

ABERDEEN CITY REGION DEAL:

Powering Tomorrow's World

Report	Aberdeen City Region Deal – Communications Strategy and Plan
Lead Officer	Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council communications lead officers
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Date of Report	6 October 2016
Governance	Joint Committee

1: Purpose of the Report

- i. To finalise the City Region Deal communications strategy, as previously reported, and outline the plan for ongoing activity.

2: Recommendations for Action

- i. It is recommended that the Joint Committee approves the communications strategy and project plan as set out in this report, with actions to be developed and carried out by the project working group led by the two councils and Opportunity North East (ONE).

3: Background and Main issues

Background and communications activity to date

- i. The public narrative of the Aberdeen City Region has been one that has been inextricably linked to the success of the Oil and Gas sector.
- ii. It is an economic success story for Scotland and the UK, generating over £18bn per year and between 2003 and 2013 this economy created 42,000 jobs, double the Scottish average. In the same period economic output (GVA) grew by 94% more than double the Scottish total of 44%.
- iii. Following increasing concerns about the impact of falling oil and gas prices, discussions concerning an Aberdeen City Region Deal process gained significant national and international media currency as a result of the Oil and Gas summit held in Aberdeen on 2nd February 2015.

3:	Background and Main issues
iv.	In addition to the need to invest in regional infrastructure, given the anticipated productive lifespan of the North Sea fields combined with the high costs of recovery of oil and gas in the North Sea calls were made to help support the sector, and the extended supply chain, to both internationalise and diversify.
v.	An initial communications and engagement strategy was formally adopted in October 2015 with the objectives mainly geared towards building public, stakeholder and political support for an Aberdeen City Region Deal.
vi.	The www.abzdeal.com website was subsequently established and a social media campaign using the hashtag ABZdeal was utilised across the twittersphere and all communication channels to build the conversation around the City Region Deal. This campaign relied heavily upon the existing networks of stakeholders as well as the combined 40,000 plus following of the two councils.
vii.	This initial integrated communications and engagement strategy and plan helped to ensure that the case for a City Region Deal was heard by the right audiences and at the right times. Significant media coverage was gained and helped to build wider public support and understanding about the benefits of a City Region Deal not just to the Region but for Scotland and the UK as a whole.
viii.	In December 2015 both councils approved a Regional Economic Strategy containing four key strands: Investment in Infrastructure, Innovation, Inclusive Economic Growth and Internationalisation. The strategy was rooted in capitalising on the advantages from North Sea oil and gas and delivering a more balanced and resilient economy as a result of world class innovation and competitive business.
ix.	The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) provided the framework for the future economic development of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The City Region Deal is a key component in making sure this strategy is delivered.
x.	Significantly the strategy also aimed to support a broadening of the economy across other sectors – including renewables, tourism, food and drink, fisheries, agriculture, life sciences and the creative industries.
xi.	Communications activity around the RES therefore underpinned the work on the City Region Deal.
xii.	During the course of 2015 significant efforts led by the two councils, industry and other stakeholders were made to develop a package of investment and initiatives which resulted in the signing of a Heads of Terms agreement in January 2016 – subject to the development of detailed business cases and implementation plans.
xiii.	Specifically it was identified that a range of supply-side issues were constraining Aberdeen’s competitiveness and this included digital and transport connectivity, the need to boost innovation, the need to develop a better functioning housing market and expand the harbour. Improved infrastructure, in addition to the investments already planned for, was required to secure the city’s long term

3:	Background and Main issues
	<p>economic wellbeing and its place as a successful international business environment.</p> <p>xiv. In addition to the £250m identified in the City Region Deal the Scottish Government announced that an additional £254m would be available to support the implementation of some elements of the original proposals that would not be funded within parameters of the signed Heads of Terms.</p> <p>xv. The task of a new communications strategy and project plan is to promote understanding of and engagement with the programme amongst the full of range of audiences along the lifecycle stages of the 10 year programme.</p>

