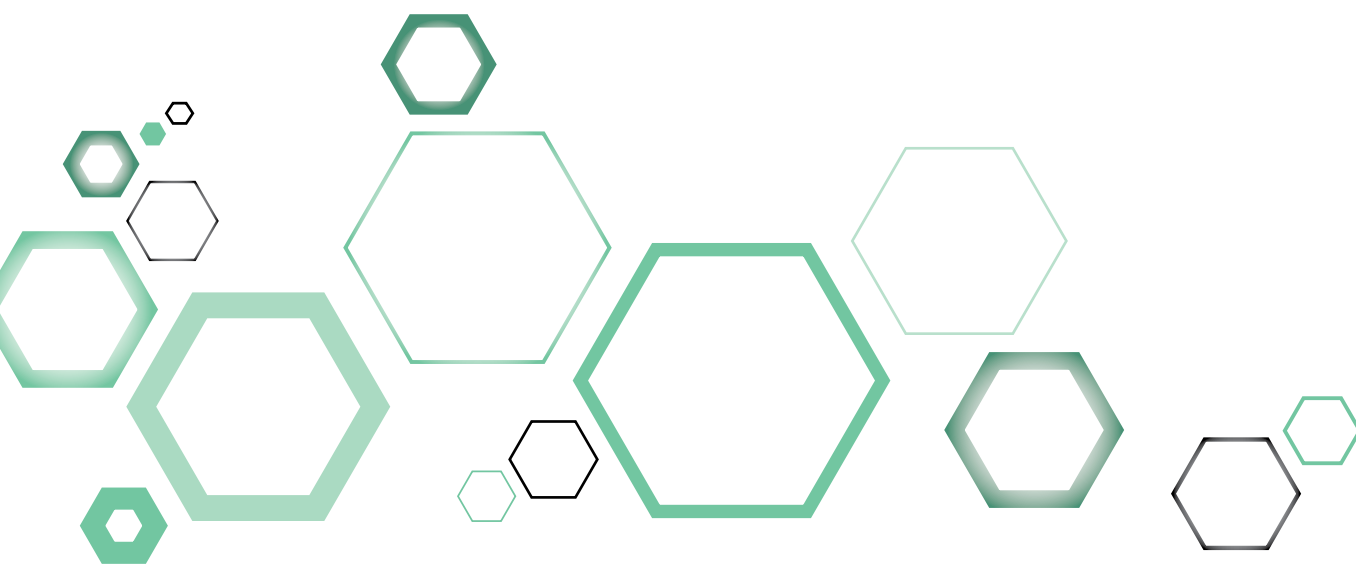


LGcommunications and Local Government  
Association Publication

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# New Reputation Project: Summary Report for Consultation



March 2010

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# Introduction

In 2005, the LGA launched the Reputation Campaign to meet the challenge of falling satisfaction levels with councils at a time when public perceptions of council services were improving. Using MORI research and BVPI data, they identified 12 core actions that councils could undertake to improve their reputations. Seven of these core actions were practical improvements on key services relating to the Cleaner, Safer, Greener agenda. The second set of core actions aimed to improve communications, which had been shown to be a key driver of council satisfaction.

The core actions for the LGA Reputation Campaign were as follows:

## Environmental Core Actions: Cleaner, Safer, Greener

1. Adopt a highly visible, strongly branded council cleaning operation.
2. Ensure no gaps or overlap in council cleaning and maintenance contracts.
3. Set up one phone number for the public to report local environmental problems.
4. Deal with 'grot spots'.
5. Remove abandoned vehicles within 24 hours.
6. Win a Green Flag award for at least one park.
7. Educate and enforce to protect the environment.

## Communications Core Actions:

1. Manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council.
2. Provide an A – Z guide to council services.
3. Publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents.
4. Step up internal communications so staff become advocates for the council.
5. Use consistent branding.

Local authorities were invited to sign up to these 12 core actions and to set out a timetable for achieving them. A booklet accompanied the campaign which provided guidance on delivering the 12 actions.

# Introduction



Since 2005, there have been significant shifts in the reputation landscape for central and local government. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about trust in authority, the influence of social media on reputation, the impact of a new economic reality, and a progression towards a changing set of responsibilities in local government.

LGcommunications, working in partnership with the LGA, is developing new guidance for councils on reputation called the New Reputation Project. This work seeks to meet the old and new challenges to local government reputation.

As part of the New Reputation Project (NRP), LGcommunications has:

- reviewed the original LGA Reputation Campaign
- met with heads of communications in England, Scotland and Wales
- surveyed heads of communications
- examined the drivers for local government reputation
- held a deliberative event for thought leaders in communications
- undertaken case studies with councils to look at different models of excellence

The next important stage of this project is the development of guidance to improve the reputation of local government. This report summarises our research to date and invites councils to give their views about what shape the guidance should take given LGcommunications' key findings.



