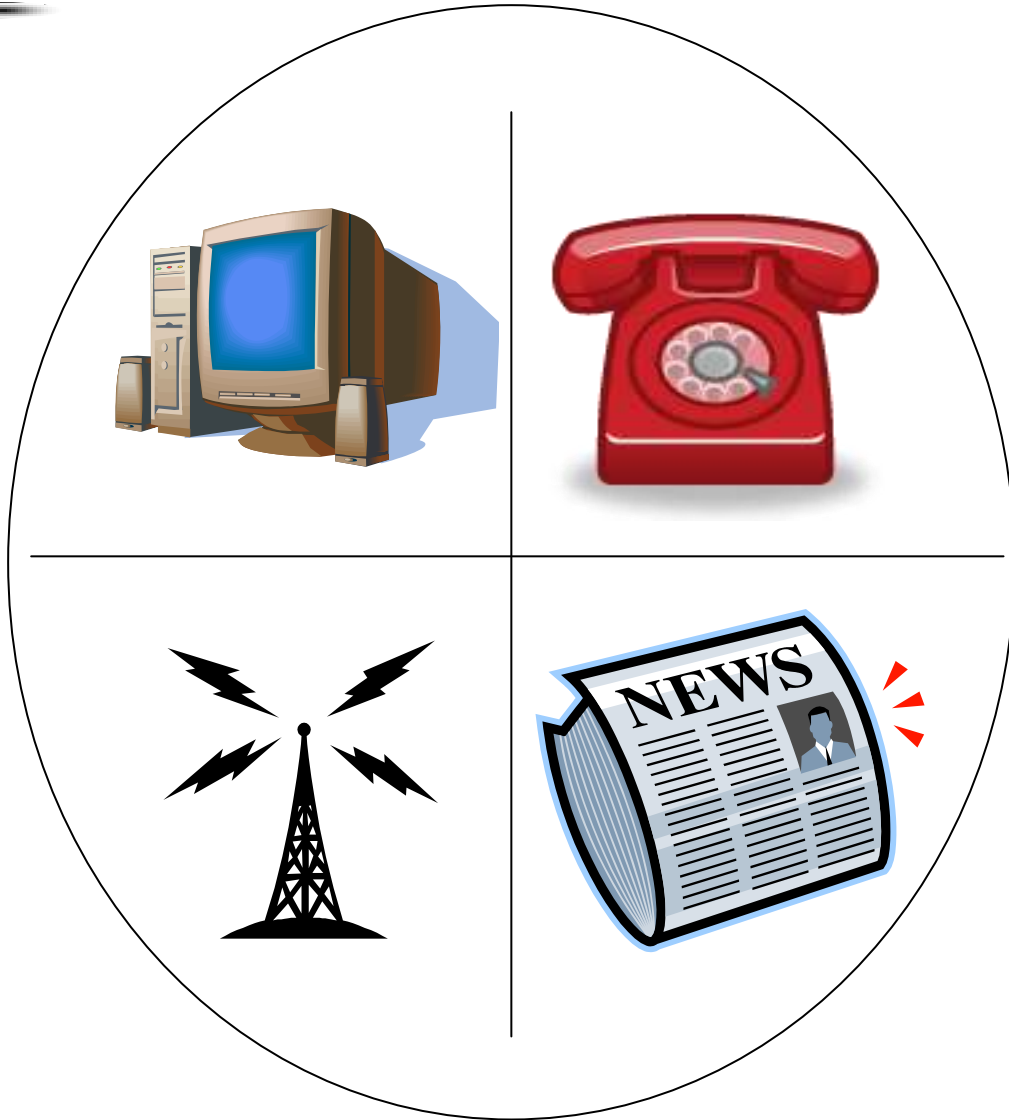




Lac La Biche County Communication Plan



March 2008

Introduction:

What Is a Communication Plan? Why adopt such a plan?

A Communication Plan is a written tool which provides the philosophy, strategy and implementation of a Plan to increase, enhance and improve communication with all stakeholders within and throughout Lac La Biche County. The Plan is only valuable if it provides a specific and achievable action plan to meet this objective. Accordingly, an integral part of this Plan is the “Implementation Plan” which identifies the strategies, detailed actions and implementation timelines.

