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**East Dunbartonshire Council**

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**EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL  
SOCIAL WORK SERVICES**

**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT**

A guide to delivering effective communications for Social Work staff

**East Dunbartonshire Council  
Social Work Service**

**Communications Toolkit**

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## **1. Introduction.**

The purpose of this communication toolkit is to provide a framework to enable the Social Work Service to communicate effectively with employees, partners and stakeholders.

It is important to engage effectively with employees and all stakeholders as good communications support effective practice, service user satisfaction, service planning and development and are key to delivering high quality and modern social work services in East Dunbartonshire.

The Social Work Service is therefore committed to communicating clearly, openly, and regularly with staff and stakeholders, in line with the Council's Corporate Communication Strategy.

The communication toolkit has been developed to support the delivery of effective communications that are accurate, timely, relevant and reliable through a range of appropriate methods and formats. Effective communication will support the delivery of key objectives detailed in the Social Work service plan.

The toolkit will streamline and standardise the ways in which the Service communicates national and local policy and information on service provision. The Services' transparent, open and consultative approach to communications should deliver better outcomes for service users.

This communication toolkit will also apply to the multidisciplinary working the Social Work Service undertakes to meet the requirements of local and national policies, including the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Changing Lives policy.

### **1.1 Communication Toolkit Aims**

Social Work Service will use this Communications Toolkit to deliver the following communications aims:

- To determine how the Social Work Service will communicate internally with its employees and elected members
- To ensure that external communications are consistent, coordinated and focussed to meet the needs of those that services are provided to
- To determine how up-to-date information about Social Work Services, including the information that must be provided by law, will be provided
- To determine how Social Work policies, plans and information regards service delivery and change should be publicised and consulted on
- To ensure that Social Work Service information is designed and delivered appropriately in keeping with Corporate Guidelines
- To make sure the people who use services and their carers are fully informed about our services and procedures, including complaints procedures.

- To work effectively with partners to provide effective multi-agency service information to service users and carers
- To ensure that the Council's equality and diversity policies are met.

## **1.2 Stakeholders**

Key external and internal stakeholders for the Social Work Service are:

### **External Stakeholders**

- Service Users and their Carers
- NHS Services
- Community Planning Partnership
- Voluntary / Community Groups
- Scottish Government Departments
- Police
- Housing Organisations

### **Internal Stakeholders**

- Social Work Service Employees
- Trade Unions
- Elected Members

## **2 Corporate Communication Strategy**

The Council's Corporate Communication Strategy, The Guide to Public Affairs, was produced in 2005 and provides clear guidance on all aspects of communications, including the corporate identity and logo, corporate communications guidelines and advice on internal and external communications. It contains comprehensive information on the Council's media and marketing services and should be the first point of contact for producing communications. The Public Affairs Team is based in the Council's Headquarters at Tom Johnston House, Civic Way, Kirkintilloch and the Team can be contacted on 0141 578 8152.

### **2.1 Brand and Identity**

The Council's logo comprises a large red 'e' followed by the Council name and it includes the Council's website address. The logo is available in colour and is also available in black and white and reversed formats depending on the type of publication or promotional material it is required for.

The Council's logo should appear on all corporate documents, Council publications and partnership publications. It is available to download on the Council's intranet site the Hub. The Council's logo should not be altered in any way and guidance on its use is available through Public Affairs.

It is important that the Council's brand is recognised by all service users and Public Affairs can advise all Services on corporate standards and branding to ensure that Council activity is recognised.

## **2.2 Plain English**

The Council adopt the use of plain English in all its publications and on its website. This ensures that customers and service users are being provided with information that is easy to understand.

Plain English should be used in all policy documents and internal communications as well as in information to service users and in formal publications.

Appendix A provides some guidance on the use of plain English. A comprehensive guide to writing for the website is available from Public Affairs which includes guidance on plain English and on the corporate style for written materials.

## **2.3 Translation and Interpretation**

The Council has a Translation and Interpretation Protocol which provides information on how the Council will provide information to those in the community who require it in alternative languages or alternative formats.

