be achieved?		
<b>Budget code</b>	Who will pay?		
<b>Target users / customers / partners?</b>	Who will benefit most from attending? Detail rationale for selecting / configuring the attendance.		
<b>Benefits of attending this event</b>	What outcomes are anticipated to be achieved?		
<b>Other options</b>	Are there alternative ways to engage?		
<b>Costs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event.</li> <li>• Accommodation.</li> <li>• Travel / subsistence.</li> </ul>		
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of the event?</li> <li>• Promotion of Council's involvement in the event?</li> <li>• Report back afterward.</li> </ul>		
<b>Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected Members?</li> <li>• Officers?</li> <li>• External attendance - target users / customers / partners.</li> </ul>		
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security.</li> <li>• Health &amp; Safety.</li> <li>• Data protection.</li> <li>• Equality / disability.</li> <li>• Environmental.</li> <li>• Staffing burden.</li> </ul>		
<b>Is it appropriate use of public money?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political fundraising event?</li> <li>• Party political event or hosted by any one political party?</li> <li>• Sound rationale for attendance / involvement.</li> </ul>		
<b>Director approval</b>	Spend up to £500	<b>Approved / not approved</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>SMT approval</b>	Spend over £500	<b>Approved / not approved</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Council approval</b>	Spend over £2,000	<b>Approved / not approved</b>	<b>Date:</b>

<b>Next steps</b>	Rework / additional information	
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INTERNAL DRAFT



# Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

## Communications Strategy

2021

Policy Number	xxxxx
Version Number	x.x
Author	xxxxx

Date of Screening of Policy	xxxxx
EQIA	N/A
Date Adopted by Council	Vx.x xxxxxx Vx.x xxxxxx
Date Policy Revised	June 2021

# ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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**COUNCIL'S Communications Strategy describes the Council's strategic approach to the management of Corporate Communications and PR. It was adopted by Council in September 2017 and reviewed in June 2021. Council adopted the revised Strategy on xxxxx.**

Effective communication is the responsibility of all Elected Members and Officers across the Council.

The Corporate Communications Team is responsible for developing and setting the strategic framework for delivering the Council's communications.

The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee has overall responsibility for making recommendation to Council on corporate communication matters.

The implementation and effectiveness of the policy will be overseen by the Chief Executive of the Council or by officers so designated by him.

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The Strategy will be monitored and reviewed annually.

Responsibility for monitoring and review will rest with the Democratic and Central Services Manager in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team.



# INTRODUCTION

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**IN this revised Communications Strategy for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council we set out our commitments to communicating effectively with our audiences.**

We recognise the changing world we now communicate in, as the pandemic continues to impact on all aspects of Council business and wider society.

It is essential that Council positions itself as a leader within the community and communications, both internal and external, are central to this.

## OUR COMMUNICATIONS CONTEXT

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**WE are tasked with preserving the continuity of high quality public service in the most challenging circumstances and in line with fluid public health advice.**

Internally, remote working is now the norm for many teams across Council and it is crucial that there is a renewed effort to foster a sense of cohesiveness, which the success of the communications strategy relies upon.

The pandemic has served to highlight the need for timely, accurate and often reassuring communication, which should remain a key consideration for all service areas.

**In everything we do as an organisation we need to question:**

- Why are we doing this?
- Who are we doing it for?
- What effect will it have?
- How, when and to whom should we communicate and share information?

## KEY PRINCIPLES

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**OUR guiding principle and driver for all activities should continue to be in the context of the needs and expectations of our ratepayers, and those who live, work and visit the Borough.**

We should seek to build on progress to date and reinforce integrated working relationships to provide the best possible service to the public.

We will recognise the continued need for clear, consistent and accurate information, especially during times of crisis.

It's important to recognise that the corporate communications team cannot work in isolation. It relies on the support and input from the Senior Leadership Team, Heads of Service and relevant Officers.

