



Bedfordshire Police Authority

Communications Strategy 2009-2012

Connecting police and communities

Introduction

The purpose of this communications strategy is to establish a framework to ensure that Bedfordshire Police Authority communicates as effectively as possible with all its target audiences. This document defines communication and the relevant target audiences for Bedfordshire Police Authority. It describes the strategic aims, objectives and methodology for the Authority's communication; the key messages, vehicles and media for communication and concludes with an action plan and anticipated outcomes for the coming year.

The need for communication has been emphasised by Government guidance and statutory duties placed upon Police Authorities. This strategy takes into account the Government's single confidence measure, the need to effectively engage the public in the Authority's work and the desire to further demonstrate the efficacy of the Authority's work through an outcome-led communications programme.

Communications cannot work in isolation and to that end a dovetailed approach will be adopted with regard to the Authority's Community Engagement and Partnership Strategies and with other Police Authority business. Engagement with the public is a key priority for the Authority and requires well-informed citizens are at the heart of shaping a responsive, accountable and value for money police service.

Police Authorities are different from many public organisations in that they do not deliver a direct service. All communications must therefore demonstrate the non-operational role of the Authority and its function in the delivery of the direct, operational service provided by the police force under the direction of the Chief Constable.

Definitions

Communication - a two-way process of giving or receiving information, whereby a shared understanding is achieved.

External Communication - the process by which information from the Police Authority is conveyed to the target audiences. Its purpose is to inform and reassure the public, giving them confidence in the service provided.

The public, as local tax payers and service users, has a right to be informed of the work of the police service. Different audiences will, of course, require different information and approaches. Communication has a pivotal role to play in how the general public judge how well policing in Bedfordshire is being delivered. This inevitably has an impact in public confidence.

Internal Communication - the process by which information from the Police Authority is shared with the members and staff of the organisation, including police officers and police staff. Its purpose is to ensure that all personnel are working together to achieve common goals"

Effective, two-way communication improves staff satisfaction and the performance of the organisation. It also reduces the opportunity for confusion and misinterpretation of key policies and decisions.

Vision

Bedfordshire Police Authority is an organisation that communicates effectively with all its publics, internal and external, with clarity and a clear understanding of their needs and expectations, ensuring that each of the audiences has access to information relating to the work and role of the Police Authority.

This vision contributes to the delivery of the Authority's as set out in the Strategic Plan 2009-2012.

Why Communicate?

Communication is an essential ingredient in the drive to increase confidence in policing. People who are aware of the opportunities available to them to get involved in setting policing priorities and who understand that the Police Authority acts as the watchdog on local policing, are much more likely to have confidence in the police. Communication, in all its forms, is the key to keeping people informed.

There is a statutory duty upon Police Authorities to consult with people about policing services in order to develop policies and determine priorities. Communication helps people to have informed opinions.

As taxpayers the public have a right to know how their money is being spent, the type of service they are receiving and whether it meets the targets set for it and expected standards.

Aim of the Strategy

Bedfordshire Police Authority shares its strategic vision with Bedfordshire Police and aims to be: 'an organisation that inspires trust and confidence, that listens, responds and meets the needs of individuals and communities'.

The aim of this Communications Strategy is defined as:

"To help maintain and improve confidence in the provision of policing in Bedfordshire through timely, necessary and helpful information covering all aspects of the Authority's responsibilities to the public, partners and stakeholders, and by ensuring that people know who to turn to if they have concerns."

Guiding Principles

Our communications will be shaped by the following principles:

The way in which we communicate is informed through consultation with our publics and the delivery will be open and transparent, designed to reach all sectors of the community.

We will provide a clear understanding of the role of the Authority, its aims and objectives alongside its role and responsibilities including our obligations around Freedom of Information;

Using creative, varied and carefully selected communication vehicles we will regularly inform local residents, decision makers, stakeholders and our partners.

The public will be encouraged, through our communication, to become more engaged in shaping the delivery of policing services.

Communication can contribute toward more realistic expectations improving overall satisfaction and public confidence.

All our diverse audiences will have access to our information, including how they can express their views, needs, expectations and how they can complain when they are unhappy.

Strategic Objectives

To enable the Authority to meet the aim of the Strategy, a number of key objectives have been identified.