# Executive Summary



## Strategic Leadership

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The New Reputation Project (NRP) should start from the point of emphasising the importance of strong political, administrative and communications leadership of the organisation in order to improve services and the awareness that the council is doing a good job.

The LGA Reputation Campaign did not include this strategic dimension and presumed that practitioners would deliver the core actions with strategic oversight. From our review, it would appear that senior communications practitioners did not always deliver in this regard. Around a third of senior communications practitioners surveyed for this project thought that the LGA Reputation Campaign had made at least a fair amount of difference to their council's reputation but only 3% said it made a great deal of difference. Heads of communications explained this by saying that they were already delivering the core elements of the campaign to a very high standard – a view not borne out by performance data in terms of overall council satisfaction and a minority of residents feeling informed about public services.

There is an argument that the NRP should concentrate on developing thinkers not doers. There should be clear guidance to CEOs that maps out the core competencies expected of strategic communicators and the benefits that accrue to the business from strategic communications.

The LGcommunications Commission on Core Competencies laid out six competencies and qualities that chief executives identified for senior communications practitioners to develop in order to become more strategic and gain credibility with political and managerial leadership:

1. Strategic communications
2. Leadership, influence and experience
3. Excellent communications / effectiveness
4. Truthfulness, integrity, honesty
5. Resilience
6. Political nous

The NRP should devise a clear 'development ladder' for organisations to improve senior communications practitioners in order that they meet this strategic challenge.



## Knowledge and Credibility

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In order to succeed the NRP must seek to generate a national consensus about the strategic role of communications amongst senior practitioners and their organisational leaders and therefore gain credibility within the sector. This may not be in the remit of the guidance and could take the form of an LGcommunications – LGA campaign that clearly sets out the benefits of reputation management to organisations, especially on the business bottom line during difficult financial times. However, without the promotion of what is important for councils in terms of reputation, the sector could face a ‘GroundHog Day’ scenario that sees communications frozen at a second level function in many councils.

Credibility should also be built through improvement of practitioners’ knowledge. Senior communications professionals need a highly developed understanding of how their business works both in terms of financial realities and policy development (nationally and locally) and must also possess an understanding of the political reality in which they operate.

Actions or programmes that can shift opinion, change behaviour or influence decision making require a seamless understanding of policy and communications. In order to achieve change through social marketing, senior communications professionals need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of policy. Our review suggests there is a role for the NRP to give guidance on how this can be developed.

There is also a need for organisations to acquire insight into audiences. It is not enough to have demographic or geographic understanding of audiences but insight should include social, economic and ethnographic understanding of what drives behaviour or issues. This should be used to help organisations begin two-way conversations with their audiences. It may not be in the skill sets of senior communications practitioners but they should be able to commission the right sort of insight needed. The NRP should give practical guidance about how this can be improved within organisations.

## Developing the Brand

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The need for a clear understanding from the senior management group of the council’s objectives, vision and values and the strategy to deliver it is essential in delivering reputational benefit. This has been termed the ‘what do we want to be famous for?’ question.

It is much more important for the NRP to give guidance to organisations about how they develop their core values than to give guidance on the management of communications channels. Senior communications professionals need to be capable of influencing the leadership and directing corporate behaviour to relentlessly promote core values and the ‘reason for the business to exist’. The NRP should give guidance concerning how organisations develop clear and believable narratives and values and provide a new impetus for staff engagement.

# Executive Summary



However, organisations must be prevented from simply pushing out corporate messaging. This one-way command and control style of communications imposes messages on audiences rather than engaging in two-way conversations. There should be a focus on changing corporate narratives from ones that interrupt what people are interested in and developing them into engaging conversations on subjects that interest and stimulate attention.

## Building Trust Between Brand and People

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Trust is an important element of reputation for any organisation. At the most basic level public service organisations, in order to build trust, must provide services that are reasonably priced, effective and have social worth in terms of supporting individuals and communities. It is imperative to get the signature services functioning very well otherwise building trust will be impossible. Organisations are still not very good at making people aware of what they do and getting the credit for it.

Leadership of local authorities must also understand the dynamics of trust in order to be able to develop values and communications that build trust between residents and their local authorities.

Trust could be described as having three core dynamics<sup>1</sup>:

- 1. Mutuality** – the belief that a relationship between council and residents is based on shared values or interests
- 2. Balance of power** – trust is developed where there is a belief that risks and opportunities are shared by both parties in the relationship
- 3. Trust safeguards** – trust is built where there is a recognition that safeguards exist to limit vulnerability if power imbalances are created

In order for communications to help develop trust they need to be two-way. Councils need to learn to listen to residents and respond effectively.

Our Reputation Index analysis shows the importance to reputation of promoting the interests of local residents and acting in these interests. These important issues which connect with trust, fairness and delivery can account for about half the variation in levels of council satisfaction. The New Reputation Project will need to examine how councils deliver on promises, build two-way communication with residents and develop stronger relations with the public.