**“ By collaborating and working together we can showcase how the organisation is working to improve and enhance the borough for all our stakeholders. ”**



## CURRENT POSITION

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**WE cannot ignore the impact of the pandemic on our current position, and the challenges as well as opportunities this represents.**

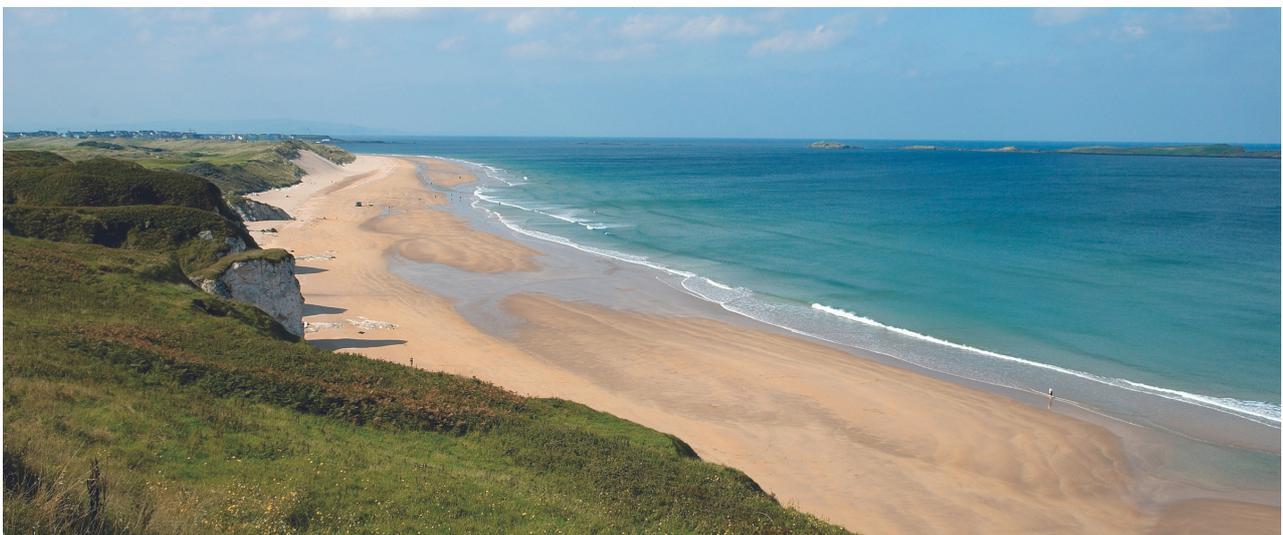
There has been a commendable demonstration of resilience, illustrated by the swift adoption of new working practices and virtual communications methods and delivery which has allowed Council business (internal and external) to continue.

While many teams are now working from home or in line with social distancing restrictions, the use of Zoom and MS Teams brings staff and elected members together. This new approach has allowed the democratic process and the out-workings of this to continue.

The fluidity of the situation has highlighted the ever-increasing importance of utilising Council's digital communication avenues including its website and social media channels to relay timely and accurate information to the public, the visitor market and the business community.

It is important that these channels are monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure information remains consistent, accurate and up-to-date at all times.

We recognise that different audiences are seeking different information and Council must seek to position itself as an important portal of accurate and useful information for all these segments.



# COUNCIL'S VISION & SUPPORTING THEMES

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## Vision Statement

**WE will maximise the benefits of our unique location and landscape by providing accessible, efficient, and sustainable services fulfilling local and visitor expectations.**

## Mission Statement

Improve the quality of life for our citizens and visitors by:

- Providing effective, accessible and sustainable local public services.
- Improving economic prosperity
- Ensuring local communities are at the heart of decision making.
- Protecting, promoting and enhancing our unique natural environment and assets.
- Advocating for the area and our citizens in local and international arenas.

## Strategy Objectives

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- Demonstrate civic leadership and Council's role as a champion for the Borough.
- Foster an ethos of effective and efficient working as part of a single corporate unit with a common purpose and culture.
- Encourage knowledge and skills sharing within and across teams.
- Maintain a strong corporate brand which instils confidence and reassurance, which is of particular importance in this changeable social climate.
- Encourage all teams to recognise the value of their work and how it demonstrates the strategic priorities of the corporate strategy in action.
- Communicate achievements, initiatives, and projects from across the Council spectrum internally and externally.
- Adopt a more proactive approach to showcasing Council business and preserving Council's reputation.

