

# Communications Strategy



2010 – 2013



# Peak District National Park Authority Communications Strategy 2010 – 2013

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## **Introduction**

**Communication plays a vital role in everything we do at the Peak District National Park Authority.**

Residents, visitors, local businesses, partner organisations, staff and members have a right to know about:

- Our services
- Our performance – what we are doing well and where we need to improve
- How we are spending public money
- The decisions we make and how they are taken

Our reputation is determined by all aspects of communication - from the way we write letters and answer the phone through to the newsletters and leaflets we produce.

Delivering effective communications improves:

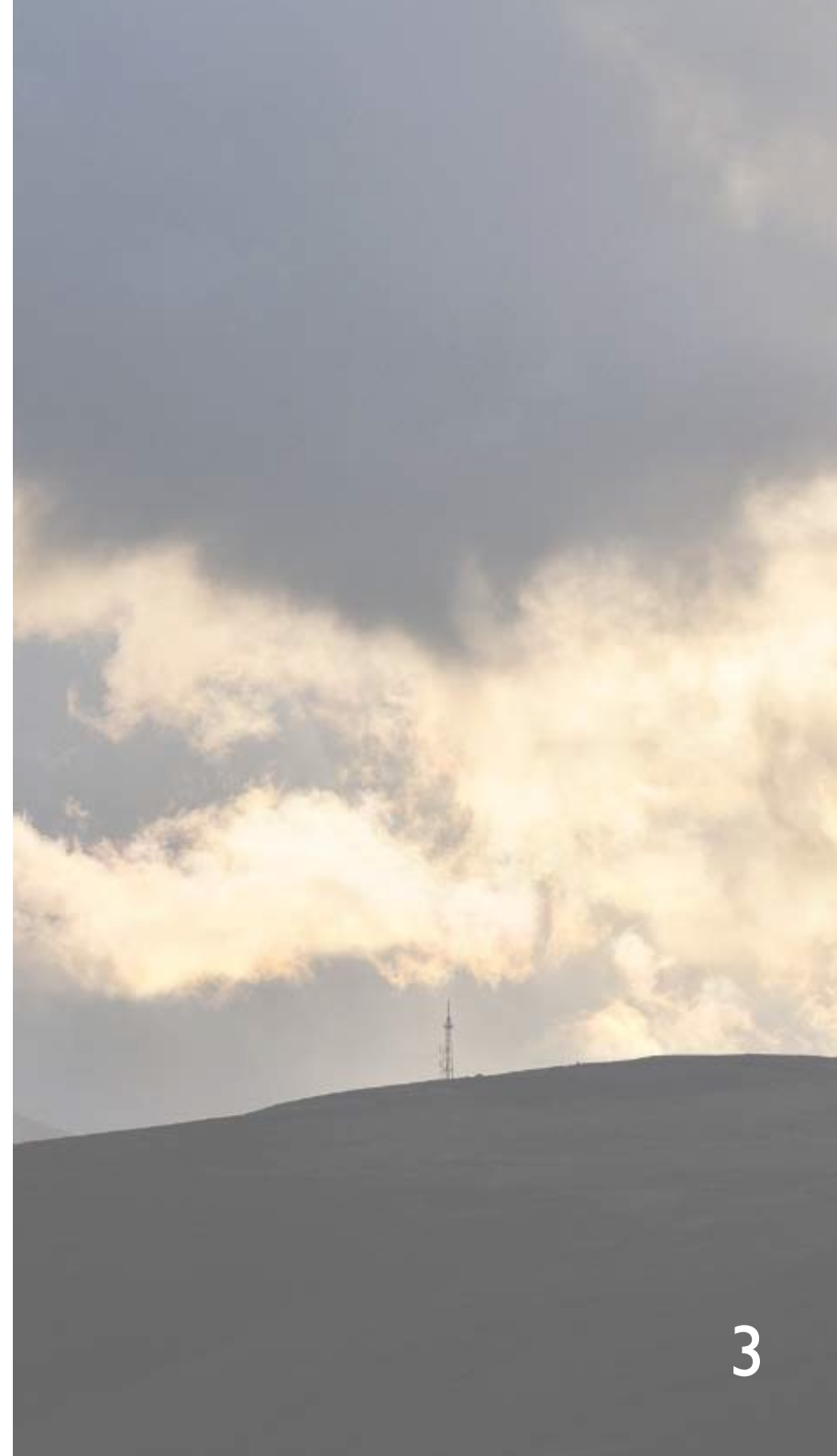
- the relationships we have with residents, visitors, businesses and partner organisations.
- our ability to build and maintain public confidence in the Peak District National Park Authority and national parks in general.
- our ability to obtain funding for projects.

