



LGcommunications



Building Trust

Action Plan

October 2013

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1: Three essential steps to Building Trust	8
2: What the Reputation Campaign achieved	10
3. What do we mean by trust?.....	19
4: How to evaluate success.....	25
5: Professional development	26
6: Developing a strategy.....	28
7: Consultation Responses	29

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Building Trust project aims to help local authorities work more effectively with local people, their own staff and the wide range of groups and organisations that make up our local communities. It has been developed jointly between the Local Government Association (LGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and LGcommunications, the professional body that represents local government communications teams.

This is the first time that a corporate communication project has been undertaken jointly by the bodies that represent elected members, chief officers and communication professionals and we believe that ultimately this will be its greatest strength. This unified approach goes to the heart of the building trust philosophy which says that communication is everyone's job and what is needed if we are to succeed in providing effective leadership is absolute unity of purpose among elected members, senior managers, staff and partners.

The action plan report examines how local government has used communication in the pursuit of its goals and analyses what has worked. It also makes a set of strategic recommendations that will form the basis for effective and efficient communication practice as all of us in the sector continue to navigate our way through uncharted waters.

Its intention is to support council leaders, chief executives and communicators to identify challenges in their area and build trust with their communities, partners and staff during a period of unprecedented change for local public services. This goes beyond communications to understanding how local government itself needs to change as the LGA's Rewiring Public Services campaign has set out the challenges for local public services and a series of propositions.

Recent years have seen a decline in trust in the both public and private sector organisations. We cannot trust the food we eat, the expenses claims of MPs, the journalistic standards of the newspapers we read or the behaviour of the banks we invest our money with. Local government has suffered its own reputational issues over the years. However, it has worked hard over the last decade to act in such a way as to deserve a good reputation and trust in local councils has increased from 52% to 65% between 2001 and 2012.¹ If local government fails to recognise this and does not manage its reputation through building trust with the public there is a risk that this good work could be undone. In particular there may be increased opposition to reform and a loss of confidence in the competency of local government. The action plan we have produced is designed to complement this work and help to reconnect people with the local democratic process.

For the purpose of the Building Trust project, communication is defined in its broadest sense: this is probably best captured by returning to the Latin root '*communicare*', meaning to share. There should, therefore, be no false differentiation between communication,

¹ Citizenship Survey (2001-2011) c.10,000 GB adults 18+ each year. Community Life Survey (2012) c.2,500 GB adults 18+

consultation, engagement or even research: all fall under the umbrella of communication in its broadest and truest sense.

Developing Building Trust

Those councils which adopted the LGA / LGcommunications Reputation Campaigns of 2005 and 2010 have told us that there is now a need for the next step as the landscape has significantly changed. For those councils which adopted the key actions of the reputation campaign, it can be shown that they made a significant contribution to improving how councils communicated, and with that the overall reputation of local government.

Reputation I was launched in 2005, driving a period that saw government funding for councils increase above inflation each year (between 2000 and 2009). Its core premise, backed by a significant body of evidence, was that to increase satisfaction the task was simply to ensure that local people were kept informed and that universal services in particular were strongly linked to the council that was responsible for delivering them. It was a tool kit with 12 core actions: if these were carried out effectively, both satisfaction and reputation were predicted to rise. This still holds true and these core actions remain at the heart of effective communications activity.

Reputation II was launched in 2010 in the shadow of the looming cuts. It sought a more strategic approach, setting out for the first time what the underlying factors that determine good council communications. It began to move the concept of council communication from a tactically based task-led approach to one that could and should be more strategically driven.

Building Trust was launched in 2013 to review and develop the work of these two campaigns. Much of what has been set out in the two previous campaigns is still valid and useful and should not be discarded. However, what is required now is a more nuanced approach to ensure there is no loss of confidence in our capabilities to manage our local areas through inevitable significant change. As the resources available to local government reduce, it will be increasingly important for people to work with us if we are to deliver the outcomes we want for our areas. Trust will be the oxygen of this increased co-operation.

This approach must recognise that as expectations change, and local government's capacity for delivery reduces, communication needs to be less about simply broadcasting and informing and more about conversing and winning people's trust and confidence. For local areas to survive and thrive we need to change the relationship between local government and the public. This will require councils to develop a better understanding of what builds trust between them and the residents and businesses they serve, the behaviours they need to improve or change, new customer service expectations and what destroys trust and the resulting consequences. The best communications teams, who are the conscience of their organisation, are capable of insight into the audiences they serve which will help drive this change.

We know that there are those who are civically engaged and those who are not. There are some people who put local authorities at the centre of their lives and others who have very little contact with the council. Both groups will need to be engaged and an increased level of trust will be crucial to this. The challenge is focused around the role of local leaders to use

communications to help them deliver real results. Trust will help to deliver mutually beneficial actions especially in times of austerity.