4:	Purpose and communications objectives
	<p><u>Purpose</u></p> <p>To implement a communications strategy and project plan that will support the development and implementation of a successful City Region Deal that in turn supports the economic and wellbeing aspirations contained within the Regional Economic Strategy.</p> <p>Communication objectives will be evaluated and shaped through the course of the project, but in the early stages should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Building public and stakeholder awareness of the lifecycle of the CRD; ii. Continuing to build public and stakeholder engagement, understanding and support for the key aims of the deal; iii. Communicating milestones relating to major projects and specific deliverables; iv. Building stakeholder awareness of how the deal will benefit a wide range of interests within the city region and the overarching focus on improving the long term prospects of the region; v. Showcasing the innovation, opportunity and strength of spirit in the region. vi. Explaining the relationship between the City Region Deal and the proposed £254m expenditure announced by the Scottish Government in January 2016.

5:	Key messages, audiences and dependencies
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Key Messages

Key messages should underpin all communication and be clear in all activity. It is important to identify a limited number of key messages to avoid these being diluted. These should include:

- i. The CRD will support world class innovation;
- ii. Key partners in the CRD are working in harmony to deliver a vibrant long term future for the region;
- iii. Enhancing the region's global reach and connectivity, both physical and digital, will be at the core of the CRD projects.

Audiences

- iv. The public of the region;
- v. Businesses, stakeholders and partner organisations;
- vi. Media, influencers and other opinion formers;
- vii. Councillors and other elected members;
- viii. Current and future suppliers;
- ix. Current and potential investors;
- x. The wider business and tourism community, national and international

Dependencies

- xi. The ongoing communications strategy and plan mirror the phases and sensitivities inherent within the programme and implementation plan;
- xii. Elements of communication activity will be shaped by projects undertaken by third parties, with a partnership approach to communication required.

6:	Ways of working: Communications Protocol
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- i. Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council work within the governance frameworks of their respective organisations and the laws, statutes, regulation and guidance governing local government in Scotland.
- ii. Communications activity is therefore guided by local policies and standing orders as well as national regulations contained within the various Acts detailing local government activity and the conduct of elections.
- iii. In addition given the complexity of activity it is important that there is clarity over the identification of a project that may or may not be directly related to the CRD programme. Activity that is identified as programme related will need to be 'badged' clearly as part of the CRD.

6:	Ways of working: Communications Protocol
iv.	A number of projects contain funding from a variety of sources and each partner organisation will need to be involved in the communications planning. This will ensure support is credited but also ensure that the appropriate agency leads on the communications activity.
v.	For this reason as well as the principle of maximum transparency and coordination a communications protocol has been devised and is enclosed at appendix 1.
vi.	It is intended to be a coordinating tool to help the range of partners involved in the City Region Deal to work together to maximise engagement, awareness and support.

7:	Strategic approach and communications plan
<p><u>External communications</u></p> <p>External communication will be vital to build engagement and understanding of the CRD and its different elements, unified under the CRD 'brand'.</p> <p>To ensure co-ordination and an integrated approach a single communications project plan, closely aligned to the Implementation Plan held by the PMO, has been developed and will be maintained on an ongoing basis. Monthly communications planning and review meetings have been introduced.</p> <p>An integrated approach to communication is vital, utilising traditional and digital channels available to CRD partners.</p> <p>External communication will employ the following tactics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. News: Traditional, online and broadcast coverage of news and key milestones; ii. Features: Traditional, online and broadcast features relating to the objectives of the CRD; iii. Thought leadership: Traditional, online and event-based opinion/knowledge-led opportunities; iv. Video: Regular programme of video content, charting progress and future activity; v. Digital: Expanding reach through engaging and regular content across all partner social channels in addition to regular updates to CRD website. The re-introduction of a regular electronic newsletter is also planned; vi. Influence: Developing an influencers strategy to increase awareness about the programme and its significance to the economy of the local area, Scotland and the UK is 	

7: Strategic approach and communications plan

- recommended. Consideration should be given to public affairs support;
- vii. Engagement: Briefings for partners, stakeholders, MPs and MSPs were well received and a formal process for briefing key stakeholders across the programme's lifecycle should be established;
 - viii. Marketing collateral: A full suite of marketing material to be developed (print, video and animation) to reflect deliverables and timescales;
 - ix. Outdoor: As buildings and locations are identified the opportunity arises for information boards and building 'wraps' to promote the activity on the site and the fact it is part of the City Region Deal programme. These need to be factored into the project planning process.