There are many reasons why to adopt a Communication Plan. A good Plan will:

- Enhance transparency and accountability to all County customers;
- Provide several mechanisms for two-way communication;
- Be consistent with Lac La Biche County’s Business Plan and Sustainability Plans;
- Focus on both internal and external communication practices;
- Identify opportunities for future enhancement and growth to continually improve communication processes and protocols;
- Provide a tangible benefit to County customers by providing specific direction, measurable goals and implementable processes;
- Identify resource needs in order to plan for and achieve communication ideals;
- Be a living and breathing document which is revisited and re-evaluated for effectiveness and completeness on a regular basis;
- Take advantage of technology and communication trends;
- Be of value to each and every resident, landowner, service user, employee and customer of Lac La Biche County.

Context within the Business Plan

A Communication Plan for Lac La Biche County meets **all** of the Goals identified within the County’s Business Plan. This is summarized as follows:

- **Progressive and innovative municipality** – by introducing new and progressive communication tools and processes;
- **Provide quality programs, services and facilities** – by providing opportunities to gather feedback (positive and negative) through communication processes which will result in program and service improvements;
- **Provide leadership and direction** – through the issuance of press releases, newsletters and website postings;

- **Fiscally accountable to stakeholders** – by providing timely and accurate information regarding Council and Administrative activities through media dissemination and other communication tools;
- **Foster a safe and healthy community** – by providing the public relevant information on programs and services which assist in increasing public safety and health of the community (ex: preventative programs, public notices on safety hazards and safe practices);
- **Develop a healthy and productive workforce and a safe work environment** – through internal communication tools such as staff newsletters, regular staff meetings, safety meetings and through written procedures and protocols.

The Business Plan of Lac La Biche County identifies programs for both Internal and External Communication. This Plan will identify activities within both contexts as both Internal and External Communications assist in achieving the Goals identified within the Business Plan.

Context within the Sustainability Plan

The Sustainability Plan of Lac La Biche County includes elements within it which are incorporated within this Plan. The incorporation of Communication enhancement activities within the Sustainability Plan reinforces the importance of taking an organized approach to improving Communication practices within Lac La Biche County.

This Communication Plan is intended to work in concert with the County's Business Plan and Sustainability Plan and it forms part of the visioning and strategic planning of Lac La Biche County Council.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The first part of the Strategy is to identify the stakeholders. This is followed by identifying the resources and tools available now and in the future needed to enhance communication with the stakeholders.

Stakeholders

The Stakeholders are everyone involved in the communication equation. Without restricting the generality of the above, they are:

- County Residents;
- County Landowners;
- Users of County Services (including tourists);
- Business and Industry both in and around the County;
- County Council;
- County Staff;
- Media;
- Other levels of government;
- Municipal neighbours;
- Local Public Institutions (health and education);
- Community Organizations and Volunteers.

Stakeholders can *generally* be further divided into two groups defining the primary style of communication – *Internal* and *External*. This Communication Plan is intended to deal with both styles of communication. The **primary** style of communication for residents, landowners, service users, business, industry, media, local public institutions, community organizations and volunteers is through **external** processes. The **primary** style of communication with County staff and Council is **internal** processes. Communication with other levels of government and municipal neighbours is generally a combination of internal and external processes.

Communication Tools and Processes

Identified below are the various communication tools and processes, whether the tool or process is external or internal or both, and which stakeholders are targeted with these tools/processes. The targets identify communication ideals to strive towards. There are secondary or incidental targets in some cases. The Implementation Plan attached as an appendix to this Plan contains the specific details of the implementation. The “Strategies” outline the “what” and the “Implementation Plan” outlines the “how” and “when” and other specific details.

LOCAL MEDIA

The two main local media sources include the *Lac La Biche Post* (including the *Town and Country supplement*) newspaper and *Big Dog 103.5 FM* radio station. These are **external** communication tools which provide paid and unpaid service to the County. The communication strategies for maximizing communication through these two sources are highlighted below:

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Residents;
- County Landowners;
- Users of County Services;
- Business and Industry;
- Community Organizations and Volunteers.

