



Bracknell Forest Partnership Communications Policy January 2011

1. Introduction

Effective communications are critical to the success of any initiative, particularly ones that seek to strategically integrate the delivery of services to improve the well-being of communities.

2. Background

This document has been prepared to act as the basis for a communications strategy that will support the Bracknell Forest Sustainable Community Strategy and the associated work of Bracknell Forest Partnership and the theme partnerships.

The strategy will seek to ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach to interactions with the community and local stakeholders. Given the diversity and size of Bracknell Forest Partnership, a communications programme will be complex and will require the development of key messages in line with best practice.

It should be noted that all promotion should be related to the Partnership's priorities and associated key messages.

3. Benefits

There are a wide range of benefits that will result from the communications and strategy:

- Strengthen partnership working across agencies
- Share information and reducing duplication of effort
- Improve service co-ordination and delivery
- Develop a shared understanding and commitment to key priorities
- Facilitate better links between the theme partnerships
- Encourage the local community to get involved
- Inform the community and other external stakeholders of the role and responsibilities of the partnerships
- Provide a mechanism for feedback to the community and stakeholders

4. Communications Objectives

- To ensure that members of the partnerships are well informed about the role, functions, achievements and priorities of the partnerships
- To increase public awareness and profile of the partnerships and their activities through a broad range of communications channels

- To champion a consistent message of Bracknell Forest as an inclusive, safe, green and healthy place to live, work and visit
- To raise the profile of Bracknell Forest, regionally and nationally

5. Target Audiences

These are identified as follows:

- i. Members of the partnerships
- ii. The agencies, organisations and sectors represented by the individual members of the partnerships
- iii. People who live, work or visit Bracknell Forest, including those who are traditionally understood to be 'hard to reach'
- iv. Agencies and organisations beyond the borough of Bracknell Forest that could help the partnerships to achieve their objectives
- v. Government and regional agencies

6. Key Messages

This strategy must be placed in the context of the Bracknell Forest Sustainable Community Strategy and the supporting plans and strategies of the theme partnerships.

The key messages regarding the partnerships fall into two tiers.

Tier 1 – Messages to support Partnership Operations

- The partnerships exist to improve the quality of life in Bracknell Forest;
- The partnerships are representative of people who live, work and study in Bracknell Forest;
- The partnerships exist to make better use of resources;
- The partnerships are a way of ensuring the views and ideas of the people of Bracknell Forest are sought and considered.

Tier 2 – Messages to support the delivery of partnership priorities as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy and related theme strategies and delivery plans.

7. Communications Channels

Dedicated BFP communications channel include the quarterly partnership newsletter and BFP website www.bracknellforestpartnership.co.uk. Positive messages about the work of the partnership, theme partnerships and individual partners will be displayed through these channels.

Shared communication channels will be drawn from those used by individual parties. These should include local papers, trade publications (such as Municipal Journal), national papers, local magazines (including parish publications), talking newspapers, partnership publications (including web sites, intranets, staff magazines and public magazines), and local radio.

These channels will be supplemented by specific initiatives such as promotional materials and campaigns/events. Media protocols and identified spokespeople are included in this strategy.

8. Media Protocols

Dealing with media enquiries

If you receive an enquiry from the media relating to Bracknell Forest Partnership, the Sustainable Community Strategy, or any project being undertaken by two or more partners working together, all those on the BFP Communications Working Group should be notified by email immediately.

If the enquiry relates specifically to Bracknell Forest Partnership, then the response should come directly from the Council and be signed off by the designated officer. Where possible, the response should be sent to the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board BEFORE it is sent to the journalist.

However, media deadlines mean that it is not always possible to wait for a response from each organisation before the response is sent – but every effort should be made for this to happen.

There will be occasions where it is appropriate for joint responses to media enquiries. This should be established at the initial email contact stage.

The media may well request that they speak to the people directly involved with the strategy; however, the initial port of call should always be the communications contacts. They will find out the nature of the media enquiry and alert the other members of their organisation.

All relevant support staff in both organisations must be alerted to the above protocol.