The Translation and Interpretation Protocol has been developed to ensure that the Council meets its Equality and Diversity responsibilities and provides details on how the needs of those with language difficulties, disabilities will be met.

All Council publications contain information on how to obtain translations and alternative formats.

In addition to the provision of translated documents in community languages or alternative formats such as audio and Braille and the provision of community language or BSL interpreters when required, the Council also subscribes to Language Line and to Type Talk.

Type Talk enables those with hearing and speech difficulties to communicate with the Council through text telephones, whilst Language Line, clearly displayed in all Council Offices, is a direct telephone interpreting service, which can be called whenever anyone with a language interpretation requirement arrives in a council office.

The Translation and Interpretation Protocol is published on both the Council's website and the intranet site – The Hub.

### **3. Internal Communication**

At the operational level, protection procedures must be followed for all aspects of communication relating to protection issues. It is every Social Work Service officer's responsibility, irrespective of the nature of their work or its location, to follow procedure on all protection case, and to quickly report any perceived concerns in the system.

In order to ensure the security and confidentiality of information, Social Work will adopt a Clear Desk Policy which all staff within the Service will be required to follow.

There are a number of different internal communication options, depending on the type and urgency of information that needs to be conveyed. The most used options and when they should be used are summarised below.

#### **3.1 Meetings**

Meetings are direct, regular ways of exchanging information and cascading information through the Service. The Corporate, Directorate, Service and Team regular meeting structure will ensure that information is effectively delivered to staff at all levels and enable issues developing within the Service to be fed upwards to management.

##### **Directorate Management Team**

Head of Social Work attends to report on issues relating to Social Work Service and reports back to Social Work Service on issues arising across the Directorate and information reports from the Corporate Management Team.

##### **Social Work Management Team**

This is the forum for Senior Managers and Head of Social Work to address issues across the Service and manage the strategic direction of the Social Work Service.

##### **Team Meetings**

Team meetings enable managers and team leaders to cascade information to all members of staff, discuss relevant issues enabling all staff to input to these and to collate feedback on Service delivery.

##### **One to one meetings**

One to one meetings between managers or team leaders and their reporting staff ensure that confidential issues can be raised, regular updates are exchanged and the council's Personal Development Management Process (PMDP) is delivered.

##### **Issue-based meetings**

Issue based meetings are usually task and finish groups and are often called as and when required with the relevant staff rather than scheduled in on a regular basis.

### **3.2 Social Work Newsletter**

The Social Work Service has introduced a bi-annual social work newsletter. This provides information to staff across the Service on national and local policy, Service quality and performance reporting, training programmes, Service awards, and staff survey results. A template for the newsletter has been produced by Public Affairs who arrange the design and print of each issue. The Newsletter is issued to all Social Work staff and Elected Members.

### **3.3 Staff Magazine - EDIT**

Edit is the Council's staff magazine and is produced quarterly in Spring, Summer Autumn and Winter each year. It features Corporate information as well as information on successes by individuals and teams across the Council.

The Social Work Service will ensure that it feeds Service information and successes to the Edit editor as a means of informing staff across the Council on issues relating to Social Work and of the successes achieved by the Service.

### **3.4 Email**

Email is an immediate form of communication and as it is written, provides an audit trail. It can be effective in conveying information both one to one and also to a wider group or even Service-wide. It should be remembered that email only reaches those who have access to the Council's IT network, which often excludes field staff. Care should be taken over the assumption that emails once sent have been received and noted. Staff are not always at their desks and do not always have access to their emails. If the content of an email is urgent then a phone call to ensure it has been received should be considered. Appendix B contains useful hints on the use of email.

### **3.5 Circulars and Bulletins**

Circulars and Bulletins form direct sources of information often on single issues and sometimes in order to instruct on a course of action that must be taken. The Chief Executive issues bulletins as issues arise across the Council. Examples of Chief Executive's Bulletins include those on Equality and Diversity, the Shared Services agenda with other Councils and on the implementation of Single Status. The Social Work Service can also make use of circulars and bulletins, which can be printed and distributed therefore an effective way of communicating with non-office based staff who do not have access to the intranet or email system. .