## WHO COMMUNICATES AND HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Target Audience	Partner	Communication Actions
The Mayor	Chief Executive The Mayor's Office	Chief Executive briefing, Councils minutes and agendas, press releases, photo opportunities, speeches, Mayor's Diary on corporate website, video conference channels, video messages.
Elected Members	Chief Executive	Council minutes and agendas, press releases, text alerts, monthly forecast of events, briefing notes, video conference channels.
Council Staff	Democratic Services Senior Leadership Team	Weekly staff e-zine (collated and issue via corporate communications), Staff Portal, consistent cascade of information from management, video conference channels.
Citizens	All Departments	Corporate website, corporate social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), annual newsletter, press releases, photocalls, advertisements, publicity material.
Visitors	All Departments	Visit website, corporate website, Visit social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), Events team social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), advertisements, publicity material, press releases and photo calls.
Community Groups	All Departments	Corporate website, corporate social media channels (Facebook and Twitter), annual newsletter, press releases, photocalls, advertisements, publicity material.
Key Partners Business Community Statutory/Voluntary Agencies	All Departments	Corporate website, social media, network opportunities.
Section 75 Groups	Equality Forum	Provision of accessible information, SignVideo service.

## HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES

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**WE will continue to develop our digital channels as direct links and two-way communication channels to the public and external partners.**

Through ongoing review and development, we can build valuable, accurate and useful resources of information which contributes to a positive public profile. This should be complemented by strong local and regional media relationships.

We will aim for openness and transparency in everything we do and strive for accuracy and timeliness in our communication activities, both internally and externally.

We will work with key communication champions from across the organisation to foster consistency to build trust and reassurance and celebrate success.

We will look beyond the parameters of individual teams and directorships to collaborate and develop a 'one unit' ethos.

Collectively we will look forward for opportunities, threats and risks to reputation in order to plan and be prepared.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

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**TO maintain our corporate brand and public confidence we must redouble efforts to nurture a 'one unit' ethos across the organisation.**

Our communication should be as timely as possible, without compromising on accuracy or accessibility. Current working methods have highlighted the importance of timely internal communication within the organisation.

There should be a renewed emphasis on the need to communicate well internally, with integration across services areas and with SLT a crucial consideration.

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

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**EFFECTIVE media relationships are an important consideration of our communications strategy.**

These relationships should be guided by principles of openness and transparency.

Media enquiries are received every day, and the Corporate Communications team work in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the provision of accurate and effective responses.

The Corporate Communications team cannot respond to media enquiries in isolation. The SLT and relevant officers must support the team in order to provide accurate, agreed responses.

Facilitating this flow of information is essential to maintaining effective relationships with the media, and this is integral to the work of the Corporate Communications team. By working with the media on reactive matters we can protect and preserve our Council's reputation in the community.

At times throughout the year, or to coincide with major events or announcements, the Chief Executive may decide to hold media briefings which will also help to foster positive media relationships.



## SETTING THE AGENDA

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**Greater collaboration and forward planning are important considerations that will allow us to share our key messages at our chosen time instead of reacting to media demands and matters arising.**

However, as a corporate body we are bound by decision-making processes which often dictate the timing and pace of our communication activities.

Issuing an accurate message, which reflects the decision of the corporate body, is more important than issuing a piece which could ultimately lead to mixed messaging, confusion and mistrust in our brand.

We recognise that this can be frustrating, especially at times of loud external commentary, but corporate communications will always be guided by the governance which exists around council business. However, by forecasting and identifying issues in advance of a Council decision we can place ourselves in a more proactive position.

As set out at the beginning of this document, effective communication is the responsibility of elected members as well as Council officers. While elected members will all have their own diverging opinions and positions on Council matters, their support in creating a positive public profile for the organisation is vital. Elected members are often in a position of influence within their communities and therefore how and what they communicate, including online activity, can impact on Council's public reputation.

The Code of Conduct for Councillors and the NIPSO Guidance on the Use of Social Media both remind elected members that their conduct must not bring their position, as well as the Council, into disrepute and this is something to be mindful of.