The new approach also suggests that communication is increasingly the job of everyone and not just the few. The job of our professional communicators (who, like staff in all departments, will be fewer in number) will become less about communicating and more about supporting and advising the organisation on how it communicates. This is a subtle but crucial difference that goes to the heart of building trust. Martin Reeves, president of SOLACE, captures the new communication challenge well when he talks of devolved leadership in our organisations and the need to recruit armies of narrators and chief narrators to tell our stories.

The following are just some of the outcomes that you should look to achieve through the Building Trust project:

1. Changes in the way services are delivered
2. Manage demand for services
3. Manage expectations of the people and organisations that you serve
4. Deliver behaviour change
5. Access capacity within the community to deliver services
6. Reduce unnecessary contact with the council
7. Increase engagement with the democratic process
8. Improve community cohesion and local places themselves
9. Improve access to and use of services
10. Boost the morale of staff and elected member
11. Improve the lives of residents
12. Better join up local public services

The Trust Test

A high performing council communication team will have been following best practice for at least a decade. However, just because something worked in the past does not mean that it will continue to do so. *The Trust Test (part 1)* can be measured as a series of self-assessment qualitative questions. These can be used as the basis of discussions with elected members, chief officers, communication professionals and members of the public:

1. **Are people too familiar with your communications?** We encourage all councils to assess whether the style and content of their communications is fresh and dynamic. The original activity of the Reputation Campaign worked because it was different to the unstructured communications that preceded it.
2. **Have local people changed their relationship with communication channels?** Attitudes towards and use of broadcast, print, social and digital media are changing rapidly. Does your communication now need to deliver a targeted approach based on the interests of the public?
3. **Has your council changed what it is communicating about?** This may require different tools and approaches than the ones that have been successful in the past.
4. **Do local people feel they have less influence?** People need to be informed about the services and benefits the council provides, but also about issues affecting their local area and how to get involved in local decision-making.

The Trust Test (part 2) establishes that the impact of addressing these issues can be measured in a quantitative way through public opinion surveys. Some of these have been set out by the LGA in their regular polling of public opinion, and as part of their LGINform series of questions they recommend local authorities ask the public. We will develop this further as the Building Trust project progresses:

- 1. How much do you trust your local council(s)?**
 - Current level: **61%** of Britons say great deal/fair amount²
- 2. To what extent do you think your local council(s) acts on the concerns of local residents?**
 - Current level: **63%** of Britons say great deal/fair amount
- 3. Overall, how well informed do you think your local council(s) keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?**
 - Current level: **66%** of Britons say very/fairly well informed

Using the Action Plan

The Building Trust Action Plan, available from our websites, sets out a clear strategic basis for how effective communication needs to be conceived and executed so that it drives the agendas of our organisations and areas. This consists of three core elements: brand, leadership and strategy. It aims to achieve absolute unity of purpose and clarity of method between elected members, chief officers and the professional communicators they employ to deliver effective and efficient communication for their organisations.

To help with this we have set out:

- our evidence for why the concept of building trust is important;
- how to evaluate success;
- a framework for professional development;
- a framework for a strategic plan.

We are confident that these ideas will be of use to you. We welcome feedback relating to the Action Plan principles and how these have been implemented locally. This is not a definite answer: it is a work in progress which we want the local government sector to own and develop.

Work so far

A number of formal and informal workshops and sessions were held with senior elected members, senior officers and communications professionals to explore what they required from this piece of work. This included two sessions with the LGA's cross-party Innovation and Improvement Board. A broad proposition was developed, and was tested with key politicians and officers before it was launched.

The original Building Trust consultation document and online survey were launched at the LGcommunications Academy in May 2013. Following the responses, we reviewed progress

² LGA polling on resident satisfaction with councils, July 2013, 1,002 British adults 18+ interviewed by telephone

at the LGA Conference in July 2013. The key themes were explored with the 45 Chief Executives and senior managers in workshop sessions. This is an ongoing process: we are launching this Action Plan at the SOLACE Summit in October 2013 but are looking to continue the discussions and development of the Building Trust project over at least the next couple of years.

Throughout the development of the Building Trust project we have tried to open up the discussion beyond just communication professionals. We have engaged with elected councillors, senior decision-makers and the public themselves. We have incorporated evidence from publically available research into the Action Plan.

What continuing support are the LGA, LGcommunications and SOLACE providing?