Strategies:

- Continue with weekly newspaper column including notices, scheduling, programs, events and County website access information;
- Develop a “What’s Happening” notice for advertisement in the newspaper on a monthly basis which directs readers to the County Website (see strategies for “County Website”). The focus of this tool will be to inform the public on Council activities and decisions;
- Issue Press Releases for major County decisions to both media sources, as well as to any other appropriate media sources, on a timely basis;
- Develop internal protocols for advertising within both the newspaper and the radio (ex: mapping protocol for statutory notices);
- Develop internal protocols for media interviews (who, how, when, etc.);
- Continue to provide Council agenda packages to the media on the day of Council meetings;
- Continue to use the newspaper as a source of advertising for employment opportunities (other media sources may be appropriate for this as well);
- Meet on a regular, scheduled basis with owners/operators of both media outlets to discuss advertising, media coverage, dissemination of information and other relevant and related issues;
- Set-up a monthly radio spot including the Mayor, CAO, Senior Management and/or Communication Coordinator to discuss important issues;
- Participate, within reason and in accordance with budgetary restrictions, in advertising/coverage of local community events.

COUNTY WEBSITE

The County Website is an important portal to information for stakeholders. It is primarily an **external** communication tool; however it is used by internal stakeholders as well. **The relevance and importance of the County Website as a primary and preferred communication tool needs to be recognized and pursued.** With the prevalence and availability of high speed internet service to the majority of County residents, the usefulness and relevance of the County website will continue to increase. Strategies should focus on not only providing information but also increasing the interactivity of the website. The website provides a specific benefit to long distance County landowners and other County customers.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Residents;
- County Landowners;
- Users of County Services;
- Business and Industry;
- All other identified stakeholders to varying degrees.

Strategies:

- Continued posting of documents including press releases, career opportunities, minutes, agendas, planning documents (including things like the Budget) and quarterly newsletters;
- Posting of scans of all critical documents of the County (minutes, bylaws, policies);
- Undertake complete overhaul of County website;
- Expand functionality of website to provide for customer access to their information (tax and utility accounts);
- Review and update data on the site on a regular basis;
- Incorporate a citizen complaint/concern form with a tracking system to collect, act on and respond to (as per the County's Sustainability Plan);
- Track site usage to identify use trends and use this feedback to improve the site;
- Link the website to key partners (ex: Community Futures, Portage College);
- Provide for a monthly communication summarizing Council activities for the past month;
- Continue to work with MCSNet to expand and develop its network throughout the County to increase access and facilitate use of the County's interactive website;
- Incorporate short surveys and opinion polls on County matters on a periodic basis;
- Investigate the implementation of electronic, internet based Council agenda packages.

CORRESPONDENCE, MEMOS, TELEPHONE AND EMAIL

This set of Communication Tools has been put together as the core of administrative tools used together for internal and external communication purposes.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- All stakeholder groups.

Strategies:

- Review and revise as appropriate the internal protocol for circulating and tracking correspondence received and responded to;
- Establish protocols for the receiving, circulating and response to internal and external email. Evaluate and consider staff training for this purpose;
- Establish protocols for the standardization of the look and use of County stationery for letters and memos;
- Establish protocols for answering and directing incoming phone calls;
- Arrange customer service training for all staff which communicate with the public;
- Develop protocols for establishing target response times for responding to customer requests and concerns (see also “County Website” strategies);
- Establish RSVP protocol to track Council members’ participation in upcoming conferences, seminars and meetings.

PUBLIC MEETINGS/OPEN HOUSES/FOCUS GROUPS/SURVEYS

The need for public meetings, open houses, focus groups, customer satisfaction surveys, meetings with other public bodies and other similar such public engagement communication tools arise from time to time to assist with gathering feedback on a project or program, general County customer service or significant community initiatives. Lac La Biche County needs to establish best practices for using these communication tools. The best practices needs to determine how, when and which of these tools are to be used for which purposes. Lac La Biche County has previously used these tools for such things as the amalgamation review process. Included within this section is meeting with other local public institutions as well as with neighbouring municipalities. This is an important set of external communication tools with further internal communication connotations.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Residents;
- County Landowners;
- Users of County Services;
- Business and Industry;
- Community Organizations and Volunteers;
- Municipal Neighbours;
- Local Public Institutions

Strategies:

- Review previous public engagement practices and other municipalities' practices to develop a "best practice" for public engagement opportunities;
- Develop a strategy for providing a scheduled and organized approach to carrying out public engagement opportunities (ex: annual public meetings);
- Develop and proceed with a customer satisfaction survey of stakeholders and develop a SWOT analysis;
- Review County equipment needs for conducting successful public engagement opportunities (ex: trade show equipment, electronic equipment);
- Identify and arrange training opportunity for key County staff for carrying out successful public engagement opportunities;
- Develop processes for capturing and synthesizing feedback obtained in these processes;
- Arrange meetings with local public institutions and neighbouring municipalities in order to keep abreast of current and relevant issues;
- Establish a protocol with Council on reporting/identifying areas of concern between county residents and provincial agencies.