## DELIVERING TOGETHER

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**Effective communication activity should demonstrate Council's strategic priorities and confirm our position as a champion and advocate for our ratepayers.**

An associated Action Plan has been developed to complement this Communications Strategy and guide our communications activity.

It outlines the key issues we face and how we can address them. There is a need for greater collaboration, proactive preparation and forecasting for both opportunities and risk.

As an organisation we need to recognise the importance of working together as an efficient corporate unit with a common purpose and culture.

Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic we should continue to look for opportunities to highlight best practice, achievements and 'good news stories' from across the organisation.

All employees should be encouraged to reflect on their contribution to the organisation and work with the team to proactively highlight corporate strategy goals in action.

These are a demonstration of our commitment to the borough and our ratepayers and will allow us to promote and uphold our brand within the news agenda.

This can only work via a reciprocal relationship with the corporate communications team, which will be fostered through the Communications Liaison Group.

## Communications Strategy: Draft Action Plan

	Issue identified	Actions	Desired outcomes	Time scales
1	Need for enhanced collaborative working across the organisation	Convene Communications Liaison Group and hold quarterly meetings	Encourage increased forward planning and contribute to a 'one unit' ethos instead of a silo approach	Quarterly
2	Need to encourage proactive communications practices	SLT and Heads of Service to commit to earlier engagement with PR over both opportunity and risk	Enhanced PR for the organisation. Better work flow planning for PR.	Ongoing
3	Need for increased 'horizon scanning' for both opportunity and risk	Increased early engagement between SLT, Heads of Service and Corporate Communications	Help to protect Council's reputation and build a positive public profile.	Ongoing
4	Need to provide timely and robust responses to all media enquiries	Increased timely co-operation from relevant officers to facilitate necessary information sharing before final sign off	Contributes to positive and effective media relationships  Fosters a sense of openness and transparency.	Ongoing
5	Need to build and maintain Council's reputation within the community	Utilise social media and digital engagement opportunities. Engage where appropriate in two-way conversations.  Regular cascade of press releases to local and regional media from across the Council spectrum.  Annual issue of Council's citizens' newsletter.	Makes audiences feel valued and contributes to a sense of openness and transparency. Increased awareness raising about positive Council business and decision making.  Highlight how Council is achieving its corporate objectives through service delivery.	Ongoing

	Issue identified	Actions	Desired outcomes	Time scales
6	Need for enhanced internal engagement with employees around council business and decisions alongside health and well-being matters, support services and other relevant information.	Team meetings Chief Executive updates Staff news Revisit/revise the buddy system	Staff feel valued and morale is improved.  Staff recognise their role within the wider organisation.  Staff recognise their contribution to Council's corporate objectives.  Addresses issues of isolation associated with working from home.	Staff news issued weekly.  Other actions ongoing with a commitment to regular contact.
7	All staff to recognise PR potential or implications of their projects and initiatives	Staff should keep their Heads of Service informed and link in with Corporate Communications	Staff recognise their role in contributing to the organisations corporate objectives.  Leads to greater PR opportunities for Council	Ongoing
8	Need to ensure information is accessible by all	Continue to look at areas of best practice and implement where possible.  Ensure provision of alternative formats where required.  Raise awareness about Sign Video, loop system and corporate website translation options.  Ensure staff are aware of their obligations.	Provision of equitable service for all.  Ensure all members of the community are valued.  Enhanced reputation in the community	Ongoing

	Issues identified	Actions	Desired outcomes	Times scales
9	Protect use of Council's corporate brand in-line with branding guidelines	<p>Ensure that all staff and partner organisations are aware of Council's branding guidelines when using the corporate brand.</p> <p>Ensure sign-off of all branded material by Corporate Communications team.</p>	<p>Enhances Council brand recognition and public profile.</p> <p>Illustrates Council's service delivery or contribution to external projects.</p>	Ongoing
10	Increase awareness of the Mayor's role as leader and ambassador for the area.	Use the position as Council's key spokesperson and representative for internal and external opportunities.	<p>Provides added corporate value to service delivery.</p> <p>Raises Council profile externally, contributing to enhanced reputation and awareness in the community.</p> <p>Enhances corporate credibility of internal and external initiatives.</p>	Ongoing