All requests for interviews, filming, photos etc should be channelled through the communications contacts in the first instance.

No photographs or recording will be permitted by anyone without prior approval.

Off the record comments

Sometimes journalists can ask for information “off the record” which can mean different things in different situations. The most reliable approach is to only ever give journalists information and comments which all organisations are happy to be published or broadcast.

No off the record comments to journalists will be given by any organisation in relation to Bracknell Forest Partnership.

Tips for handling media enquiries

- Don't panic – an ill considered response or “no comment” usually results in unfavourable coverage. Don't be afraid to say “I will have to call you back”
- Be polite – aggression implies you have something to hide
- Listen carefully and don't be drawn into comment
- Don't be afraid to ask questions and take notes – they certainly will
- Always deal with media calls immediately – journalists work to deadlines and become frustrated when not called back quickly
- Never tell a journalist something off the record – he/she could easily forget who gave the information and use it

- Always seek guidance from the relevant communications contact before making a response.

Proactive media/communications activity

Bracknell Forest Partnership will want to issue proactive information to the media, as well as to staff, the public and other stakeholders. This may be independently of each other or it may be jointly as appropriate.

For the media this could take many forms including face-to-face briefings, press conferences, photo calls and news releases.

Other communications may include Town & Country newspaper and BFP publications, website and newsletters.

All proactive activity will be planned jointly and in advance by all organisations in an agreed Action Plan. Any updates to this action plan will be agreed by all organisations.

All proactive information issued directly by any one organisation in the partnership will be agreed by the BFP Communications Working Group BEFORE it is sent to the media.

Key spokespeople

Key spokespeople for each organisation have been nominated to carry out media interviews and provide press comments as follows:

Partner	Key spokesperson	Deputy spokesperson
Bracknell Forest Council	Timothy Wheadon	Victor Nicholls
Thames Valley Police	Simon Bowden	Jon Goosey
Berkshire East PCT	Mary Purnell	tbc
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service	Steve Buck	tbc
Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action	Martin Gilman	Chris Cowap
Bracknell Regeneration Partnership	Helen Barnett	None
Bracknell Forest Homes	Caroline Titley	tbc
Town and Parish Councils	Chris Smith	tbc

9. Action

In order to achieve the objectives identified in section 4, the BFP Communications workstream has been developed, outlining key actions and deadlines. This workstream has been developed in line with the overarching action plan and work programme for the BFP Board and covers management of the BFP dedicated communications tools such as the BFP newsletter and website.

10. Resources

All partner agencies signed up to the strategy will be expected to commit the necessary time and resources for its implementation. This could take the form of dedicating staff time, contribution of funds to support existing BFP support officers or donation of prizes for competitions.

11. BFP Communications Working Group

The joint BFP Communications and Customer Services Working Group will coordinate messages between different agencies and promote the work of the partnerships. The group will meet to oversee implementation of the strategy and the action plan for its implementation.

Although the wider group also includes support officers and Customer Service professionals, the below are the names of the Communications contacts in the group who represent each partner organisation:

Name	Role & Organisation	Contact Details
Gemma Morgan	Head of Communications, Bracknell Forest Council	gemma.morgan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk 01344 352136
Ros Middleton	Project Manager, Bracknell Forest Locality, NHS Berkshire East	ros.middleton@berkshire.nhs.uk 01753 636833
Sue Mahoney	Communications Officer, Thames Valley Police	susan.mahoney@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk 01753 506033
Helen Barnett	Marketing Manager, Bracknell Regeneration Partnership	helen.barnett@newbracknell.com 01344 350084
Nicole Targett	Communications Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	targettn@rbfrs.co.uk 01189 322283
Chris Cowap	Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action	chris.cowap@bfva.org 01344 383520
Mike Morrissey	Communications and Marketing Manager, Bracknell Forest Homes	mike.morrissey@bracknellforesthomes.org.uk 01344 382824
Chris Smith	Executive Officer, Sandhurst Town Council	chrissmith@sandhurst.gov.uk 01252 879060

12. Identity Guidelines

The BFP Communications Working Group has developed identity guidelines to be used by BFP. These are available by request from Claire Sharp.