

Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)

Communications Plan

1. Purpose

To provide a co-ordinated approach to communications.

2. Anticipated outcome

Members of CYPS can work confidently with colleagues and partners to improve outcomes for children and young people together.

3. Background

The creation of Children and Young People's Services supports Every Child Matters. The focus is on the child or young person rather than service. To this end the Children Act 2004 required education and social care for children and young people to amalgamate.

The coming together of all the 'duty to co-operate'¹ partners is represented by the Children's Trust. Devon County Council is the lead agency in ensuring that all those who work with children and young people, be they from private, voluntary or statutory sectors, work together. A variety of means is being developed for the practical application of this vision, and it is largely delivered through CYPS.

The CYPS communications plan is therefore interlinked with that of the Children's Trust and seeks not to duplicate roles but to ensure they are complementary.

4. Focus

The key focus for this planning is therefore the staff who work within CYPS, other Devon County Council Directorates and schools. Communications with elected members has also been considered.

Information sharing on individual children is not included as this is found within service plans and is also a major strategy within the Information Sharing Protocol and Contactpoint (previously called the Information Sharing Index).

5. Principles

5.1 We recognise that:

- CYPS is part of Devon County Council and will work within its frameworks;
- the purpose of our collective services is to improve outcomes for all children and young people;
- in order to support their leadership within communities, good communication with elected members is essential;
- all staff are committed to improving outcomes but different people will have different perspectives and interests due to different roles;
- good communications are key to effective working;
- good communications will rely on a variety of methods ;
- appropriate communications are hard to achieve; all need to contribute to make them successful
- over-communication, especially through email, can be counter-productive.

¹ These are the partners upon whom a duty is laid in the Children Act 2004: the County Council, District Councils, the Learning and Skills Council, the Strategic Health Authority, the Primary Care Trust, the Police, the Probation Service, the Youth Offending Service, Connexions.

5.2 We are committed to

- open decision-making whenever possible, with reasons for non-disclosure made clear when this is appropriate;
- two-way communications which encourage dialogue and contribute our capacity to make the right decision;
- timely communications;
- clear language;
- communications that are fit for their purpose, which includes the right recipients.

6. Directorate expectations

6.1 Freedom of Information means that all communications can be requested, seen and published unless there is a legal reason for not doing so. See

http://www.devon.gov.uk/freedom_of_information for further detail.

- always be professional in your communications;
- delete unnecessary records as a matter of practice.

6.2 Only communicate with the media with advice from our communications team.

6.3 Email - we want less of it

- speak to people rather than using email;
- always ask yourself 'is this email really necessary?' before sending it;
- 'reply to all' should rarely be used - be selective;
- remember your email can easily be sent on - do you want that wording cascaded?;
- avoid sending on if you can - does the recipient want all the pages that went before?;
- use links rather than attachments - how many times does your machine choke up under the weight of what you receive?;
- remember that not everyone has access to email: ensure no-one is left out;
- use Calendar
 - keep it up-to-date;
 - send invitations to meetings by Calendar.

7. Directorate pledge

7.1 We will:

- try to use plain language rather than initials or jargon and will help each other to do this;
- have an 'events calendar' to assist planning that will include key dates from our partners;
- use the staff survey and other evaluations to improve the way we work;
- exhort and encourage colleagues and find ways of celebrating good work;
- display pictures of the children and young people of Devon where we work to remind ourselves who we are doing this for;
- make the notes and Action Log of the CYPS Strategic Leadership Group available to everyone in CYPS
<http://staff.devon.gov.uk/cyps/cypscommitteesgroups/cypsslq.htm>
- circulate the minutes of each branch Senior Management Team (SMT) to all members of the Joint SMTs;
- have termly meeting of all CYPS managers;
- using a wide range of newsletters and other tools.