The NRP should give guidance on how councils can move from ‘communication, communication, communication to conversation, conversation, conversation’ and how to develop trust by listening to residents through meaningful consultation and acting on the response to deliver promises.

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<sup>1</sup> The Dynamics of Public Trust in Business – Emerging Opportunities for Leaders. Arthur W. Page Society 2009



## Understanding What's Important

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It is essential for organisations to understand what is important for their reputation – this is not necessarily always what seems most urgent. The skill of an excellent senior communications practitioner is to focus the attention of the organisation on what is important.

The jury is still out on the impact of social media and practitioners should beware of evangelists. What is more important is the ability for councils to understand which conversations via social media are important and how to monitor them and the understanding that joining a conversation with the public, with stakeholders, with staff, is more powerful than simply sending out corporate messages.

Our Reputation Index analysis shows that in 2008/9 value for money was the most powerful driver for overall council satisfaction. It can explain over 80% cent of the variation in overall council satisfaction. In single tier authorities, The Research Unit (TRU) has found that council tax level matters and it is one of the most important factors influencing perceptions of value for money. Being informed about value for money, communicating effectively the services you provide and explaining how council tax is spent is extremely important to how satisfied residents are with local authorities. For example it is no accident that Hammersmith and Fulham, which cut council tax in 2006/7 and 2007/8, joined the top 10% performers in terms of overall council satisfaction in 2008/9 for the first time.

Satisfaction with universal council services is becoming increasingly important. Together, these universal services can account for 61% of the variation of overall council satisfaction in 2008/9. Street cleaning has the most impact on the overall reputation of councils. TRU would suggest that this is because it is both a barometer of council efficacy and links in with anti-social behaviour issues. What our analysis also suggests is that councils need to push for satisfaction on a wide range of council services. This has two important consequences for the New Reputation Project. It underscores the importance of 'one council' branding and the importance of developing a set of core actions or campaigns related to council services.

Resident informed ratings are, are closely connected to perceptions of councils. In the Place Survey, there is still a strong correlation between the public service informed rating and overall council satisfaction.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

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In our reputation survey, heads of communications overwhelmingly identified themselves as delivering the core actions of the LGA Reputation Campaign to a very high standard but this self-evaluation does not stack up with public perceptions data. This perception, shared by many heads of communications, indicates a 'credibility gap', that has the potential to suggest the LGA Reputation Campaign was being delivered but not to a sufficient quality standard and without strategic direction or senior buy-in from council leadership.

The NRP should consider carefully how any guidance to organisations will be monitored or evaluated. We would recommend that self-evaluation of the LGA Reputation Campaign did not work and should be replaced with a different mechanism.

The NRP should also advise organisations on how they can monitor reputation and evaluate how effective communications and policy are at influencing it. This could take the form of a 'reputation tracker' survey conducted at regular intervals during the year.

Obviously, monitoring should be focussed on the most important drivers of reputation for specific councils. The Reputation Index should help in determining which of the key drivers of satisfaction particular councils need to concentrate on.

However, as above we recommend that key drivers of satisfaction include monitoring the satisfaction with universal services, value for money perceptions, trust in the organisation, informed ratings and perceptions of leadership.

## Structure and Planning

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Total Place means Total Reputation. Communications and public sector services will need to work more closely together to enhance reputation and ensure value for money. This requires the development of closer working arrangements, protocols and understanding of when to lead and when to support. The NRP should consider providing case studies to help organisations achieve this across the public sector.

The NRP should also consider providing guidance to organisations about the optimum structure for communications functions (unified corporate communications) and the strategic templates and skill necessary to plan, research and evaluate integrated campaigns.



## Basics Masterclass

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In order to make the LGA Reputation Campaign relevant and achievable for all local authorities it was designed as a simple to use tool focussed on the basics. Although this had the obvious advantage of inclusiveness, any refreshed version should aim to help councils develop the 'habits of the best'. It should be designed as a 'maturity model' which looks across the key themes outlined above and offers targets for improvement for all councils from the best to the worst towards the goal of excellence.

The NRP should give direct practical advice backed up by case studies of best practice on the core channels of communications. For example, the NRP could develop best practice guides to publications and staff engagement.

The guidance should be flexible enough for all authorities across all tiers of government to find it relevant and practical to use. The NRP should consider which elements of the guidance are most important for different local government structures and guidance should be given on the choices councils should make between developing these elements.

# Key Outcomes

LGA Reputation Campaign Review



# Introduction – LGA Reputation Campaign Review



The LGcommunications New Reputation Project (NRP) aims to appraise what is happening to local government reputation and in particular the challenge set by the Place Survey of falling public satisfaction with councils often coupled with very positive satisfaction with council services.