Internal communications

Each partner has access to a workforce, many of whom might also be stakeholders and/or resident in the region. A range of internal communications materials will be developed, including:

- i. Intranet updates;
- ii. Staff engagement events;
- iii. Repurposing and sharing of external communication material, including digital newsletter and video content.

Evaluation

A record of coverage will be maintained using a media monitoring service that will cover most of the traditional media and key social media platforms. The ABZdeal hashtag also enables us to monitor the conversation on twitter. This will be supplemented by free online alert tools. A record will be maintained of media releases issued and the level of interest from journalists.

The use of google analytics aligned to the CRD website will identify traffic and the relative balance of interest to help shape ongoing communications.

A highlight report covering all the available metrics will be produced to coincide with the communication reporting and updates to the Joint Committee.

8:	Proposed short term actions
<p>The short term actions are proposed as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Populate CRD communications plan; ii. Schedule ongoing monthly communications planning meetings; iii. Review the existing content of the www.abzdeal.com website; iv. Expand content of the website, including video and animation; v. Prepare CRD launch activity 	

9:	Proposed medium term actions
<p>Medium term actions are proposed as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review the ABZdeal brand and develop guidelines; ii. Plan production of a range of other short to medium term assets such as a CRD 'factfile' and the CRD video; iii. Keep the strategy and plan updated throughout the life of the programme. 	

10:	Finance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A separate communications and engagement budget has not been allocated and will need to be bid for once the communications project plan has been completed; ii. A full communications and engagement programme will have staff time and costs attached to it. The communications project group will apportion tasks to each of the partners and stakeholders and bring the costs to the joint committee. 	

11:	Risks
<p>The following high level potential risks have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. There is a significant reputation risk for the City Region Deal partners if key developments are not communicated in an accurate and timely manner; ii. The cohesion of the working relationship could be harmed if each partner does not coordinate the release of information; iii. Should the linkage between the project plan and the communications plan not be maintained at an operational level then there is risk that out of date or incorrect information could be 	

11:	Risks
	<p>communicated.</p> <p>The above risks can be mitigated by agreeing to proceed to develop a joint and transparent communications project plan that is regularly updated.</p>

City Region Deal – communications protocol [APPENDIX 1]

Introduction

The communications protocol has been developed to ensure a joined-up and consistent approach is taken to the provision of public information, general promotion and all media relations associated with Aberdeen's City Region Deal.

Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and ONE will jointly develop and deliver a communications and engagement project plan for the Aberdeen City Region Deal. The communications strategy and project plan will guide the overarching programme of communications activity and be the responsibility of the Head of Communications & Promotion (Aberdeen City Council), the Head of Customer Communication & Improvement (Aberdeenshire Council) and ONE's nominated representative.

The teams will use a range of tools to communicate messages to residents, focused on stakeholder engagement, media relations, events and speaking opportunities, supported by social media. This protocol covers all activity set out in the emerging communications and engagement strategy and applies to all key partners actively supporting CRD.

Communication principles:

Whilst equal emphasis will be placed by the communications teams on the development and implementation of an overarching communications and engagement project plan, the council chairing the Joint Committee will take the overall coordinating role for communications activity.

Both councils will nominate a City Region Deal communications lead as will ONE. They will work together to formulate key plans and manage all communications and engagement activity on behalf of the partners. Activity will be overseen by the respective Heads of Communications in both councils, but the chairing council will be responsible for regular reporting.

As supporting partner, Scottish Enterprise may also wish to nominate a communications representative to sit on the Communications Project Planning Group. The two governments will also be invited to provide representatives.

The City Region Deal partners will adopt an approach of openness and transparency with key audiences and will be proactive in our delivery of news and information.