7.2 Team / Service / Project Working

We will communicate work outcomes by

- promoting good practice within teams of regular meetings, briefings and internal communications;
- being clear about what key messages we need to communicate and then deciding the best way of communicating them;
- following the Devon Way <http://staff.devon.gov.uk/devonway.htm>
- consider carefully who might need a checklist. This will be specific to your area of work but you should consider information on what we are doing, using
 - Who else in CYPS? e.g.
 - Managers;
 - Staff.
 - Who else in DCC? e.g.
 - HR;
 - Finance;
 - Planning.
 - Partners? e.g.
 - Parents;
 - Children and young people;
 - Children's Trust partnership;
 - Schools (heads, staff and /or governors);
 - Private and voluntary sector.
 - Local Government? e.g.
 - DCC elected members - remember local members (see below);
 - District Councils;
 - MPs.
 - National Bodies?

8. Who will give support?

8.1 CYPS has a good communication team - use it

- David Hutchings: 2594 - media and education specialist;
- Louise Raymond: 3578 - media and all CYPS matters;
- Kelly Doonan: 3698 - internal and external publications;

8.3 Ensure that any staff in your teams who do not have email access receive messages in other ways.

Keeping County Councillors well informed

A summary of CYPS protocol for communications with members

1. The County Council is accountable for our work and Councillors are Devon's democratically elected representatives. It is important that they are well-informed and we need to ensure that this is done appropriately.
2. There are a number of issues which we need to consider:
 - ◆ The appropriate level of information - councillors should not be overwhelmed by minutiae and they do receive a huge amount of information on a vast range of subjects. Some want to know more than others. Do not assume that they will have time to read all papers and absorb all the implications for their area. Where we provide information to individuals, it needs to be in a digestible form. *Give 'headlines' and offer follow-up on request.*
 - ◆ Councillors know their areas, including the sensitivities, and can assist us in resolving issues. If they are not involved or informed they can be embarrassed. If DCC is engaged in an issue locally and they are not informed it is not conducive to a positive working relationship and does not show DCC in a good light with local people. *In local issues, remember the local Councillor.*
 - ◆ We have a responsibility to all members of the County Council, not just the majority party. *Respond thoughtfully and promptly to all requests.*
 - ◆ County Councillors are right to challenge us and may pose difficult questions. We welcome rigour in our work as part of our accountability and this approach helps ensure that we are considering things thoroughly. *Accept challenge as a check on what we are doing.*
 - ◆ We are in a period of change. Lines of decision-making are sometimes less clear given the developing role of the Children's Trust Partnership. We remain responsible to DCC and we are a lead partner in the Children's Trust. For a while this may mean doing things twice on some occasions. *Check out with a senior manager if in doubt.*
 - ◆ Some matters, in particular those relating to an individual, are confidential and it is not appropriate that they should be shared with members any more than anyone else. It is still appropriate to alert a member to the existence of sensitivities without providing details. *For matters of this kind, a senior officer should be the conduit of information.*
3. How we keep members informed:
 - ◆ Developing strategy
 - Papers to the Executive, Scrutiny, County Committees and working parties;
 - Strategy will be discussed with the appropriate portfolio holder, during development, by the senior officers involved, and the appropriateness of which committees should be involved will be agreed with SLG.
 - ◆ Local matters
 - If there are managers based locally they should make contact with their local councillors, normally in writing, so that councillors know whom to approach. Each service manager should agree with his or her team who should be in touch with members locally and at a strategic level;
 - If a matter is sensitive or significant, discuss communications with your line-manager or other appropriate senior officer.
4. **Rule of thumb**
 - 4.1 **Make sure your local member knows if there is:**
 - ◆ anything likely to reach the press or cause controversy;
 - ◆ a public meeting to discuss a local issue (consult on dates if possible);
 - ◆ a consultative exercise on a local issue (consult on dates if possible);
 - ◆ a formal visit by senior county councillors;
 - ◆ a local issue which may go to committee.
 - 4.2 Contact details for members are available from the DCC web-site at http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/democracymunities/county_councillors.htm. The geographical areas of members do change so do check.
 - 4.3 This CYPS protocol sits within DCC's formal requirements, with which all staff are required to abide.