LGA

- Focusing outward communications on the **Brand** of the sector and how local government is “getting the basics right”; driving innovation but also listening and engaging
- Encouraging changes across local public services to build trust
- Setting up peer reviews using the Building Trust framework
- Continuing to monitor the impact of the project through public opinion polling

LGcommunications

- Developing online and regional discussions on the principles of the Building Trust project, expanding the research base and showcasing case studies
- Supporting a professional development programme
- Relaunching the LGcommunications Reputation Awards
- Working with the LGA to develop new metrics and analysis as part of the Trust Test at a national and local level
- Work with the LGA and SOLACE to develop and agree a communications **Strategy** framework document for local government

SOLACE

- Working with Skills for Justice and the LGA to establish a learning framework for **Leadership** skills among senior managers that embeds the concept of trust in their professional development
- To also include trust within a framework of ethics and values that will be developed as part of the next SOLACE business plan

Acknowledgements

This is the first time the LGA, SOLACE and LGcommunications have worked together on a joint project and we would like to thank those who took part in our consultation and discussions. Many of their comments are in the appendices.

Amongst others we would like to thank: Sir Merrick Cockell, LGA Chair; Cllr Peter Fleming, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board Chair; Jill Shortland, LGA Deputy Chair; Marianne Overton, LGA Independent Group Leader; Ruth Cadbury, LGA Improvement and Innovation Board Deputy Chair; David Holdstock, LGA Director of Communications; Joe Simpson, LGA Leadership Centre Director; Martin Reeves, SOLACE Chair; Cormac Smith,

LGcommunications Chair; Robin Campbell, LGcommunications National Secretary; Neil Wholey and Hannah Condon, LGcommunications.

1: Three essential steps to Building Trust

Building on the reputation campaign of 2010, the partners of Building Trust have adopted three strategic drivers that we consider to be essential for any organisation wishing to communicate effectively and thereby increasing trust. These drivers are brand, leadership and strategy

Brand

The basis of any successful communication is a compelling and credible story. The story should set out a vision for the local area how the council will behave and what others can expect from it. It is important never to make promises that we cannot deliver on. A powerful brand is no less important for a local authority than any other organisation in pursuit of goals where they need to engage large audiences. A successful brand starts with a compelling corporate narrative and ends as a promise fulfilled. It is always what people say about us when we are not in the room that matters. Leaders of local places need to maintain their own brand identity but also manage multi-layered brands across a range of agencies.

As a sector, local government already has strong ingredients to make up a credible and strong brand and provide leadership. It is the most efficient part of the public sector and is more trusted to deliver than national government.

Five steps to branding the local areas and councils

1. Set out a clear and compelling corporate narrative that explains the council's vision for the local area, what it stands for and how this relates to partner organisations
2. The narrative must be developed with, and owned by, local leaders; this includes leading members, chief officers, staff and a range of people within partner organisations
3. Underpin the narrative with a small number of priority service-based promises
4. Embed the narrative in the corporate plans of a range of organisation. Also embed it within their individual business/work plans/policies to ensure the narrative is clearly part of frontline service delivery across the local area
5. Communicate the narrative across the local area to achieve understanding and unity of purpose

Leadership

While communication is the job of all council employees, it must start with absolute unity of purpose between the political and managerial leadership of the council. Once this has been achieved, the job of recruiting brand champions and devolved leaders at every level of the organisation, and among residents and partners, can begin in earnest. Face-to-face communication will always be most powerful and the most trusted.

Five steps to assessing whether leadership is embedded at the heart of communication

1. Do senior leaders display absolute unity of purpose?
2. Does the organisation have clear core values and behaviours which are consistently displayed by the organisations leaders?
3. Do organisations middle managers and line managers own the values and vision and carry these to staff?
4. Does leadership based internal communication lie at the heart of the council's staff engagement?
5. Do you have a plan for identifying and developing leadership in the organisations best people?

Strategy

Strategy is probably no more than having a coherent plan that is based on understanding of what works and how it works in your place and for your residents and partner organisations. Goals must always be relevant and achievable and all activity must be evidence-based. Work should also be evaluated regularly to demonstrate added value and contribution to local goals.

Five steps to setting a coherent strategy (the ROSIE method)

1. RESEARCH - Ensure a clear understanding of issues and target audiences before commencing communication activity. Refer to existing data and carry out fresh research if necessary.
2. OBJECTIVE - Always set clear objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable relevant and time limited. (SMART)
3. STRATEGY - Ensure that communication activity is aligned to and supports the agenda set for the local area and the organisations within it. There must be support for the desired brand and senior communication staff must have a clear understanding of how this works.
4. IMPLEMENTATION - Review your communications to ensure capability and capacity for the planning, organising and deployment of the full range of appropriate channels and messages for any required task.
5. EVALUATION - Always evaluate communication activity both to demonstrate what works, and what adds value, and to enable lessons to be learned that will inform future policy decisions and strategy.