Following on from the LGcommunications reports on 'Core Competencies for Senior Communicators' and the 'Chief Executives' Challenge', we are gaining a clearer understanding of what leading professionals, and their corporate and political bodies, require to deliver reputational excellence.

An essential part of local government's response to the challenges of reputation is provided through the LGA Reputation Campaign. This first report for the New Reputation Project evaluates the current campaign and looks to build on its successes.

There is much to commend in the current LGA Reputation Campaign and this report emphasises the step change in local government thinking that this campaign has brought about. Our discussions with a wide range of local government commentators and those in local government strongly advise keeping much of what is in the current campaign in any future developments. This said, it is time to re-appraise whether councils are properly focussing on all the right things that will be necessary to improve their public standing.

Our peer review examined whether the LGA Reputation Campaign from 2005 is fit for purpose in 2010. The review focused on the following five key questions:

1. What worked and what is still relevant from the original campaign?
2. What can be learnt from the implementation of the original campaign?
3. What is missing from the original campaign?
4. What should be in the new campaign?
5. How should a new campaign be implemented?

As part of this review, Local Government Public Affairs (LGPA) and The Research Unit (TRU) have used a series of opportunities to get perspectives on the LGA Reputation Campaign and its future. This can be summarised as follows:

1. Review of LGA Reputation Campaign by the LGcommunications Steering Group
2. Perceptions of local government communicators in Scotland and Wales, and at LGcommunications events in England
3. Representative survey of 125 local authority heads of communications
4. Perceptions of those involved in developing and implementing the LGA Reputation Campaign
5. Public sector communicators meeting

# Key Outcomes



The following is a summary of the key outcomes from the report:

1. The large majority of local authorities and heads of communications welcomed the LGA Reputation Campaign and two-thirds have used it in their work since 2005. It clearly has encouraged better communication, and without it, council perception scores may have declined further.
2. The New Reputation Project (NRP) should start from the point of emphasising the importance of strong political, administrative and communications leadership of the organisation in order to improve services and the awareness of the council doing a good job.
3. The need for a clear understanding from the senior management group of a council's objectives (what do we want to be famous for?) and the strategy to deliver it, coupled with strong, credible leadership from the communications lead, is essential if the reputation of a council is to improve.
4. There is also a need to formalise the new campaign by embedding it in the performance management mechanisms of councils, recruitment of senior managers, public service agreements or the inspection regime of councils.
5. In order to make the LGA Reputation Campaign relevant and achievable for all local authorities it was designed as a simple-to-use tool focussed on the basics. Although this had the obvious advantage of inclusiveness, any refreshed version should aim to help councils develop the 'habits of the best'. It should be designed as a 'maturity model' which looks across the key themes and offers targets for improvement for all councils from the best to the worst towards the goal of excellence.
6. An interactive toolkit should be developed which reflects the changing financial realities and includes:
  - best practice case studies
  - quality measures used to ensure the delivery of improvements are taking place
  - guidance on new communications channels



## What Was Missing From The Campaign?

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1. Two of the most important elements missing from the LGA Reputation Campaign were firstly, a link between the core actions of the campaign and the strategic goals of councils and secondly, a lack of emphasis on the importance of getting strong political, administrative and communications leadership for the campaign.
2. Heads of communications said that they had delivered the Reputation Campaign to a very good standard but this was self-evaluation without quality control. This had the potential for the campaign being delivered but not to a sufficient standard and without strategic direction or senior buy-in from council leadership.
3. Equally, some key communications channels were not included in the Reputation Campaign such as guidance on websites, social media (not least as this campaign was designed in 2005 when social media was not in widespread use), e-communications and council tax bills.
4. Heads of communications also thought that a refreshed campaign should include a focus on value for money (66%), evaluation methodology (63%) and strengthened internal communications (63%).
5. The landscape in which the reputations of councils must be promoted and defended has changed considerably since the launch of the LGA campaign in 2005. The new financial reality in which councils will operate in the medium term will require heads of communications to show how their work has direct and lasting positive effects on council budgets and business imperatives. It is no longer good enough to pay lip service to evaluation – worth must be demonstrated.

# Key Outcomes

## Reputation Index





# Introduction – Reputation Index

This report examines and reviews findings from the recent Place Survey 2008/9 and earlier BVPI surveys and put these surveys in a wider demographic context.

This research identifies drivers and barriers to improving reputation which LGcommunications will use in developing resources to help councils boost satisfaction levels and improve their reputations. As part of this work, we are also developing a Reputation Index and Communication Index to show the relative performance of councils in terms of reputation and communications.

## Key Outcomes

The following is a summary of key outcomes from the report.