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Lac La Biche County has successfully produced and circulated quarterly newsletters. It is an important external communication tool that should be continued. Lac La Biche County should seek to continually improve the content, look, use and features of the newsletter. It may be appropriate to review the frequency of the newsletters.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Residents;
- County Landowners;
- Business and Industry.

Strategies:

- Seek best practices through reviewing newsletters of other municipalities and through monitoring and reviewing newsletter reader feedback;
- Review technologies involved and production arrangements to identify possible improvements or efficiencies;
- Review, consider and report on the frequency of the newsletter and whether or not it is desirable to increase the frequency of production;
- Develop a guide for staff in preparing items for the newsletter.

STAFF NEWSLETTER/INTRANET/STAFF MEETINGS/REACH OUT

This set of communication tools are among the most important internal communication tools. The intent of these tools is to keep staff informed of the happenings within the organization on a timely basis and to provide opportunities to provide feedback. The size of the County as an organization dictates the importance of providing communication tools to staff which will connect front line employees with supervisors, supervisors to managers and managers to senior management.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Staff.

Strategies:

- Establish an intranet system for use by County employees as a means of providing another tool for relaying announcements, resource information, etc. This is to be used in conjunction with (and not as a replacement for) Staff Newsletters and memos to staff;
- Issue staff newsletters on a regular basis to keep staff apprised of Council's activities as well as to provide for general announcements affecting staff;
- Develop a protocol for holding regular staff meetings among different levels and for different groups of staff, in addition to establishing a protocol for general staff meetings to be held in accordance with the County's Human Resource Management Policy or any other relevant County policy;
- Provide for a confidential staff feedback collection system, in conjunction with the County's Human Resource Management Department, in order to identify and track employee thoughts and concerns regarding the organization. Up to present, County has carried-out a "Reach Out" confidential staff survey process as well as for the collection of exit interviews. These processes should be continued and enhancements considered to them.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND DISASTER SERVICES TOOLS

There needs to be a connection between the County's Communication Plan and the Health and Safety Policy and Municipal Emergency Plan. This is primarily an internal function but it does relate to external entities as well.

Primary Stakeholder Targets:

- County Staff;
- County Council;
- Local Public Institutions;
- Community Organizations and Volunteers.

Strategies:

- Incorporate health and safety awareness elements into staff meeting processes in order to improve and comply with the Health and Safety Policy;
- Include health and safety related announcements and issues within other internal County communication tools (ex: staff newsletter and intranet);
- Participate in the Municipal Emergency Plan Committee including and specifically for the purposes of providing media relations.

COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR POSITION

Presented for Council's review and consideration is a future staffing enhancement for a Communication Coordinator position. While it's possible to proceed with this Plan and to implement communication enhancements, there is value in considering the inclusion of a full-time, permanent position for this purpose. In considering this matter, it is worth noting that other similar sized municipalities have employed the use of such a position. What this position would provide is a dedicated body to ensure that all the matters contained within this Plan are reviewed and implemented on a regular basis and that there is an opportunity to review the plan objectives on a regular basis.

In the appendix to this plan is a column entitled "Enhanced Staffing" which indicates how items may be affected by extra staffing. Some strategies are contemplated only with enhanced staffing in mind.

In considering such a position, an analysis would have to be undertaken to determine an appropriate position description and an appropriate level of remuneration for the position.

Administration is recommending consideration for this position in the 2009 County Budget.

SUMMARY

Lac La Biche County is a dynamic municipality experiencing unprecedented growth. With this growth have come many challenges. One of these challenges is to develop and implement a Communication Plan which will lead to effective and enhanced communication with all County stakeholders. Lac La Biche County, both as an organization as well as a community, has seen much change. This has included the introduction of many new faces. Implementation of a Communication Plan along with enhanced staffing for this purpose will assist the County in successfully meeting our communication needs.