This strategy covers the period 2010 to 2013 and is intended to provide a consistent approach to communications. It will help us deliver our own corporate objectives, which in turn make our contribution towards the outcomes in the National Park Management Plan (which can be seen at [www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/npmp](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/npmp) ).

Most communication initiatives will be delivered as part of our everyday activities and developed and monitored through individual service plans. This includes communications plans to help deliver all the National Park Management Plan outcomes.

### **The purpose of this strategy is to set out:**

- the principles and overall direction behind all our communication
- four key transformational issues we will focus on between now and 2013. These are:
  1. Communication about planning issues to help the public understand and be involved in the process.
  2. Increasing the use of new media communication to respond to the changing needs of residents, visitors, staff and members.
  3. Adopting the five core actions of the Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign.
  4. Play a leading role in communicating climate change issues for the Peak District National Park.



## Our principles for effective communications

We promise to:

- Maintain a culture of open and transparent communication throughout the authority as a fundamental part of good leadership.
- Encourage open, honest and accountable two-way communication with our customers.
- Never lie, mislead or knowingly provide inaccurate information.
- Apologise and change things if we get something wrong.
- Provide professional, accurate and timely communications.
- Keep information free from jargon and easy to understand.
- Make sure information is available in appropriate formats so that no one is excluded from accessing it.
- Ensure communications activities are reflected in service plans throughout the organisation with appropriate resources to deliver the objectives.
- Encourage all staff and members to be advocates for the authority and the Peak District National Park.
- Promote a consistent corporate identity.
- Carry out effective public consultation, avoiding unnecessary duplication and providing feedback about findings and the action taken as a result.



## Where are we now

Overall the Peak District National Park Authority has a good reputation for communications but we recognise there is still room for improvement, with communication about planning issues a particular concern for local residents.

The resident survey of 2009 and staff survey of 2008 showed:

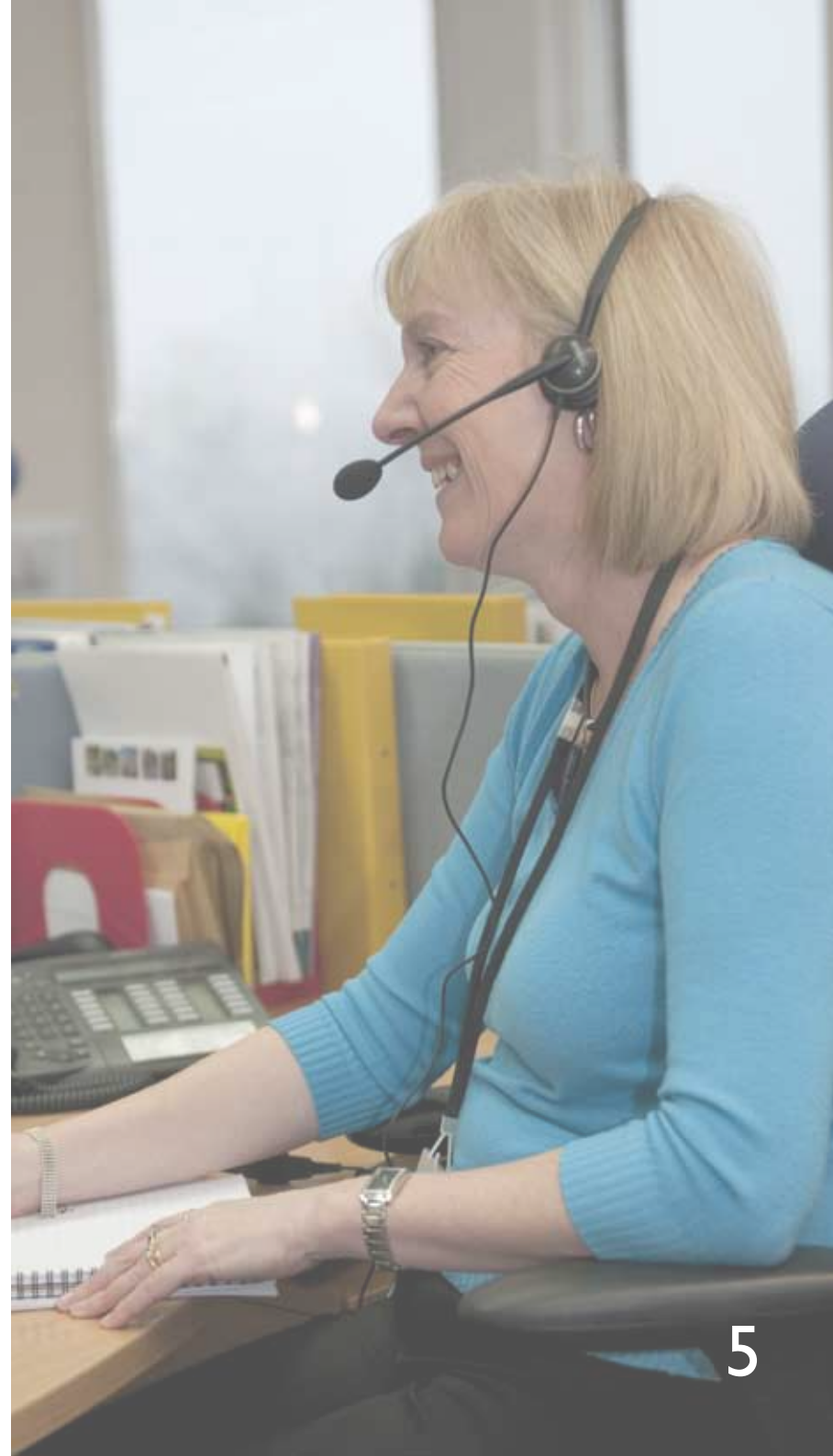
- 79 per cent of residents feel either very well or quite well informed about why the Peak District National Park exists – 5 per cent don't.
- 53 per cent of residents feel very well or quite well informed about the work of the Peak District National Park Authority – 12 per cent don't.
- 53 per cent of staff feel well informed about priority work of the authority.
- 77 per cent of staff feel line managers keep them informed about issues affecting their job, with 69 per cent feeling informed through the staff e-zine and 68 per cent through the staff walks and talks programme.
- 54 per cent of newspaper, magazine and website stories involving the authority are positive. Less than four per cent are negative, with the rest being neutral.



## Where we want to be

By 2013 we want to increase the percentage of:

- Residents who are quite or very well informed about why the Peak District National Park exists to at least 82 per cent.
- Residents who are quite or very well informed about the work of the Peak District National Park Authority to at least 58 per cent.
- Staff who feel well informed about the work of the Peak District National Park Authority to at least 65 per cent.





## How we will get there

### I. Communication about planning issues to help the public understand the process and decisions taken.

Planning has a big influence on the reputation of the authority as a whole. It is way that most people hear about or directly contact us. It is also important for the credibility of decision making that residents understand the planning application process, how decisions are made and the reasons behind those decisions.

We will:

- Produce plain English leaflets to assist the public in making or commenting on a planning application.
- Increase public awareness of improvements made in recent years to the planning service (eg evening planning surgeries, new website pages) and seek opportunities to build on these initiatives.
- Set up a residents' panel to advise on communication improvements to the website, leaflets, application forms, letters and general customer service.
- Promote planning officer advice to help people make applications.

### Case study – Evening planning surgeries

For residents with little or no knowledge of the planning system making a planning application can be a daunting prospect.

One-to-one pre-application support has always been available from Peak District National Park Authority planning officers. But the feedback we received was that many people were unable to get in to the authority's offices during office hours.

So to improve communication evening planning surgeries are held at various villages across the national park where people can book 15-minute appointments to talk with planning officers.

The surgeries help residents avoid making mistakes in the planning application process, which in turn saves them time and money. It also means that planning officers are more likely to receive applications in line with planning policies.