1. Raise awareness of the work of the Police Authority to ensure that all audiences are aware of the services available to them; our future plans and the added value the Police Authority brings to policing.
2. Illustrate the success and benefits of partnership and collaborative projects.

3. Encourage engagement with the community and to involve, inform, reassure and illustrate how public opinion has influenced strategic decisions.
4. Inform the public of strategic policing priorities that have been set by the Authority and progress on them.
5. To listen to the views of the public and clearly demonstrate the 'you said, we did' approach adopted by the Authority.
6. Protect the reputation of the Police Authority.
7. To meet our statutory requirements and illustrate the accessibility of our services.

The Audiences

Clearly, the public is not a homogeneous group but a collection of people with vastly differing needs and expectations of the police force. Particular segments of the global "general public" requiring tailored messages and methods of communication may include the following:

External

- local taxpayers of the county
 - the business community
 - rural communities
 - urban communities
 - victims and witnesses
 - older people
 - young people
 - Black and minority ethnic groups
 - people with disabilities
 - those whose first language is not English
 - those who live in fear of crime
 - those who are disengaged
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- local and national media – (published, broadcast and multimedia)

Internal

- Members of the Police Authority
- Officers of the Police Authority
- Officers and staff of Bedfordshire Police
- Contracted suppliers to Authority and Force
- Staff groups and networking groups
- Strategic Independent Advisory Groups
- Volunteers, such as Independent Custody Visitors

Opinion Drivers

- Members of Parliament
- Councillors
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
- Chambers of Commerce
- Association of Police Authorities
- National Police Improvement Agency
- Audit Commission
- Police Negotiating Board
- Home Office
- Association of Chief Police Officers

Partners and Stakeholders

- Partners (e.g. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships)
- Stakeholders (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch, Drug and Alcohol Teams)
- Local government
- Statutory Boards & Panels
- Local politicians including MPs
- Criminal Justice Board
- National Associations, such as Victim Support

This list is not exhaustive, but is an illustration of the breadth and variety of target segments to be considered. The Police Authority aims to deliver appropriate information to each sector of the target audience.

Key Messages

Generic

- The Police Authority is an independent body;
- The Authority connects police and communities, forming a bridge to link the two;
- The Authority acts on behalf of local people;
- The Police Authority is keen to see increased public reassurance and satisfaction;
- The Police Authority holds the Chief Constable to account on behalf of the people of Bedfordshire;
- The Police Authority is responsible for maintaining an efficient and effective police service for the county.

Performance

- The Authority is the local Police watchdog;
- The Authority scrutinises police performance (in all areas, operational, resources, money, human resources, complaints, diversity, health and safety etc) on behalf of the public to ensure that the force is efficient and effective;
- The Police Authority has driven a number of significant improvements;
- The Police Authority monitors the extent to which Bedfordshire Police meets the standards of the Policing Pledge, that contribute toward public confidence and trust.

Involving People

- The Police Authority is responsible for setting local police priorities;
- The Police Authority supports the development of Neighbourhood Policing;
- The Police Authority undertakes and is responsible for consultation with the community.
- The Authority listens to what people tell it, acting upon this information to improve policing in the county
- The Authority feeds this information back to the community and in particular the consultees.

Resources

- The Police Authority is the budget holder for policing in the county and sets the amount of council tax paid towards policing.
- The Police Authority ensures value for money;
- The Authority drives the efficiency programme.

Partnership and Collaboration

- The Authority works with statutory partners to set policing targets, improve the overall quality of life in communities and keep people safe;

- The Authority works with the Local Criminal Justice Board to ensure that offenders are brought to justice;
- The Authority works with other police forces to deliver greater efficiencies in both service delivery and financial savings;
- The Authority works in partnership with local organisations to ensure that the needs of local people are met.
- The Authority works with national organisations to improve the opportunities for Bedfordshire Police and communities.

Standards

- The Police Authority is responsible for the Independent Custody visiting schemes.
- The Police Authority is committed to diversity and equality of opportunity;
- The Police Authority investigates complaints against senior officers and oversees the process of all complaints.