In all public statements, press releases and public information, the activity should always be referred to as the City Region Deal.

A boilerplate will be agreed in advance which should be used in all communications as a standard paragraph to aid people's understanding of the City Region Deal, what it seeks to achieve, the process and key partners.

Press releases:

All press releases relating to the City Region Deal will be shared with the councils and ONE communications teams, and they will seek appropriate authority from key partners and relevant organisations.

All press releases relating to the City Region Deal will include quotes from a senior councillor at Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils and ONE. Where appropriate, supporting quotations will be gained from partners organisations, stakeholders and influencers.

Media responses:

The full Programme Communications Group should be advised of any approaches from the media in relation to the City Region Deal. Media responses should be shared in advance with the partners, to allow adequate time for consideration and approval.

Approvals:

Neither Council nor ONE will issue any public statement relating to the City Region Deal without gaining the approval of the other key partners.

It is possible that during interviews on other topics partners will be asked direct questions about the City Region Deal. If that is the case the interviewees will if possible work with the agreed lines.

Communications and engagement activity will be agreed in advance, with reasonable time set aside to gain approvals. Where this is planned activity, a minimum of 48 hours will be given for approval.

Where a response to the media is required within a specific deadline, every effort will be made to seek approval of all partners (2 councils, ONE, Scottish Enterprise and the two governments). Where this is not possible, the CE of the council responding to the media enquiry must give express permission for the response to be given without the approval of the other partners.

Interview requests:

Where there are requests for interviews from the media, generally the leader of the Council (City Council), Co-Leader of the Council (Aberdeenshire Council) or a representative of ONE will be asked to undertake these. Opportunities for responding to media requests for interviews will be shared with the lead partners. For proactive communications activity this will be set out against each project in the communications project plan.

The Communications Project Planning Group will seek to work with the two governments to ensure these arrangements are reciprocated at all layers of the City Region Deal governance process.

Where the key spokespeople are not available, the interviews will be offered in the first instance to the Chief Executives of both councils' and Joint Committee members however usually officers will only be asked to undertake interviews if there is a need for technical or specialist knowledge.

Partner organisations and stakeholders will be informed as to the opportunity to ensure coordination and where appropriate the media will be directed to obtain interviews directly from wider stakeholders.

Social media:

Hashtag #ABZdeal should be consistently used by all partners throughout social media on twitter

Keeping councillors and partners informed:

Each partner organisation will be responsible for keeping their councillors/members informed of all activity, as per their agreed protocols. An online newsroom and microsite has been established which is being used to store and distribute key assets to councillors and other key stakeholders.

Appointment of external consultants covering communications, public affairs and engagement:

From time to time over the lifetime of the City Region Deal consultants or contractors may be appointed to support communications, public affairs and stakeholder engagement activities. Such activity will need to be coordinated with the communications strategy and plan developed by the two councils and their partners.

Their work should mirror the communication principles set out in this protocol to ensure a consistent and joined-up approach between the two councils and the agencies or contractors involved. Any planned engagement activity arranged through the contracts should be advised to the Heads of Communications to ensure that supporting media activity can be arranged with clear and consistent messaging and timing.

Pre-election periods:

During a pre-election period, specific guidance comes into effect, which determines the approach taken on all media matters. This guidance will be

published in advance of all elections and will replace this protocol for a temporary period. Even if the media/public engagement activity involves partner organisations if there is a perception, as set out in the electoral guidance, that activity is deemed to be supportive of a political group then it should be deferred until after an election.

More information:

For more information about this media protocol, or for media advice and support, please contact Takki Sulaiman, Head of Communications & Promotions (Aberdeen City Council) on 01224 522615 / tsulaiman@aberdeencity.gov.uk ; Kate Bond, Head of Customer Communication & Improvement (Aberdeenshire Council) on 01224 664405 / kate.bond@aberdeenshire.gov.uk ; or Paul Smith, External and Internal Communications Manager (Aberdeen City Council) on 01224 523188 / paulsmith1@aberdeencity.gov.uk .

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