### **3.6 Intranet - The Hub**

The Intranet provides up to the minute information which is easily accessible to all those with access to the Council's IT network. In addition to corporate information, policies and guidance, all Social Work policies and procedures should be published to the Council's intranet site.

The intranet is also the source of information on HR policies and procedures, including training information and the Council's Performance Management and Development Programme (PMDP). The intranet also contains a comprehensive Council directory with details of all staff and locations

### **3.7 Staff Induction Process**

Staff induction is included in internal communications as it is an important mechanism for informing new members of staff of the organisation and procedures of the Council. This is important in establishing how Social Work fits into the wider council agenda. The comprehensive induction programme ensures that all employees have a common understanding of the way the Council operates and includes:

The Council's commitment to the citizens of East Dunbartonshire

The Council's commitment to its employees.

How the Council and its services are structured

The principal policies which support good personnel practice towards employees.

Know their obligations in terms of the Council's Health and Safety policy.

The Council's Information, Communication and Technology policies.

### **3.8 Communicating with Elected Members**

#### **Media Protocol for working with Elected Members**

This protocol, published on the Hub or available through Public Affairs, advises staff and Elected Members how the Council will work with the elected members and the media. It includes guidance on press releases and photo calls and working with conveners and Councillors in the new multi-member wards.

#### **Social Work Committee Reports**

Regular reports will be provided to the Social Work Services Committee on key matters affecting the business of the service e.g. performance areas, inspection & audit outcomes, legislative change, and service development.

#### **Elected Member Technical Notes**

Technical notes are issued to elected members on an issue basis to advise them on developments and action taken.



## **4. External Communications**

The Regulation of Care Act requires information about Social Work registered services to be provided to service users and carers. External communications are those used to engage with a wide range of stakeholders including clients and carers (thus complying with the legislation), as well as partner care delivery organisations, voluntary groups etc.

A wide range of communication options are available to deliver information and collect feedback. The most effective method of communication will depend on the issue and the circumstances and should be adapted accordingly. The most frequently used methods of communication are when they are appropriate are summarised below.

### **4.1 Council website**

East Dunbartonshire has a high percentage of computer ownership in its household and an accessible range of computers throughout its libraries. The internet is therefore a powerful tool for providing large amounts of information to the wider public, partners and other organisations, service users and carers. It is also an effective way of encouraging feedback through the Your Say comment and complaint system or by email.

The service will ensure that all current Social Work information that is available electronically is published on the Council website and will work towards developing regular updates on social work policy and performance and consultations to be made available via the internet. Publications can also be published on the website in downloadable format.

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, all committee reports are published on the Council's website and these, along with all information published on the website become exempt from FOI requests as the information is publicly available and accessible.

The Social Work Service has a website editor and all information to be available on the website should be provided to the editor to be published.

### **4.2 Publications**

A range of publications on Social Work Services are available for service users and carers and further leaflets will be produced as required. All publications, including reports should be produced in consultation with Public Affairs who provide the marketing and design function for the Council. Work is currently under way with Public Affairs to redevelop the current suite of publications and to produce them in a Social Work house style that complies with the Council's corporate identity but ensures that they are easily recognisable as Social Work information.

Section 2.3 provides information on the community language and alternative format requirements for all Council publications.

#### **4.3 Events and Public Meetings**

The service can use these events to inform and gather information/feedback on issues such as service developments, delivery or change. They are a useful means of informing the public on service policy and an effective way of measuring impact and effectiveness within the community.

These events should be held in accessible venues, suitable for all stakeholders to attend and /or participate in. They will take special note of such needs as disability, dietary and language requirements.

Appendix C provides some useful guidance on the organisation of and preparation required for holding public events and meetings event.

#### **4.4 Complaints and Comments Procedure – Your Say**

Comments or complaints regarding the Service are one of the best ways of determining if the services provided meet service user's expectations. They provide vital information on improving our services.