- 1.** The Reputation Index analysis shows that in 2008/9 value for money is the most powerful driver for overall council satisfaction. It can explain over 80% of the variation in overall council satisfaction. In single tier authorities, TRU have found that council tax levels matter and it is one of the most important factors influencing perceptions of value for money. It is no accident that Hammersmith and Fulham, which cut council tax in 2006/7 and 2007/8, joined the top 10% performers in terms of overall council satisfaction in 2008/9 for the first time.
- 2.** In 2008/9 Place Survey, London boroughs have become the best performing type of local authority. However, this should be seen in the context of overall council satisfaction ratings in London remaining quite constant over the period of the BVPI and Place surveys. This suggests that there might be two possible readings of their positive current position. It could be argued that London boroughs are performing well, meeting the new challenges and expectations of the public, or alternatively, that it is the declining performance of other local authority types that now flatters London.
- 3.** Improving a council's reputation relative to other councils is challenging. 58% of local authorities in the top 10% for public satisfaction in 2008/9 were in the top 10% in 2006/7. About a third of the top 10% performers have been in this position since 2003/4. In contrast, only five councils, with performance outside the top 40% at any time since 2003/4, are in the top 10% in 2008/9.

# Key Outcomes



4. Satisfaction with universal council services is becoming increasingly important. Together, these universal services can account for 61% of the variation of overall council satisfaction in 2008/9. Street cleaning has the most impact on the overall reputation of councils. TRU would suggest that this is because it is both a barometer of council efficacy and links into anti-social behaviour issues. What our analysis suggests is that councils need to push for satisfaction on a wide range of council services. This has two important consequences for the New Reputation Project. It underscores the importance of 'one council' branding and the importance of developing a set of core actions related to services.
5. The analysis also shows the importance to reputation of promoting the interests and acting in the interests of local residents. These important issues which connect with trust, fairness and delivery account for about half the variation in council performance. The New Reputation Project will need to examine how councils deliver on promises, build two-way communication with residents and develop stronger relations with the public.
6. Resident perceptions of how informed they are, are also closely connected to perceptions of councils. In the Place Survey, residents were asked about how well they felt informed about local public services as opposed specifically to their council, as in 2006/7. Though weaker than relationship with council informed ratings in 2006/7, there is still a strong correlation between the public service informed rating and overall council satisfaction. In 2008/9, informed ratings about the overall services and benefits provided by local public services can account for 42% of the variation in overall council satisfaction.
7. The cleaner, greener agenda as identified in the LGA Reputation campaign remains important for council reputation. Perceptions of public services' ability to keep local areas clean and green account for forty-one per cent of the variation in overall council satisfaction.
8. Another important root of council reputation is perception of levels of anti-social behaviour and safety. Community cohesion and perceptions of anti-social behaviour account for 35% of the variation in overall council satisfaction. Performance on anti-social behaviour issues explains more variation in council performance than in police performance.
9. Using background factors to develop a picture of local communities like the Index of Multiple Deprivation, population density and qualifications, TRU could account for 71% of the variation in perceptions of satisfaction with place. However, these factors give a less robust account of overall satisfaction with councils, accounting for just a quarter (26%) of the differences. This suggests that by looking closely at the key factors that drive the reputation of councils, councils have a real opportunity to improve their performance.



# Case Studies

# Case Studies



As part of our review of reputation, we conducted a series of council visits to examine different routes that councils were following to improve their reputation and the challenges they identified for the New Reputation Project.

Our visits across the country showed that there is no simple blueprint for high-quality reputation. However, those councils with excellent reputations had taken time to acquire their reputations. These organisations displayed strategic leadership, had delivered on key drivers of reputation and key council services and communicated this with their residents<sup>2</sup>.

## Case Study Visit: Norfolk County Council

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Norfolk is an area that has some of the most positive council satisfaction scores in the country. In 2003, Norfolk County Council was in the bottom quartile for overall council satisfaction and their own survey analysis showed that their informed rating was similarly low. This picture of bottom quartile performance for overall council satisfaction was repeated in two of the Norfolk districts: Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn and West Norfolk. The survey data also suggested that overall council satisfaction was underperforming in comparison to council service satisfaction measures.

To meet this challenge, Norfolk County Council, along with the two districts, undertook the only ever Local Public Service Agreement based on improving overall council satisfaction. Government pump priming money was used to boost communication and campaign efforts, targeting the key reputation drivers. The organisations shared a communication officer and agreed mutual use of each others' newsletters. In addition, an independent review of marketing in the three councils was commissioned to help focus efforts and find ways to make money stretch further. This examined print, production and communications capacity and branding and recognition issues.

### Did the council sign-up for the LGA Reputation Campaign?

Yes

### Reputation Index

Norfolk County Council on the Reputation Index score is almost identical to the overall council satisfaction score (44% compared to 45%). In 2008/9, Norfolk County Council is a top quartile performer amongst county councils in terms of overall satisfaction. Along with Hammersmith and Fulham, King's Lynn and West Norfolk is one of the only two council to have moved from being in the bottom 40% of performance in 2003/4 to the top 10% of performers in 2008/9. Norfolk County Council, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth all outperform expectations in terms of the Communications Index (+6%, +6% and +4% respectively).