APPENDIX

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
LOCAL MEDIA			
Continue with weekly newspaper column including notices, scheduling, programs, events and County website access information	Review arrangement on a periodic basis with newspaper to ensure equitable service is provided	Review annually	Review Quarterly
Develop a “What’s Happening” notice for advertisement in the newspaper on a monthly basis which directs readers to the County Website (see strategies for “County Website”). The focus of this tool will be to inform the public on Council activities and decisions	Prepare item for posting to the website and for advertising in the newspaper	Monthly	After each Council meeting
Issue Press Releases for major County decisions to both media sources, as well as to any other appropriate media sources, on a timely basis	As per current practice, on an “as required” basis	Within 24 hours of decision to issue a press release	Issue the press release the same business day in most cases
Develop internal protocols for advertising within both the newspaper and the radio (ex: mapping protocol for statutory notices)	Develop a written protocol and circulate to all staff involved in producing such items for advertising	October 2008	Review on a periodic basis and revise as necessary
Develop internal protocols for media interviews (who, how, when, etc.)	Develop written protocol and distribute to media, Council and Senior Management	October 2008	Review on a periodic basis and revise as necessary

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Continue to provide Council agenda packages to the media on the day of Council meetings	As per current practice	Ongoing	Pursue electronic agenda packages for Council, staff and the media
Continue to use the newspaper as a source of advertising for employment opportunities (other media sources may be appropriate for this as well)	Coordinate employment advertising with the HR Manager to maximize advertising dollars	Ongoing	Complete cost analysis of various advertising methods involving media and the internet
Meet on a regular, scheduled basis with owners/operators of both media outlets to discuss advertising, media coverage, dissemination of information and other relevant and related issues	As per strategy	Twice per year with each media source	Quarterly per media source
Set-up a monthly radio spot including the Mayor, CAO, County Clerk and/or Communication Coordinator to discuss important issues	Arrange a standard time and process for this.	Monthly starting in September, 2008	After each Council meeting
Participate, within reason and in accordance with budgetary restrictions, in advertising/coverage of local community events	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
COUNTY WEBSITE			
Continued posting of documents including press releases, career opportunities, minutes, agendas, planning documents (including things like the Budget) and quarterly newsletters	Continue current posting of documents.	Update at least every 2 weeks	Update weekly

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Posting of scans of all critical documents of the County (minutes, bylaws, policies)	Scan critical documents that are not currently scanned and uploaded.	Have all Lac La Biche County documents scanned and uploaded by June 30/08 and then update on a monthly basis	Scan and upload as per previous box, but undertake scanning and uploading of pre-amalgamation critical documents until a complete library is in place (likely a 2-3 year project)
Undertake complete overhaul of County website	Undertake an RFP process to complete the work	September 30/08	
Expand functionality of website to provide for customer access to their information (tax and utility accounts)	Coordinate this activity with Corporate Services and HTE Bellamy		December, 2009
Review and update data on the site on a regular basis	Complete a page-by-page review	Every 3 months	Every month
Incorporate a citizen complaint/concern form with a tracking system to collect, act on and respond to (as per the County's Sustainability Plan)	Investigate automated/internet solutions for this. A possible provider has been identified to date.	June, 2008	
Track site usage to identify use trends and use this feedback to improve the site	Obtain reports from service provider		2009
Link website to key partners	Identify key partners and submit link request to service provider	May, 2008	
Provide for a monthly communication summarizing Council activities for the past month	Use similar format as the staff newsletter	May, 2008	Provide this summary after every Council meeting

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Continue to work with MCSNet to expand and develop its network throughout the County to increase access and facilitate use of the County's interactive website	Ongoing	Ongoing	
Incorporate short surveys and opinion polls on County matters on a periodic basis	May require web software enhancement for this purpose		2009
Investigate the implementation of electronic, internet based Council agenda packages	Will require high speed connections for all Council members and possibly new software. Will need laptops for all Council	September, 2009	April, 2009
CORRESPONDENCE, ETC.			
Review and revise as appropriate the internal protocol for circulating and tracking correspondence received and responded to	Have established a computer-based solution to date which is being used and evaluated	Ongoing testing	
Establish protocols for the receiving, circulating and response to internal and external email. Evaluate and consider staff training for this purpose	Develop and circulate written protocols based upon a review of best practices.		2009
Establish protocols for the standardization of the look and use of County stationery for letters and memos	Implement as follow-up to the County logo project	October, 2009	
Establish protocols for answering and directing incoming phone calls	Develop written procedures in concert with Corp. Services	May, 2008	