Key methods of communication

The following vehicles will be used, as appropriate, to communicate the agreed messages to **external** audiences:

Branding material	To increase recognition of the Police Authority
Media Activity	Press releases, statements, interviews and launches to all elements of the media as appropriate
Police Authority Committee Meetings	Opportunity for public to see how key decisions are reached
Website	To carry information about all aspects of the Police Authority's business, plus Police performance information and a direct link to both Force and Partners
Information Leaflets	Providing information on the Authority's work and role. Available in different formats on request
Statutory Information	Eg, Council Tax leaflet, Annual and Strategic Plans, produced in hard copy or electronically as appropriate, available in alternative formats on request.
Performance information	Local Policing Summary and Spring Newsletter, available in alternative formats on request. Also available electronically. Delivered to all households.
Member Networks	Members will utilise new and existing networks to communicate with different groups.
Partner Newsletters and Websites	The Authority will contribute to the newsletters and proactive publicity of its partners wherever possible. It will carry links to its partners on its own website and vice versa.
Face to Face Meetings	All opportunities to meet people on a face to face basis, either at specific meetings to address a local issue, or via existing meetings will be explored.
Public Events	Opportunities to engage with the public at public events, where large numbers of people are expected, including police and partner specific events will be explored.
Street/Supermarket Briefings	The Authority will take the opportunity to inform the public on localised issues, with its partners, wherever possible.
Special Campaigns	The Authority will use dedicated campaigns to inform the public
Public and Partner Consultation	The Authority will consult with the public and its partners and feedback the findings, explaining how these have been taken into account. It will consult with representative samples, general public and specific groups.
Meetings	Members and/or officers will attend meetings of appropriate organisations
Advertising	The Authority will use paid for space in appropriate

	publications when necessary.
E.bulletin	The Authority will produce a regular bulletin on its decisions and police performance for stakeholders and general public.
Partner News	The Authority will produce a specific bulletin for its partners
Seminars	The Authority will hold seminars with its partners and specific audiences to share information
Dialogue with local and national politicians and organisations	The Authority will increase its dialogue with key influencers to explain the challenges facing policing in Bedfordshire and the way in which it is meeting those challenges.
Printed collateral	Posters, letters, panels etc will be produced as appropriate
New technology, social media techniques and text messages	Will be explored and introduced as appropriate and budgets permit

Internal Communication

A dedicated strategy for internal audiences has been developed, to dovetail with the external strategy where appropriate.

Environmental Scanning

Authority officers and the communications provider will continuously scan the media to report on issues that have direct and indirect relevance to the authority and force. This will be supplemented by reports emanating from the Association of Police Authorities. Information will be reported to Members by way of weekly summaries.

This will include material on proactive and reactive press stories where included on electronic media sites.

Responsibilities

The Authority's media resources will provide:

- press and public relations
- media handling
- branding material
- on-call cover
- crisis management
- environmental scanning
- support to the secretariat to ensure the best utilisation of technology and IT facilities including the web site
- copywriting and production services for Authority publications
- input to partner publications and website
- media training and advice
- information to assist with evaluation
- provide information on general policing issues in the media which may affect the Authority communications/decisions
- advice and support for the promotion of consultation opportunities.

Authority Members will be available for:

- networking opportunities
- public meetings
- consultation
- development groups for published information
- face to face meetings
- Authority meetings

- information sharing
- dialogue with local and national politicians
- partnership work
- press interviews
- briefing sessions
- evaluation
- confidential audiences with the public

The Authority Secretariat will:

- provide timely support and information as required to members and the media consultants on all the items above
- undertake a wide variety of consultation and engagement activities and provide information for feedback purposes
- ensure that the budget is in place to carry out these actions effectively
- issue internal information
- ensure that legislative responsibilities are met
- assist in the monitoring and evaluation process for communication
- progress the IT strategy and development plan to ensure that new technology improves communication.

Media Training and Presentation Skills

Some Members and officers are more likely to be approached for media interviews than others.

These include those who have more contact with the media, including the Chair, Vice-Chair, Committee Chairs and the Chief Executive.

As such they are key guardians of the reputation of the Police Authority with a responsibility to promote the Authority's profile locally, regionally and nationally. Consequently, following a needs assessment, they will be provided with media training. The requirement for refresher training will be assessed as part of the annual member and staff appraisal process.

Equally it is felt that some advice on presentation skills would benefit the Authority, particularly members who undertake community engagement and consultation exercises.

Governance

The delivery of this strategy and associated activities will be reported to the Community Engagement Committee every quarter, with a review of the action plan on an annual basis.

