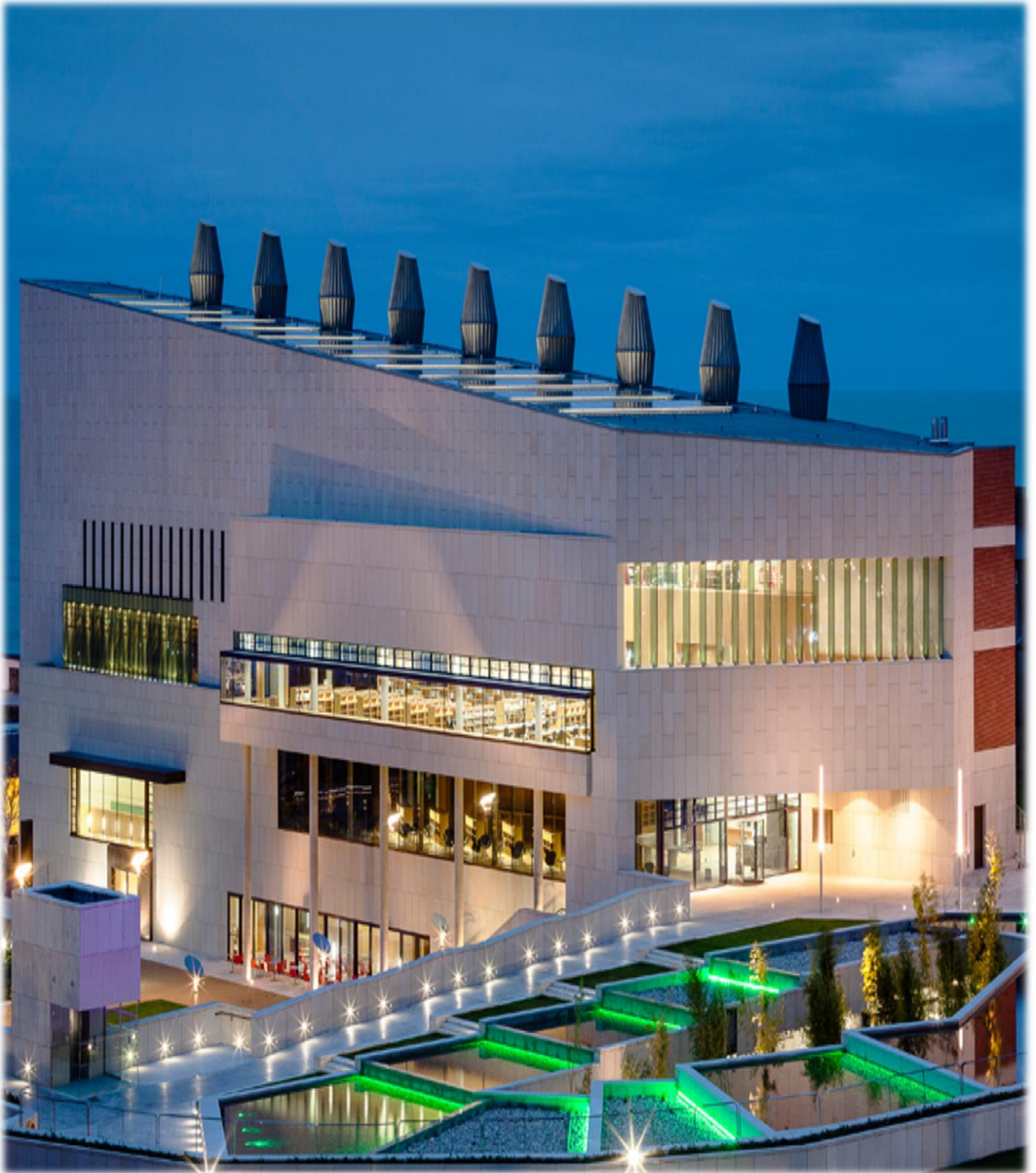


dlr County Council Communications Strategy 2016-2020



1. Introduction

Strategy – Policy - Actions

This Communications Strategy document has been developed following the adoption of the Council's new 5-year Corporate Plan 2015-2019. The Corporate Plan together with this Communications Strategy set out to fulfil the Council's key roles as a local authority, namely:

