

CIPR Pride Awards – submission

A team together – pushing the boundaries

Category 23 – Best In-House Public Relations Team

Brief description of the team

The reputation of Staffordshire County Council and its Communications Team has grown from strength to strength. Employing 21 communications professionals from a cross section of communications disciplines, from journalism and marketing and graphic design to new media, the team has grown from being seen a back office support service, to having a voice and influence at the very top table.

Our vision is to engage, not just inform. With over 830,000 residents and 30,000 staff spread over our predominately rural country, this is a challenge. But, pulling together as one team, the evidence shows we are achieving our vision.

Business Objectives

- Increase the percentage of people who feel well informed about county council services.
- Successfully manage the organisation's reputation and raise our profile locally, regionally and nationally.
- Contribute to the achievement of the county council's strategic priorities through the provision of excellent communications support.

A list of outstanding achievements – (2006-2009)

- The number of people who feel informed about county council services soared to 61%; 2% higher than our target and 6% higher than last year.
- Producing a fresh and informative resident's magazine (Your Staffordshire). 69% of people surveyed said they found it the most helpful way to find information about the council (appendix 1).
- Consistently good feedback about our stakeholder communications– from our Partners' (appendix 2) and MP Updates to internal bulletins.
- Masterminding a hard-hitting campaign securing £50,000 from the Big Lottery's 'People's Millions Fund' to support Knutton Community Farm (appendix 3).
- Leading the fight against 'Lapland West Midlands' with a media campaign which quashed the bogus event (appendix 4).
- Providing crisis management support to a school with a major Asbestos contamination.
- Receiving recognition from the Local Government Association for our 'My county council' campaign.

- Giving the extra edge that resulted in a winning a glittering MJ Achievement Award 2009 for councillor development.
- Receiving national recognition for our communications surrounding the single status agreement.
- Introducing a new internal employee reward scheme in response to staff feedback. Two winners have gone forward to the national Local Council Worker of the Year and one has just won the national accolade.
- Masterminding the staff Celebration Day which was attended by 10,000 people.
- Introducing a new intranet discussion forum which had 44,000 visits in the first few months.
- One of the first local government communication teams to deliver advertising on our own website.
- Press office success - In 2008/9 we had 89% positive or neutral coverage of approximately 2,500 press releases distributed.
- 88% of local and national journalists are very or fairly satisfied with the press office service.
- Commendations by the BBC, ITV and Midlands Today on the support they received for their coverage of the recent county council elections.
- Rugeley Bypass communications– A consultation and communications campaign about this major new road structure that saw 4000 people came to celebrate at the launch event and so no opposition (appendix 5).
- Manage the communications and engagement surrounding the multi-million pound Building Schools for the Future programme in Staffordshire (appendix 6).

An example of a particular campaign

Lapland West Midlands – quashing a bogus event and saving thousands of pounds

An event that bore a striking resemblance to the Christmas-scam in the New Forest was advertised on December 2 2008. We knew that the local authority had received complaints from dissatisfied customers who felt ripped-off and that their council have failed to protect them. We had to move fast and lead the council in protecting our residents with a hard-hitting PR campaign.

A flurry of press releases and interviews followed that aimed to prevent the sale of tickets, ensure that anyone had purchased tickets received a full refund if the event failed and protect and enhance the county council's reputation as guardian of consumer rights.

Local and national print and broadcast media joined with us in the fight against the scam that saw the organisers cancel the event, receive no revenue and give residents information on how to get a refund.

Without the communications team leading the way, the county council would have had to initiate High Court action to close the event – costing in excess of £10,000, plus officer time in response to complaints – the New Forest received 2,000 calls.

Evaluation of those achievements – including analysis of performance against budget

- The communications team has a budget of just £375,000 to cover all campaigns and two major publications. With over 830,000 residents, this is an excellent rate of return.
- Your Staffordshire - costs just 8p per resident per edition.
- Knutton Farm campaign – A budget of just £600 secured £50,000 funding.
- Lapland West Midlands – Communications staff costs only; saved residents thousands of pounds and hundreds of hours of officer time.

The reason the team is special – what makes them stand out?

Communicating to so many staff and residents isn't easy. Add into that mix a vast array of partners, media and other key stakeholders, but thanks to the dedication and drive of the Communications Team, we are catching everyone's attention in a big way.

Our team is forward thinking – we value new emerging media as a means to engage in the interactive way that today's audiences expect. Our new media officer is now rolling out a range of new media tools to compliment our more traditional mechanisms and challenging others to put the need for interactivity at the very heart of their campaign planning.

We're a small team considering the impact of the county council on people's day to day lives. The team supports services to communicate often unpopular decisions to the right people, in the right way, at the right time. Not a small task but we smash our targets and deliver award-winning campaigns by working with passion and professionalism.

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