The current comment and complaint system, Your Say, is widely available and accessible through Social Work offices, customer information packs and the website. Comments and complaints are fed into the strategic planning process so that services can be adapted as required.

#### **4.5 Council Magazine - Edlife**

The Council magazine is produced four times a year and is distributed to all postal addresses in East Dunbartonshire. It provides information on a range of Council services, developments and achievements and is therefore an effective means of communicating with the overall residential population of the Council area. Social Work will ensure that information on developing services and service successes are reported to all residents through Edlife.

#### **4.6 Media**

The local media can also be an effective way of providing general information on the Service to residents throughout the area. The Council's communication strategy details how media relations are managed and any member of Social Work who is approached by

a journalist should make no comment and refer the journalist to the Council's press office in Public Affairs.

Press enquiries received by Public Affairs will be referred to the relevant Service manager for response but all responses will be issued through the press office. The Council's Media Relations Protocol (see section 3.8) provides guidance on how the Council will engage with the Social Work Convener and other elected members on media relations issues.

Media relations can be proactive as well as reactive. Social Work will ensure that Public Affairs are advised of all good news and service successes and developments so that press releases and photo calls can be arranged for these.

#### **4.7 Survey/Questionnaires**

The service uses a range of surveys and questionnaires to collect information, data and feedback from clients and carers. This is a useful way to receive feedback on service provision, service quality and areas for improvement.

Surveys and questionnaires can also be used in consultation exercises with all stakeholders on developing policy issues and the implementation of new legislation.

The Service should consider all forms of surveying, including printed sheets, telephone and online possibilities. Guidance on surveys and questionnaires can be found at Appendix D.

#### **Stakeholder Meetings and Forums**

The Social Work Service needs to ensure effective communication is supported through existing structures of meetings with external organisations. These include:

##### **Home Visits**

These are important ways in which the Social Work Service can communicate with clients and carers. Social Work attends home visits with clients as part of their care management and assessment work and should continue to do so with a view to providing flexible appointments (evening/weekend) to facilitate carers/relatives unable to attend during normal business hours.

##### **Partners and Commissioned Service's Meetings**

The Service works with a number of user and partner organisations in working towards delivering either joint services or contracted services on behalf of Social Work. It is important that regular meetings are held to monitor these services and to inform service delivery practice, development and change.

##### **Scottish Government and Health Service Meetings**

Social work Service will ensure that appropriate officers attend all relevant Scottish Government and Health Service Provider meetings relating to Social Work policy development or implementation. This will ensure that the Council's Social Work Service is up to date with developments and can where possible input into the change agenda.

#### **Carers Forums**

The service will also continue to work with and develop for example user carer's forums to improve local services.

#### **Equality Forums**

Social Work will also where appropriate, support forums that are set up to deliver the equality agenda such as those dealing with disability and access.

### **5. VERSION CONTROL**

Policy Name	EDC Social Work – Communications Toolkit
Status	Operational
Issue Date	November 2007
Author/Isser	A Short
Version	1
Circulation	Intranet/Manager/
Date of Review	November 2008

## **Appendix A                      Plain English Guidance Notes**

Plain English is crisp, well thought out English that can be easily understood by the person it is intended for.

Vary the length of your sentences and try to aim for an average of 15-20 words. Make only one point in a sentence, plus perhaps one subsidiary but related point.

Use words which are more personal and conversational e.g. “I”, “you”, and “we”, these help relax the writing style and make the readers more involved.

Everyone stands to benefit if service information is written clearly and set out properly. Poorly written documents cause confusion, and much time and money can be spent sorting out misunderstandings. Using Plain English can:

speed up service delivery  
improve our image with the public  
avoid confusion and customer irritability

Avoid legalistic, pompous and unusual words. Avoid words like “aforesaid”, “expeditiously”, “notwithstanding” and “herewith”. They add nothing to the meaning of the sentence and confuse people. Unusual words may sound impressive but they often conceal weak ideas.