- To provide appropriate quality services for residents, ratepayers and visitors to the County
- To provide and/or facilitate the development of county infrastructure
- To fulfil a regulatory role in areas such as planning, traffic, waste management, road safety etc.
- To facilitate economic and community development in partnership with and other agencies and business, community and voluntary organisations

The Communications strategy document has a key role to play in realising these tasks and its development has been influenced by a number of external and internal factors including:

- A rapidly changing external communications environment
- The growth of new media channels
- The ongoing development of new technologies
- The priority for active, regular stakeholder engagement
- The feedback regarding dlr's communications arising from the dlr Corporate Plan consultation process
- The significant organisational changes occurring within dlr Co Co
- The need to be prepared in the event of any serious incident and/or crisis situation
- The future challenges of a changing dlr Co Co

The document also includes key policy and protocols relating to key areas of communications including:

- Media handling
- Digital engagement
- Website access
- Crisis communications
- Internal communications
- Customer complaint handling
- Irish scheme

Finally, the document sets out the need for an implementation and action plan to provide focus on the key events, milestones and activities around which the communications activities take place.

2. Purpose

The primary purpose of the Communications Plan is to act in line with and as a support to the dlr Corporate Plan. The Mission Statement of the Council, as articulated in the Corporate Plan is that:

“Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will lead in the delivery, coordination and regulation of quality public services for our communities, in partnership with our stakeholders”

In working alongside the Council’s Corporate Plan and this Mission Statement, the Communications Strategy will assist in:

- a. Protecting and enhancing the reputation of dlr Co Co
- b. Giving direction and clarity for internal stakeholders
- c. Supporting departments in the delivery of their Goals and Objectives
- d. Helping dlr inform, engage with and influence key audiences
- e. Helping the organisation in its Customer Service delivery
- f. Articulating dlr’s key messages to all stakeholders
- g. Marketing the activities and events in which dlr Co Co participates
- h. Supporting civic engagement within the county

3. Vision for the Council and the County

As part of the Corporate Plan process a Vision, Mission, Values and Themes were developed arising from the consultative process with all the Council's stakeholders. The Vision provides the direction for the Council and the County through the period to 2019 while the Mission, Values and Themes provide a framework for all the Council's key business and service delivery priorities during the period of the Plan.

Corporate Plan Vision statements

The County - *"A smart vibrant county which is attractive, inclusive and accessible"*

The Council - *"A Council that shapes a better future for our County and all its communities"*

The challenge for the Council is to have a relevant Communications Vision which both reflects and supports the above.

The dlr Communications Vision statements are:

"To positively portray the council, its plans for a better future and its work in a manner that enhances the reputation of dlr Co Co among the people who live in, do business in and visit dlr."

"To enhance the reputation of the county by delivering proactive, positive communications regarding dlr, its services, attractions and advantages - for all sections of our community"

"An open and accessible communications department encouraging a strong dialogue approach to communications with external audiences and within all departments in the council."

4. Values

The Council has also considered and agreed a set of core values as part of its Corporate Plan that will guide the organisation and its staff as the organisation pursues its ambition of ***Shaping a Better Future for our County***.

Our ambition is to act at all times in accordance with the values expressed in the Corporate Plan, to the benefit of all our stakeholders. Those values centre around being accountable, customer focused, proactive, excellence driven, cost conscious and courageous.

As a Council with ambitions to be among best practice Local Authorities in terms of communications, the manner in which we will conduct our business is reflected in our communications values.

Communications Values

Accountable - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will be fully responsible in an accountable and transparent manner for all its communications and messages. We will be trustworthy and open and act with integrity at all times.

Listen & Respond - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will actively engage with and consult with its key stakeholders and commit to listen to issues raised. The Council will respond clearly regarding feedback on all key issues arising from its consultations.

Reliable - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will be a reliable source of information for those seeking answers, clarification and information relating to events, issues or organisational matters. The council will provide information on delivery of services and be sure to communicate clear reasons when service delivery is adversely affected/disrupted.

Proactive - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will act progressively and positively, engaging with audiences and where possible, planning communications in advance.

Excellence Driven - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will strive to consistently reach the highest standards of communication to ensure that the positive impact of the council is easily identifiable.

Courageous - Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council will tackle and address issues in the best interests of its residents and businesses and will communicate in a robust and honest way, in particular, when facing unforeseen circumstances.

5. Role of the Communications Department

The role of the Communications Office reflects the breadth of the remit of the Council. The Council's activities service and support over 206,000 residents in 75,819 households along with businesses who employ over 74,000 employees in the county.