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that because of differences in survey methodologies between the BVPI Surveys and Place Survey, it is possible that a drop in absolute perception scores does not necessarily mean a fall in comparative performance. In addition, the informed rating question changes from 'being informed about councils services' in 2006/7 to 'being informed about public services' in 2008/9. This also has an effect in interpreting informed ratings.



## What effect did the campaign have on informed ratings, value for money and council satisfaction?

Date	Data Source	Informed	Satisfied	VFM
2003/4	BVPI	N/A	48	N/A
2006/7	BVPI	51	54	47
2008/9	Place Survey	48	44	33

Norfolk County Council along with the Norfolk districts have some of the highest council satisfaction ratings in the country. This case study shows how using a performance framework model based on improving public perceptions and informed ratings has driven up the reputations of these councils.

Norfolk County Council have focussed on cleaner, greener, safer messages and strongly on staff engagement with the vision and values of the organisation and engaging staff as ambassadors for their A to Z publication. These practices have helped to raise awareness of the council services with the local public and overall council satisfaction.

‘We worked even harder at internal communications to help our staff understand not just their own roles, but how they contributed to what the council was delivering overall and the part colleagues in other services had to play. We wanted our staff not just to be able to articulate our three strategic ambitions for Norfolk, but to understand them too and used a wide range of communication methods and materials to make this happen.’

**Christine Birchall, Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager,  
Norfolk County Council**

## Why did the campaign succeed or fail?

Norfolk County Council is a textbook example of following the LGA Reputation Campaign, putting resources in communications and evaluating impact and progress.

Norfolk identified a number of challenges and areas of focus for the New Reputation Campaign:

‘I think ‘skills, learning and activities for young people’ are areas that a revised Reputation Campaign might look to focus on, as they will be as relevant to counties as they are to unitaries and districts because some of the current targets [in the LGA Reputation Campaign] are less relevant to counties.’

**Christine Birchall, Corporate Communications and Marketing Manager,  
Norfolk County Council**



# Case Studies

‘There are two big challenges for me in taking our work forward – being able to continuously evidence the positive impact of our work on the day to day delivery of council priorities, services and council reputation and how best to achieve more for less. Where the latter is concerned, building on our LPSA experience, we are already in discussions with some of our colleagues about longer term pooling of resources and skills to deliver shared campaign objectives.’

**Joanna Hannan, Head of Customer Services and Communications,  
Norfolk County Council**

## Chief Executive’s Perspective

‘We are a £billion plus business, and as such communications with the people we serve and with those who deliver those services is vital to achieve everything we do. That is why communications sits at the heart of our organisation. As council resources grow even tighter, the revised Reputation Campaign will need to evidence clearly the difference it can make to the job each council has to do.’

**David White, Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council**

## Key lessons learnt

- Norfolk is a turnaround council in terms of public perceptions and this was achieved through recognising where the challenges lay and then focussing on communications to make a difference.
- A further insight is the interdependence of county and district council performance in terms of public perceptions. There may well be opportunities in two-tier areas to look at shared weaknesses to drive change.
- Norfolk used a performance and evaluation framework to drive up perceptions.

## Case Study Visit: Hammersmith and Fulham Council

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Hammersmith and Fulham Council are one of the most improving councils in the country and have moved from being in the bottom 40% in terms of council satisfaction in 2003/4 to being in the top 10% performers in terms of council satisfaction in 2008/9.

The corporate communications team has five members in it who work in a multi-disciplinary model, where staff work on marketing communications as well as media enquiries and the council magazine.



'We have a very small communications team. We now have a much more rounded approach. The staff do media enquiries, marketing campaigns, we are all-rounders. Less segmentation of talents. 70% of their work used to be media work, that's now down to about 25%. We all have a lot of project work, writing for the newspaper, campaigns and better evaluation techniques. We target our media engagement to the things that really matter to us, so from 35 to 40 media releases a few years ago we now do five or six [a week] on things that really matter to us. With very clear targets about regional and national news coverage, we are engaging much more at this level than we were, with fewer press releases.'

**Simon Jones, Head of Communications, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

## Did the council sign-up for the LGA Reputation Campaign?

Yes

## Reputation Index

Hammersmith and Fulham scores 59.7% on the Reputation Index. This London borough's overall council satisfaction score in the 2008/9 Place Survey is 58.6%. The actual and expected performance are closely in line.

## What effect did the campaign have on informed ratings, value for money and council satisfaction?

Date	Data Source	Informed	Satisfied	VFM
2003/4	BVPI	N/A	51	N/A
2006/7	BVPI	40	53	35
2008/9	Place Survey	36	59	45

One of the keys to Hammersmith and Fulham's success is residents' views of the organisation in terms of 'value for money'. Hammersmith and Fulham have seen a significant improvement in their value for money rating which has helped to catapult them into the top 10% performers on overall council satisfaction in 2008/9.