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Arrange customer service training for all staff which communicate with the public	Seek a consultant to conduct an in-service for this purpose	June, 2008	Schedule and conduct such training every 2 years.
Develop protocols for establishing target response times for responding to customer requests and concerns (see also "County Website" strategies)	Establish written protocols for this purpose	June, 2008	
Establish RSVP protocol to track Council members' participation in upcoming conferences, seminars and meetings	Completed in February, 2008	Completed	Review protocol annually and adjust as necessary
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES			
Review previous public engagement practices and other municipalities' practices to develop a "best practice" for public engagement opportunities	Gather samples and consult with the Municipal Excellence website.		June, 2009
Develop a strategy for providing a scheduled and organized approach to carrying out public engagement opportunities (ex: annual public meetings)	Investigate best practices and develop a sub-plan for presentation to Council		June, 2009
Develop and proceed with a customer satisfaction survey of stakeholders and develop a SWOT analysis	This is as per the Sustainability Plan	June 1, 2008 and every even numbered year	Review the value of an annual survey

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Review County equipment needs for conducting successful public engagement opportunities (ex: trade show equipment, electronic equipment)	Review such equipment as projectors, laptops, screens, whiteboards, video cameras and the like		Early 2009
Identify and arrange training opportunity for key County staff for carrying out successful public engagement opportunities	To be done in concert with the HR Manager and the Directors		2009
Develop processes for capturing and synthesizing feedback obtained in these processes	Develop written forms based on best practices and input into a database system		2009
Arrange meetings with local public institutions and neighbouring municipalities in order to keep abreast of current and relevant issues	Contact all bodies concerned and schedule a series of meetings with Council	Prior to June, 30 each year	
Establish a protocol with Council on reporting/identifying areas of concern between county residents and provincial agencies	As per Sustainability Plan, report to Council every 3 months	April, 2009	Possibly prior to this date
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER			
Seek best practices through reviewing newsletters of other municipalities and through monitoring and reviewing newsletter reader feedback	Conduct review of specific municipal newsletters	December, 2008	
Review technologies involved and production arrangements to identify possible improvements or efficiencies			Ongoing basis but no less than once per year

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Review, consider and report on the frequency of the newsletter and whether or not it is desirable to increase the frequency of production			December, 2009
Develop a guide for staff in preparing items for the newsletter	Prepare a written protocol and provide to staff	September, 2008	Periodically review and update the protocol to reflect changes or areas of concern
STAFF COMMUNICATION			
Establish an intranet system for use by County employees as a means of providing another tool for relaying announcements, resource information, etc. This is to be used in conjunction with (and not as a replacement for) Staff Newsletters and memos to staff	Beginning of a system is in place but it needs to be reviewed, enhanced and regularly updated and it needs to be demonstrated to staff		2009
Issue staff newsletters on a regular basis to keep staff apprised of Council's activities as well as to provide for general announcements affecting staff	Currently completed within 4 business days of each regular Council meeting.	Ongoing	Complete within one day of each Council meeting including POP Committee meetings
Develop a protocol for holding regular staff meetings among different levels and for different groups of staff, in addition to establishing a protocol for general staff meetings to be held in accordance with the County's Human Resource Management Policy or any other relevant County policy	Currently being undertaken however a mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure that each directorate and department continues to hold regular meetings	Ongoing	Develop follow-up system.

STRATEGY	DETAILED ACTION	TIMELINE	ENHANCED STAFFING
Provide for a confidential staff feedback collection system, in conjunction with the County's Human Resource Management Department, in order to identify and track employee thoughts and concerns regarding the organization	Have had the "Reach Out" process in 2005 and 2006. A similar process was conducted with the organizational review. Exit reviews are in place	Ongoing	Consider enhancements to process
HEALTH AND SAFETY			
Incorporate health and safety awareness elements into staff meeting processes in order to improve and comply with the Health and Safety Policy	Meet with Managers and Directors to ensure that meeting processes are happening and being recorded	Ongoing	
Include health and safety related announcements and issues within other internal County communication tools (ex: staff newsletter and intranet)			2009
Participate in the Municipal Emergency Plan Committee including and specifically for the purposes of providing media relations	Currently in place	Ongoing	