In supporting the service delivery departments and corporate organisation the Communications Office responsibilities include:

- **Protecting the Council's reputation by engaging with communities using clear and consistent messages about the Council and its services and activities**
- **Providing support services to all other Departments to assist in their communications needs**
- ***Delivering strategic Communications Advice to Senior Management and line department heads***
- ***Managing issue, incident and crisis communications for all departments within the Council***
- ***Providing communications support services to An Cathaoirleach, the elected members and for all Council meetings***
- ***Managing the relationships and interaction – proactive and reactive – with all media outlets***
- ***Acting proactively to promote, market and communicate the Council's activities, services and events***
- ***Developing Social Media policies and plans in line with specific protocols to support all departments within the Council***
- ***Providing photographic and video services to enhance communications of the Council's services, programmes and activities***
- ***Managing, editing and publishing Council literature including dlr Times, dlr Development Plans, dlr Corporate Plans and other dlr strategic documents***
- ***Co-ordinating internal Communications activities, management of the Council's intranet site and supporting the Council's HR department in PMDS communications and other staff related communications activities***
- ***Managing the Council's advertising, promotional and branding activities***
- ***Co-ordinating major Council events and functions on behalf of An Cathaoirleach and/or the Chief Executive***
- ***Sourcing and providing communications training and support for the organisation and in particular media training for relevant spokespeople if/when required***
- ***Managing the Council's Website/Twitter/Face book editorial content and operations***
- ***Providing the lead on the Customer Relationship Management project***
- ***Co-ordinating event promotional activities***

6. Communications Goal

The key communications goal which is set out in the Council's Corporate Plan is:

“To use all channels of communications to ensure effective and transparent communication and feedback with stakeholders”

The deliverables which will contribute to the successful achievement of this goal include the following Objectives:

- To promote a communications culture in the organisation
- To provide effective points of contact for callers and visitors to the Council
- To encourage participation in local democracy by communicating effectively and seeking feedback from stakeholders
- To promote the use of 'Citizen Space' as a means of communication with our communities
- To use Social Media to communicate timely information and messages on Council activities, events and news
- To monitor the effectiveness of internal communications
- To review the structure and content of our Corporate Website and Intranet
- To implement the Council's Irish Language Scheme

7. Messages

The Council has agreed three overarching themes to guide us through our work in the period until 2019. The key messages for the Council in this period must be centred on these themes which are:

1. **“Create an environment for economic growth”**
2. **“Drive quality of life for all”**
3. **“Transform how we work”**

In particular, the Council, to reflect its ambitions in the 5-year period, will communicate the following corporate messages:

- **dlr will be the locality of choice for a thriving business sector with a high quality of life**
- **dlr will have a network of confident communities with the best quality of life in the region**
- **dlr will be a major contributor to the Dublin Region in social, economic and cultural terms**
- **dlr will have a Council which is recognised for its collaborative approach with all key stakeholders**
- **dlr’s residents will know they are in receipt of high quality, well managed, local government services**
- **dlr will support all aspects of life in the county**

As part of the Council’s plan to communicate with its stakeholders regarding its services, activities and events, these overarching messages will form the bedrock of the Council’s communications in its publications, media interactions and internal messaging.

8. Stakeholders

The Council has a broad range of stakeholders with which our role includes positive and active engagement. In order to fulfil its mandate, the Council must ensure an appropriate, robust and effective communications takes place with all key audiences to ensure information is shared and exchanged in a timely, meaningful manner and that the Council's activities, services and events are communicated with all its audiences.

The Council's key stakeholders include:

- Residents and community groups
- Public Participation Network
- Ratepayers, business owners and operators and representative groups
- An Cathaoirleach
- Elected members of dlr Council
- dlr management team and staff
- Minister for the Environment; departmental officials and other Government departments
- TDs and Senators
- Other local councils, specifically Fingal, South Dublin and Dublin City Council
- NGOs
- The education sector – primary schools, second level and third level education bodies
- Housing organisations and homeless support bodies
- An Garda Síochána, HSE, HSA and other agencies
- NTA, transport, utility companies, tourism, sports bodies, environmental groups and specific experts
- Visitors to the county
- Media – national and local
- Partners, agents and contractors

9. Communications Channels

The Communications Office is responsible for the utilisation of all suitable channels to ensure the Council's messages are effectively communicated with all its audiences. The Council's Communications Office will continually review the choice of channels to ensure the maximum exposure for its messages. The current channels include:

Media:

- The Council will engage with local and national media outlets through regular, timely and accurate use of media statements, media focussed frequently asked questions (FAQs) and, where appropriate, media interviews.
- The Council will also work with the media and have professional relationships with journalists, media outlets and. In particular, relevant correspondents to maximise the levels of understanding of the Council's issues with the media.
- Online news sites and outlets are regarded as mainstream media and new sites/outlets are to be monitored on a regular basis.