## 2. Increasing the use of new and social media to respond to the changing needs of residents, visitors, staff and members.

We are committed to communicating to our different audiences in ways that meet their needs. In recent years we have experimented with various forms of new media including the use of social networking sites (eg Twitter), video sharing websites (eg YouTube), blogs and websites.



By 2013 we want to champion the use of these methods as a key way for all services to communicate internally and externally, with staff, the public and partner organisations.

Printed communication in all its forms (eg newsletters, leaflets, posters, newspaper and magazine articles) will remain important to reach certain audiences but we will seek to gradually reduce the use of these methods over time to respond to the changing needs of our different audiences. We will particularly seek to target key messages at younger audiences through the use of social media.

Greater use of electronic instead of paper-based communication will also help reduce our carbon footprint.

### Case study – YouTube generation



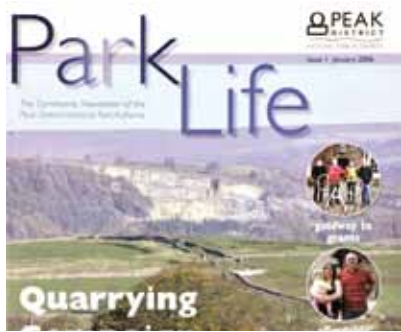
The use of video allows the Peak District National Park Authority to communicate with visitors and residents in an interactive and engaging way – at a time and place to suit them.

Videos are a powerful way of telling a story, particularly for people who would not consider reading a national park authority newsletter or other printed material. They are also attractive to people who have literacy problems or for reaching certain audiences, such as young people.

Our rangers commissioned some videos to be produced with former Gold-winning Paralympic athlete John Harris. He was asked to try out a range of activities in the Peak District National Park to show wheelchair users - or people with other mobility issues, such as parents with buggies - the opportunities open for them to experience and enjoy the national park.

John narrates the films as he tours different locations in the national park using his own wheelchair, hand-cranked bikes, a powered wheelchair and an abseil rope. Being able to see how easily John manages to enjoy various outdoor recreation activities delivers a more powerful message than would have been achieved had an article been written in a newsletter about the same subject.





### 3. Adopting the five core actions of the Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign

There is a direct link between effective communications and satisfaction with services. The more that people feel informed, the higher the satisfaction rating of the authority is likely to be. There is also a direct link between effective communications and whether tax payers feel they are getting value for money (Ipsos Mori).

The Local Government Association's Reputation Project uses Ipsos MORI research to identify five core communication actions that when delivered well, are proven to have a positive impact on reputation.

The core actions are:

1. Manage the media effectively to promote and defend the authority
2. Provide an A-Z list of services for residents
3. Publish a regular magazine to inform residents
4. Ensure the authority's brand is consistently linked to services
5. Communicate well with staff and members so they become advocates for the authority

Each action is measured against performance standards. By 2013 we aim to have met all five targets at the highest standard.

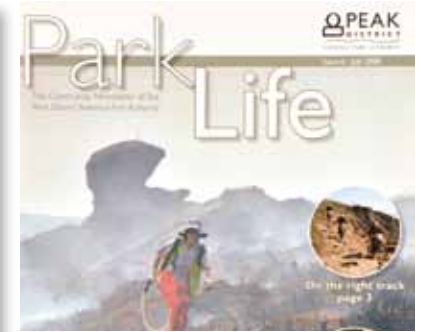
### Case study – Parklife

Parklife is the authority's newsletter for residents of the Peak District National Park and is published twice a year, in January and July.

Since it was first published in 2006 the newsletter has told residents about work that the authority is doing itself or in partnership with others.

In 2009 we decided to change the focus of the newsletter so it told the story of projects directly or indirectly supported by the authority from the point of view of people in communities. This was achieved through greater use of case studies, giving residents the opportunity to tell stories in their own words. In the past the newsletter had tended to reflect the thoughts and views of authority staff more than those in the community.

Feedback for the new format has been positive and the results of the 2009 resident survey – which happened soon after the first revised edition came out - confirmed that residents would like to see more community stories.





## 4. Play a leading role in communicating climate change issues for the Peak District National Park.



While communication of all our priorities is important climate change is one of the major challenges facing the world today. The management of national parks will play a major part in mitigating the effects of climate change and adapting to the inevitable changes ahead of us.