Measuring Success

The success of this strategy will be monitored through action/delivery plans. When these plans are agreed, each action will have a responsible officer and timescale.

The method of evaluation by activity varies, from numbers attending meetings, to coverage, to responses to questionnaires, to the qualitative nature of the response to soliciting information by postal questionnaire, face-to face or by telephone.

Assumptions

The successful implementation of this communications strategy will depend on a number of assumptions including:

- The commitment of the Authority to adopt the strategy and to support its implementation in terms of resource.
- The Authority's decision to consult using different and extended methodologies.

- Any change in Government or Government policy which alters the current expectations being placed on Authorities and Forces.
- The availability of finance and resources to support the initiatives arising from this strategy.
- The 'newsworthy' element of the Authority's work – eg, public meetings, controversy, consultation exercises for feedback.
- Clarity and timeliness of briefing material.

Conclusion

In support of this Strategy an Annual Activity Plan (Appendix A), setting out the key communications activities for the year ahead, against which progress can be measured.

It is acknowledged that its success depends upon a number of critical factors and that all members and staff of the Authority will endeavour to assist in its development and delivery.

Communications Action and Delivery Plan 2010

Appendix A

Activity	Owner	Timescale /Completion date	Target/Objective
Media Relations	BT	Ongoing	30 proactive per annum Raise awareness of Authority Business (Objectives1-6)
Council Tax Consultation to inform budget setting process	CE Officer	January 2010	Informed decision Making (Objective 1,3,)
Council Tax leaflet	BT	Feb 2010	Improve information flow about decisions taken (Objective 1,4,6)
Annual Policing Plan	Force/PA Working Group/BT	March 31 st	Inform public of policing delivery and priorities (Objective 1,2,4,6)
Three year Strategic Policing Plan	Force/PA Working Group/BT	March 31 st	Inform public of strategic aims of policing priorities (Objective 1,2,4,6)
Council Tax survey	CE Officer	April 30th	Obtain public views (Objective 3)
Spring Information Newsletter to all households (TBC)	BT/PA	May 30th	Improve information flow to public (Objective 1-4)
Information Leaflet – about the Police Authority	BT/PA	Completed	Raise awareness of PA role (Objective 1-4)
Information Leaflet – how to get involved	BT/PA	Jan 2010	Increased engagement (Objective 1,3)
Partner newsletter	PAS/BT	Every 6 months	Improved partnership working (Objective 2)
Stakeholder ezine	PAS/BT	4-6 per annum	Improved information flow to stakeholders (Objective 1,2)
Environmental Scanning	BT	Weekly	Awareness of members to topical issues (Objective 5)
Question of the Quarter	BT	Quarterly	Discover public awareness/views

			(Objective 3)
Website	BT	Ongoing	Improved accessibility to information on PA (Objective 1-5)
Summary of Annual Policing Plan	BT	June 2010	Inform public on aims of Policing Plan (Objective 1-4,6)
Partner Seminar	CE officer	TBA	Engage with partners (Objective 2)
Members Leaflet	BT	Ongoing	Increased accessibility to members (Objective 1,)
Proactive engagement – and feedback outcomes	CE officer	TBA	Obtain informed public views and give confidence that these are being heeded (Objective 3,6)
Consultation – Citizens Panel	CE officer	TBA	Obtain representative public views (Objective 3,6)
Meeting Minutes and Agendas	PAS	Ongoing	Inform on PA work and decisions (Objective 1,6)
Independent Custody Information	PA/BT		Confidence in system and recruitment of visitors (Objective 1,6)
Local Policing Summary – three versions	BT	End Sep 2010	Inform the public on local performance against priorities, raise awareness (Objective 1-4,6)
Seminars specific groups and feedback outcomes	CE Officer	1 per quarter	To share views from different community sectors (Objective 2,3)
Develop Branding Material	BT	Ongoing	To create a meaningful, recognisable identity for the Authority (Objective 1)
Dialogue with local and national influencers	Members	Ongoing	Raise awareness of the challenges facing the Authority and associated plans (Objective 1-5)
Specific Campaign	BT	Ongoing	Leaflets to inform public of localised improvements (Objective 1-4)
Events – Open Days, Fairs and Public Meetings	PA/BT	May-Sep	PA attendance at fairs, organisation of open day with partners.