### **Use less often**

accordingly  
applicant, tenant  
commence, initiate  
in respect of  
particulars  
persons  
statutory  
utilise  
linkage

### **Prefer**

so, therefore  
you  
start, begin  
concerning  
details  
people, you  
by law  
use  
link

## **Appendix B**

### **E-mail Guidance Notes**

E-mail is widely used amongst office-based council employees. The Council's ICT department has produced an e-mail policy available on the intranet which describes how e-mail should be used. All staff should ensure that they are familiar with its contents and their responsibilities whilst using the system.

Some useful hints when working with e-mail

#### **DO**

Regard email as official communication and remember that any expression of fact, intention and opinion can be held against you or the Council  
Keep your passwords to yourself lock out your screen if you are away from your desk  
Where possible, read your emails daily and respond directly.  
Activate your out of office facility if you are away from the office for a couple of days or more and deactivate it on your return.  
Make sure that all emails have been addressed correctly and that you have used a short and descriptive subject header with an appropriate salutation and ending (Hello , Hi, thanks, kind regards)

#### **DON'T**

Send confidential information by e-mail as this is not a totally secure system  
Send trivial e-mails or e-mails to those who do not need to see them  
Spread unwanted chain letter e-mails or similar  
Edit, alter an e-mail to mislead or create a false record  
Access or use passwords and read emails to which you are not authorised  
Make personal or derogative comments in emails regards service users/employees or any stakeholder.

#### **Composing a good e-mail to service users/stakeholders**

It is becoming more popular for service users to communicate with the service via e-mails rather than sending letters as it's quick, cheap, easy and can quickly produce results.

Choose words carefully to make your meaning clear and avoid using jargon or council abbreviations  
Use plain English  
Anticipate what the customer will need to know and communicate courteously as e-mails can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted  
Report any harassing or in any way unpleasant e-mails to your line manager immediately  
Use salutations and appropriate endings (Hello/Dear Mrs Smith...yours sincerely/faithfully)  
Ensure that the e-mail answers the service users enquiry and that it has further contact details.

## Appendix C

## Guidance on planning Events and Public Meetings

Public meetings are an effective form of consultation when well organised

### Organising meetings

<b><i>Purpose</i></b>	Be clear about the reason for the meeting. What do you want to have happened by the end of it?
<b><i>Who to Involve</i></b>	Is it open to all or is it for a target group? What role should councillors play?
<b><i>Tone</i></b>	Should it be formal or informal?
<b><i>How much to cover</i></b>	Be realistic. There is often a tendency to try to do too much at a single meeting.
<b><i>Participation</i></b>	How will you encourage participation on the day? How will you avoid one or two people dominating? Do you require specialist help, e.g. trained facilitators?
<b><i>Information</i></b>	How much information should participants receive on the day or before the event? Do not swamp people with information but make sure that they have what they need to make an informed contribution or decision. Make sure any information is written in plain English.
<b><i>Date</i></b>	Avoid clashes with other events – contact Public Affairs to check. Avoid festivals/holy days/holidays/major sporting events on TV. Make sure you give enough notice to participants.
<b><i>Time</i></b>	Pick a convenient time for the audience. Day, evening, weekend?
<b><i>The Venue</i></b>	Within the ‘natural’ geographic boundary of the target group. Needs to be safe and well lit externally. Close to public transport (provide info on this). Accessible – both to the premises and during the meeting. Comfortable – heating, suitable chairs etc. Power points. Adequate toilet facilities. Appropriate size for the number of people expected Parking facilities.
<b><i>Room layout:</i></b>	Avoid ‘them/us’ top table layout for consultation (horseshoe better)

If there are displays make sure there is space and time for people to look at them.

**Refreshments:** These are useful to offer before the meeting starts and can provide a break mid-meeting encouraging less formal discussions.

**Chairing** Consider this well in advance and identify someone capable/independent/acceptable to the audience.

**Publicity/Promotion** Is this organised?

**Equipment** Do you need a loud speaker system Microphones?  
Overhead projector  
Extension cables  
Flip chart  
Pens  
Get in early and set up any equipment beforehand.