As well as being a priority internally it is an issue where the Government, our partners and the public are looking to us to provide leadership in the Peak District National Park.

We are committed to engaging with the public on the issues and solutions around climate change. We will pro-actively engage residents and community groups about energy efficiency and the potential for small-scale renewable energy projects.

The communications plan for the climate change action plan will outline actions and methods of evaluation to achieve this.

### Case study – our contribution to tackling climate change

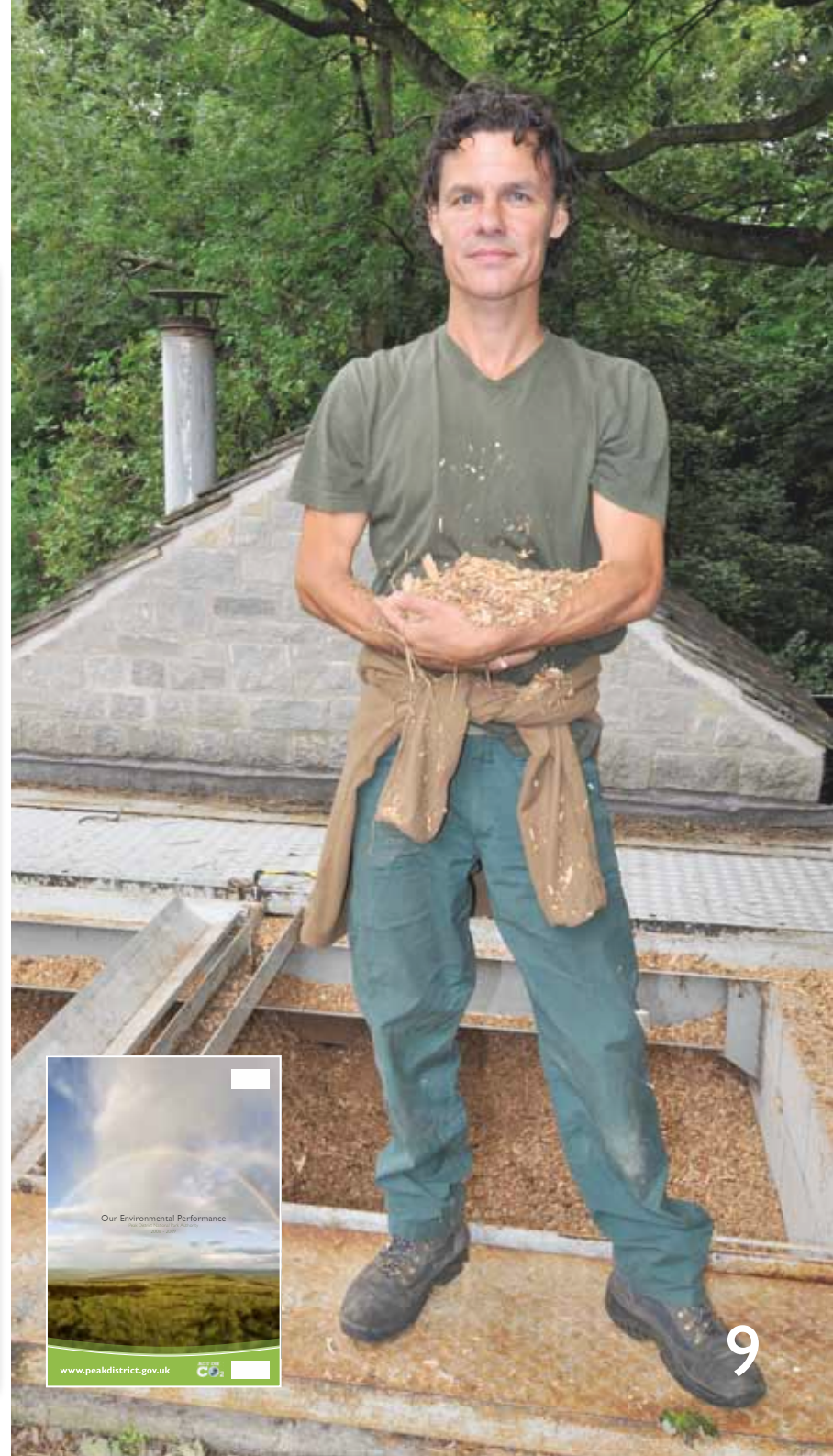
As a national park authority it is important we show leadership on the issue of tackling climate change. The authority's environmental management report sets annual targets to reduce our carbon footprint.