# Case Studies



'It's not rocket science, our residents want to send their children to decent schools and to live in a safe environment; they want clean streets and quality parks. It's our job to ensure that we are communicating clearly and concisely exactly what their council is doing to make it a better place. We have to demonstrate that they are getting value for money for their council tax.'

**Simon Jones, Head of Communications, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

## Why did the campaign succeed or fail?

Adopting the Reputation Campaign helped Hammersmith and Fulham to focus on a clear set of objectives it wanted to achieve.

'Councils need to focus on what they are about and if a council does not have that narrative or the communications team do not understand that narrative then you've got major problems. Councils need to be able to communicate this in less than 15 words, if you can't do that then you're failing.'

**Simon Jones, Head of Communications, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

'It's essential to be part of the LGA Reputation Campaign which is about driving home the huge amount of services and benefits that local authorities provide. However, it should also be about a lot more. The hallmark of a successful Reputation Campaign is one that ensures councils are connecting with communities at all levels and that we are being open and transparent about what we are doing well and where improvement is needed.'

**Simon Jones, Head of Communications, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

## Key lessons learnt

- The strategic leadership of the organisation has focussed on providing value for money quality services. This has acted as a major driver for this local authority.
- Value for money has been shown by the Reputation Index to be the most important driver of overall council satisfaction. By focussing on this core issue, Hammersmith & Fulham have seen significant improvements in their reputation.
- Hammersmith and Fulham have a small total communications team focussed on a small number of core objectives.
- Hammersmith and Fulham have a council newspaper fully financed by local advertisers.



## Case Study Visit: Broadland District Council

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### Summary

Broadland is one of the top performing district councils in the country. This council has been amongst the top 10% performing councils in terms of council satisfaction since 2006/7 and in the top 30% since 2003/4.

Broadland is a 'star performer' across the board. In comparison to other district councils, Broadland has the highest district score on litter removal, the second highest district score in terms of value for money, the third highest in terms of place satisfaction and informed ratings. The council is in the top 10 for acting on residents' concerns and experiences the lowest average score for anti-social behaviour.

### Did the council sign-up for the LGA Reputation Campaign?

Yes

### Reputation Index

Broadland District Council is one of the top 10 performers in our Reputation Index, beating its overall council satisfaction rating by 16 percentage points (79% compared to 63%). Out of all the councils in England, Broadland is third in our Communications Index, outperforming achieved informed ratings by 11 percentage points.

### What effect did the campaign have on informed ratings, value for money and council satisfaction?

Date	Data Source	Informed	Satisfied	VFM
2003/4	BVPI	N/A	60	N/A
2006/7	BVPI	64	64	58
2008/9	Place Survey	53	63	50

Broadland District Council can be characterised as an example of Total Reputation: the council excels on every measure that drives reputation.

'The public have a relationship with Broadland, there are hotlines which will take them through to the department they want to speak to and the receptionists are very knowledgeable if you do not know who you want to speak to. There is a culture in Broadland of sorting people out, we don't have a call centre.'

**Angi Doy, Communications Manager, Broadland District Council**

# Case Studies



Broadland District Council used the LGA Reputation Campaign to make the case for more communications.

'On the advice of the LGA Reputation campaign we moved to a quarterly magazine. It used to be just three times a year but we did some research with our residents through our Citizens' Panel. Residents were pretty evenly split between three and four issues but businesses wanted an extra Christmas issue to advertise in.'

**Angi Doy, Communications Manager, Broadland District Council**

Like Norfolk County Council, there is a focus on the cleaner, greener, safer messages. With Broadland, we would also pick out their focus on value for money and emphasis on customer service.

'In our communication strategy, we focus on value for money, being customer focussed, and quality of life.'

**Angi Doy, Communications Manager, Broadland District Council**

## Key lessons learnt

- A challenge with assessing what drives public satisfaction in Broadland is that the council performs so well on such a wide range of measures. The factors that should be seen as dominating even in this context are value for money, excellent relations with the public and staff, and high quality services. The Broadland approach could be characterised as a 'Total Reputation' approach where they perform well in all areas for their residents.
- It could be argued that Broadland face fewer challenges than some of our other cases studies. This is true but other councils with similar population profiles local populations tend not to perform as well as Broadland.

## Case Study Visit: Lancashire County Council

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### Summary

Lancashire County Council was an early and enthusiastic adopter of the LGA Reputation Campaign. The council's leader and chief executive recognise the benefits of good communications to the organisation in terms of improving satisfaction with services and the reputation of the organisation.

The county council has 12 second tier districts within its boundary that have varying levels of resident satisfaction from Ribble Valley Borough Council at 61% to Burnley Borough Council at 36%.