**Helpers** Do you need anyone to?  
Register people as they arrive  
Take minutes  
Write on flip charts  
Facilitate small groups  
Prepare tea and coffee

**Handouts** Have enough for all plus spares.

### **Equal opportunity considerations for public meetings**

Make sure you have covered all equal opportunity aspects.

**Crèche** Include crèche facilities.

**Transport** The meeting should be close to public transport.  
Good practice is to organise a minibus to/from your meeting with a series of pick up points. (NB public transport does not always meet the needs of the elderly, or infirm, or w

**Interpreting** Will you need interpreters or signers?  
You should publicise that they could be available on request well in advance.

**Disabilities** Is the venue wheelchair accessible  
Are there accessible toilets  
Organise a loop system for people with hearing difficulties.



### **Publicity/promotion**

If you are holding a public meeting or an event make sure it is properly publicised. This should be arranged through Public Affairs who will advise on placing adverts in the local media and will produce posters and supporting information in the Council's corporate style.

Make sure any publicity:

Is clear and avoids jargon

Is concise yet includes all relevant details

Includes a contact point for further information

Is appropriately targeted

Is appropriately distributed

Goes out well ahead of the meeting

Includes information on interpreting/crèche/loops etc

If you decide to hold a public meeting, consider splitting up into workshops for a while to discuss the issue and then come back together at the end to feed various views into the full meeting

This can be helpful in a number of ways:

More people get the opportunity to speak and voice their opinions;

The meeting is not dominated by the loudest individual;

If the issue is particularly controversial splitting into workshops can take the heat out of the meeting and allow for more rational discussion avoiding confrontation between the community and the Council or amongst the community.

## Appendix D                      Surveys and Questionnaires Guidance

A well designed questionnaire is crucial to the success of all types of survey. Time spent getting it right can save much more time later trying to salvage something from the results of a poorly designed questionnaire. In many cases it is appropriate to get specialists to develop questionnaires to ensure they are fit for purpose.

A good questionnaire will:

*Collect relevant data* – the questions should generate relevant information that can be analysed and interpreted; minimise bias- the order in which questions are asked, wording of individual questions and actual words used should not distort the information that is generated.

*Produce comparable data* – the questions should be unambiguous so that they are interpreted in the same way by all respondents. It may also be necessary to produce data that are comparable with other surveys.

*Motivate the respondent* – the questionnaire should not be too long, the questions easily understood and the topics relevant/interesting.

Closed questions (multiple choice questions) should be used whenever possible. These force the respondent to select from pre-determined answers. It is important that the supplied responses reflect the full range of potential responses, and that they are balanced. You should also allow people to say that they don't know or have no opinion.

The draft questionnaire should be tested, or 'piloted', on a sample of around ten to twenty people. The pilot allows you to check how well the questionnaire works and whether the questions are being interpreted by the respondents in the way you intended.

### Response rate

Few surveys achieve a 100% response rate. Because people in the sample are not all equally likely to respond, the results will be biased towards the views of the people most likely to respond. Response bias cannot be completely eliminated, but it can be minimised by maximising the response rate.

Postal surveys characteristically have a low response rate – usually well below 50 per cent. You can have very little confidence that the findings from such low response rates are really representatives of the target population. Postal surveys should therefore only be undertaken if other methods would be impractical and every effort should be taken to increase the response rate. For example:

Publicise the survey;

Secure and publicise the support of appropriate local groups and so on;

The survey envelope should not look like junk-mail and should be addressed by name where possible;

The survey form should be well designed, attractive, short and easy to complete;

A covering letter which is courteous, persuasive, explains the purpose of the research, gives assurances of confidentiality where appropriate and general instructions about how to complete the questionnaire, can be included;

A reminder letter, together with another copy of the questionnaire, should be sent to people who have not responded;

Follow-up non-respondents by telephone if possible; and

Consider offering incentives, such as a prize draw