

7 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Good communication between members, management and staff is vital to achieve delivery of quality services. Our success in achieving Investor in People (200?) is an example of the council's aim to constantly improve the relationship

Uttlesford's on-going objectives for internal communications are:

- Ensure members and staff **understand the aims and objectives** of the council
- Keep **staff and members informed** of major developments within UDC
- Promote commitment to the council and foster a sense of belonging
- **Consult** staff regularly and provide regular opportunities for them to express their views and offer ideas and suggestions
- Develop **open and effective** communication between members and staff
- Create an environment which enables **staff to become advocates** for the council both in and out of work
- Assist the council to provide **best value** throughout the authority by building on the benefits of a **well motivated workforce**

7.1 Surveys

A **Staff Opinion Survey** was conducted in June 2004 by Unison. There was a 65% response rate to the survey from union members. The results showed that interdepartmental communications was good, but poor on a council wide basis. Management team was not seen as communicating a clear vision for the future, or working hard to keep in contact with staff.

Another survey of **all** staff is planned for 2005. This will develop the questions that featured in the Unison survey and will add further questions as well.

A **...meet the chief exec** series of meetings was held throughout the summer of 2004 by Alasdair Bovaird. The meetings were approximately two hours in duration and involved a dozen or so people at a time. It was promoted as a forum to speak openly and honestly to the chief executive about issues that were important to the staff. Alasdair provided feedback after he had met with approximately two thirds of the staff, which can be found in the Scrutiny 2 committee minutes of 18/11/04.

7.2 Publications

Highlights

Highlights is broadcast via email every week and lists what the chief executive has been doing in the week. Hard copies are available on request. There are plans to leave copies in the staff canteen and posted to staff without computers, on long term sick or maternity leave.

Highlights covers important corporate news and includes a personal note from the chief executive, news update, and other updates. Its aim is to help staff see the bigger picture.

The Grapevine

Ideally this should be a bi-monthly staff newsletter (whatever its name). Although well regarded there is no current production and efforts via JMT appear to have stalled. There is scope to include staff input and include departmental news updates to share learning. It is hoped that any resurrection would be light-hearted with charity news, photos, staff achievements, in-jokes and competitions.

Verbal report to be made on the evening of the committee meeting.

7.3 Team Briefings

Sending out communications from management is easy, but for staff to feel valued they need to know this process is two-way – that their contributions are valued and they are involved in the decision-making process.

Team briefings regarded as essential. Those who read it felt it was a very important form of communication. However, a straw poll indicated that some readers did not currently receive a team briefing and it appears they are not consistently used throughout UDC.

To be effective team briefings should ideally be co-ordinated so there is consistency across the authority.

Informal channels ‘the corridor grapevine’ is a powerful network, but can spread speculation just as effectively as facts. Improving the official communication channels, making our processes more flexible and encouraging staff feedback will help to reduce – but never eliminate – the informal channels.

7.4 E-communications

The **Intranet** was launched in March 2004 and is accessible by the majority of officers and members. It is continually being expanded. The overall responsibility for the service and its coordination lies with the ICT Division, but the departments supply most of the content.

7.5 Other forms of internal communication

Notice boards

All sites have staff notice boards although their management varies. These are well maintained but their effectiveness is questionable.

Staff Induction

A corporate staff induction programme ensures that all new starters receive the same quality of information via a staff 'welcome' pack.

Staff Incentives

Feedback and creativity is encouraged through a staff suggestion box scheme and a management team award for exceptional service. However, take up of these schemes is not strongly promoted.