The council is undergoing a communications review and restructure to unify and centralise all communication and marketing, but in recent years has had a decentralised function. There are approximately 70 staff working across the council currently, carrying out significant communications activity.

## Did the council sign-up for the LGA Reputation Campaign?

Yes

## Reputation Index

Lancashire County Council scores 37.9% on the Reputation Index. This is close to the actual overall council satisfaction level which was 40% in 2008/9.

## What effect did the campaign have on informed ratings, value for money and council satisfaction?

Date	Data Source	Informed	Satisfied	VFM
2003/4	BVPI	N/A	49	N/A
2006/7	BVPI	40	50	40
2008/9	Place Survey	37	40	30

- Only two in five residents say they are satisfied with Lancashire County Council.
- Only three in ten residents say the council provides value for money services.
- Only two in five residents say they are at least fairly well informed.
- 58% of residents who feel informed are also satisfied with the county council.
- Only 16% of residents who are dissatisfied with the council say they feel informed.

Ipsos MORI (2009 Place Survey and 2007 Life in Lancashire Survey)

## Why did the campaign succeed or fail?

The council was an enthusiastic endorser of the LGA Reputation Campaign but felt that it did not entirely succeed primarily because it was not delivered to a high enough standard or with strategic oversight. Put simply the council applied communications, but without direction or evaluation it did not help to improve the reputation of the authority as much as it should or could have.

# Case Studies



The council's self assessment of the campaign is that it is performing at a low level.

<b>LGA reputation campaign</b>	<b>Bronze</b>
Manage the media	Reactive and no strategic planning
A-Z guide to services	Only online and not available to all residents
Magazine / newspaper	Reduced to two issues per year
Council branding	Many sub brands, no strong brand management until recently
Internal communications	Good channels in place but no focus on strategy or planning

It was felt that there was a lack of strategic direction of communications for the authority. This is illustrated by the absence of an overarching corporate communications strategy. There is therefore no clear link to the corporate strategy.

Decentralised communications meant that multiple brands had developed through departments and there was no coherent one council approach to communicating the council's message. There was a lack of overarching purpose of communications for the organisation and although there is a core narrative being put in place this has not yet been communicated effectively to internal or external audiences.

Whilst there are examples of very good practice in areas of the council, there was little consistent planning and evaluation of communications. This has led to the organisation pushing information out but having no way of judging if output was effective or a good use of council resources.

## Chief Executive's Perspective

Training and development of heads of communications needs to be addressed. Heads of communications need to understand the business and what 'makes the council tick' in terms of both politics and policy. The council believes that all too often 'gifted amateurs' are placed into communications positions and do not have the training or background to take with them strategic capability or political nous. The NRP needs to address these problems first and foremost. Core roles should be explicit and a 'developmental ladder' put in place that not only recognises the technical and theoretical requirements of the top communications job but also the crucial mix of soft skills – resilience, influencing skills, leadership qualities, trust and political nous.



CEOs need help from communications leads in taking the organisation on a journey described by a clear narrative and set of core values. To do this the lead marketing person needs to be persuasive, credible and knowledgeable about the business. There needs to be a seamless understanding between policy and communications.

Communications for the council should not be focussed on developing logos, channels or media management in isolation. What is required is an understanding of what the council stands for and a relentless promotion of that. Communications needs to understand and help develop the values of the organisation and be capable of robust defense as well as promotion.

The NRP should be developed to give guidance to chief executives not heads of communications. It should set out a clear core purpose for communications and core competencies of the lead marketing role so that CEOs can be reassured that it is developed to promote the reputation of the council. There should be buy in from SOLACE and the LGA.

### Key lessons learnt

- Focussing on communications channels without a strategic overview will not improve reputation.
- The right communications lead, who has all the attributes above is essential to leading the organisation to better reputational outcomes. A development ladder should be in place to help improve skills and core competencies.
- A clear understanding and roadmap to reputation should be targeted at CEOs not heads of communications.

# Feedback



# Feedback



## How to feedback your thoughts:

This is a consultation document that brings together our research to date. We want to take this research and use it to create new guidance to councils on how to improve and defend their reputation.

We need your help to do this. Please feed back to us what you think should be included in the New Reputation Project advice to councils.

We are calling for written evidence from you. This should take the form of a submission to the New Reputation Project (no longer than 1,000 words) by 20th April 2010.

We would especially like to hear your thoughts on the following issues:

- What is missing from the LGA Reputation Campaign that should be included in the new guidance to councils?
- What do you think are the key drivers of reputation at your council or organisation?
- How can the New Reputation Project get buy in from leaders and chief executives of local authorities?
- Should guidance be directed towards council leadership or heads of communication – or both?

We are also very interested in your feedback on the evidence we have published.

## Please send your written submissions to:

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