Social Media

- The Council will utilise appropriate forms of new media in line with its developed protocols. Currently, these include, Twitter, Facebook, You tube, Instagram etc.....

Website

- The Council will use its website and subsidiary sites as its core communications vehicles. Council related websites will be utilised as a primary tool in getting the Council's messages across to its stakeholders – both for proactive use in terms of the Council's services, activities and events and in the case of reacting to incident/crisis situations. Council websites will become the most potent form of information for all interested parties in relation to Council related information and will be available for use 24/7/365.

Customer Service Centre

- Customer focussed service facilities – front desk, switchboard and the introduction of a new customer service centre are key channels through which all Council related information and news is distributed to all the Council's audiences.

Consultations/Meetings

- The Council will utilise its statutory and non-statutory consultations and meetings with the elected members and the public – residents, ratepayers and visitors to the county – to inform and engage with all its audiences.

Publications

- The Council is committed to the production of a number of publications and these form an important part of its communications activities. The Communications Office staff also provide the public with information via advertising and public announcements

Events

- The use of events as a communications channel will be incorporated into the Communications Office activities. Events in which the Council take part and/or organise are key opportunities to showcase to a wide range of stakeholders not just the specific event, but to highlight Council messages through event launches, speeches, media and marketing opportunities around each event.

Intranet and Staff Briefings

- The use of the intranet will be the primary information vehicle to inform and update staff on all the Council's activities. The staff are a key stakeholder as well as being an important channel in the onwards communications of dlr's messages. Regular Staff briefings will also update staff on dlr's activities and policies.

10. Protocols and policies

10.a Media handling policy

The reputation of the Council, its staff and its services is important in terms of public confidence in our work. In order to ensure the greatest degree of consistency and co-ordination of all dlr Co Co messages with the general public via the media, the dlr Communications Office is the designated central point of contact with and for all media activity. All queries from the media should be directed to the Communications Office and all statements, comments and communication with the media should be centralised through the Communications Office and approved for release by the Communications Office prior to dissemination to the media.

In the event of any media query, in writing or verbally, staff should direct the journalists to the Communications Office and advise the media that the matter is being referred to the Communications Office for their attention. Staff should not offer any comment outside of their referral of the matter to the Communications Office. Following the receipt of any query, the Communications Office, working with each line department shall determine the response to the query.

The Council commits to handling media queries in a professional, timely and courteous manner and to abide by the values in this Communications Strategy.

The Communications Office shall, from time to time, put forward a spokesperson on behalf of the Council to speak on its behalf and shall assist spokespeople in the areas of preparation and training prior to their engagement with the media.

10.b Digital Communications Policy

1. Overview and Context

1.1 The rapid acceleration in the use of digital engagement channels presents opportunities and challenges in civic engagement for dlr. It provides an opportunity to build our audience numbers and drive engagement with our programmes and services. The adoption and correct use of social media can support this. With an increase in online traffic and the use of mobile devices to access content, dlr has an opportunity to engage with a potentially new and interactive audience.

1.2 Digital engagement allow dlr to:

- Listen to our citizens;
- Understand our audiences better;
- Ask questions;
- Gain feedback on ideas;
- Gauge influence;
- Disseminate information in an efficient manner;
- Build on a public profile;
- Disseminate information about Council services and policy

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to

- Define the protocols and expectations of dlr regarding the use of digital platforms by dlr employees, representatives and third parties acting on behalf of dlr.
- Assist dlr in adopting a responsible approach to managing the usage of digital platforms for business purposes;
- Highlight the potential risks associated with digital engagement by dlr employees;
- Ensure that dlr data and information is not compromised through the use of digital platforms;
- Provide dlr employees with good practice standards in their use of digital platforms in business usage and in their personal capacity;