In 2008/09 the authority achieved a nine per cent reduction in its carbon footprint and we wanted to tell the public and partners about this success – and our plans to achieve further cuts in the coming years.

An electronic newsletter – called Our Environmental Performance - was produced to turn the long list of statistics into an informative and interesting document that will encourage others to try similar initiatives.

The newsletter features case studies telling the stories behind the figures – like the estate ranger who has swapped his 4x4 for a lower emission van; the biomass boiler at Losehill Hall that has reduced gas use by 26 per cent and carbon emissions by 42 tonnes and the water recycling machine that is being used to wash bicycles at Parsley Hay cycle hire centre with rainwater instead of mains water.

A viral email marketing campaign was used to help distribute the newsletter electronically to the public, partners and the community, supported by articles in local newspapers.





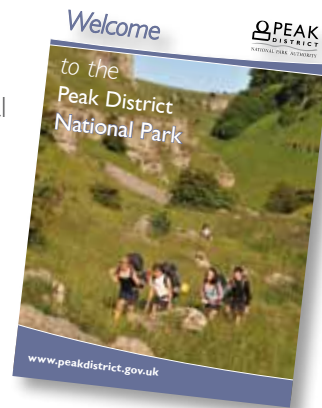
# Delivering the communications strategy

Communications is not just the responsibility of the corporate communications service. Delivering the strategy and accompanying communications service plan will require the continued support of the:

## Corporate communications service

The corporate communications service is committed to providing high quality, planned and sustained communications. We will achieve this through:

- a mix of corporate publications, including the residents' newsletter Parklife, Parish Speak newsletter for parish councils, Working Together newsletter for partner organisations, staff e-zine and members e-zine
- our website, intranet, social networking sites and YouTube channel
- media relations activity
- high quality printed and electronic design work
- promotional campaigns



## Management team

Communication is a priority activity for the authority's management team (the chief executive and directors). The team will communicate key corporate decisions accurately, clearly and speedily to all employees. They will also play a key part in communicating messages to the public and partner organisations.

## Heads of service/team managers

Heads of service and team managers all have responsibility for creating awareness of, and implementing, the communications strategy among their teams and the wider public. They also have responsibility for establishing two-way channels of communication with all members of their teams. This will ensure employees are aware of key authority and service decisions and, importantly, provide opportunities for feedback from employees to the management team.

## All employees

Every authority employee has some responsibility for communicating with the public. It is important that our key principles for communication are followed. This will help ensure accurate, honest, appropriate and timely information flows openly from the organisation at all levels. It is also vital that our employees are kept well informed about the authority's key themes, targets and performance so they can be effective advocates for the authority.

## Members

The authority's members are a vital channel of communication, representing the authority at a local, regional and national level. As well as being informed about events and services members also need to be kept up-to-date with major corporate projects, events or issues which could affect people living in Peak District communities or visitors.





## Training and development

Delivery of this strategy relies upon staff and members having the necessary communication skills to deliver actions within it. Each year the authority will commit to providing plain English courses and media training to relevant staff and members to help with the learning and development needs of individuals and the organisation as a whole.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The corporate communication indicators will be measured through resident and staff surveys held every two years.

Other communication actions will be monitored through service plans on a quarterly basis. When service plans are agreed in April, each action will have a responsible officer and timescale.

This strategy will be revised in 2013.



**Working Together**

Progress Report on the Peak District National Park Management Plan for local authorities, regional and national agencies and safety companies.

Issue 2 August 2009

[www.peakdistrict.gov.uk](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk)



We are happy to provide the information contained in this document in alternative formats on request where reasonable, so please contact customer services by phone T: 01629 816200, by minicom **T: 01629 816319** or by e mail at [customer.service@peakdistrict.gov.uk](mailto:customer.service@peakdistrict.gov.uk).

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