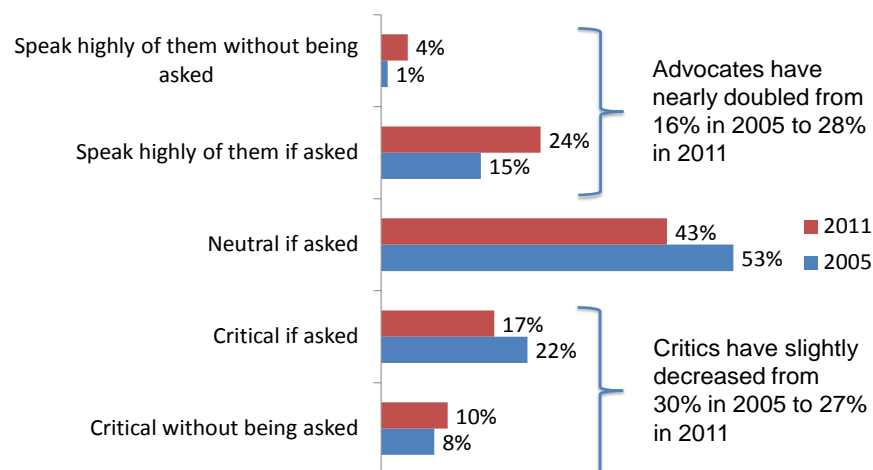
2: What the Reputation Campaign achieved

The Reputation Campaign has delivered but what next?

The Reputation Campaign from 2005 onwards, led by the LGA and LGcommunications, genuinely helped focus councils on serving the public better. It worked on the basis of a *golden rule* that the more a council informed the public about the work they were doing, the more they would understand and be satisfied with the work being done.

In 2005, just 16% of the population were advocates of their local council and spoke highly of it. This proportion had nearly doubled by 2011 (28%). This shift was mainly due to a fall in levels of neutrality among residents: 53% viewed their council neutrally in 2005, compared to 43% in 2011. The campaign therefore engaged well with those unsure or uninformed about their council, but did little to address the issues of those who had reason to be critical of their council.

Q. Which one of the following comes closest to how you feel about your local council(s)?



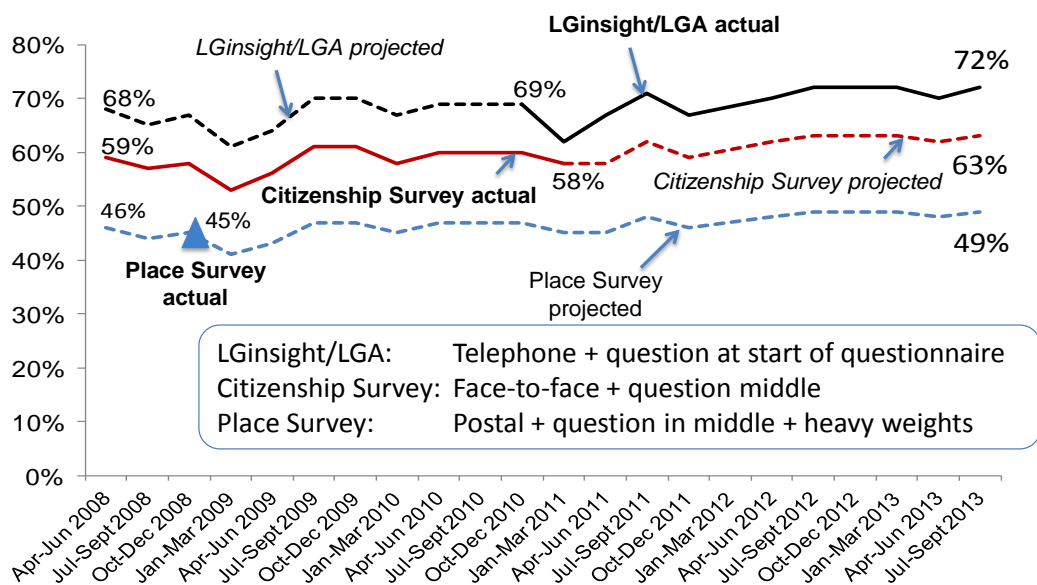
Source: Ipsos MORI/LGA Reputation Campaign 2005, Populus/LGinsight 2011.

The first campaign of 2005 suggested a number of core actions – such as publishing a council magazine or newspaper and an A-Z of services, as well as some recommendations on service delivery. This helped consolidate a clear council brand in the mind of the public, rather than the disparate collection of logos and leaflets which had developed in many areas. Local people, particularly those unsure about what the council delivered or their role in the community, were helped to understand what their council provided.

Although it was not in the original campaign the metric that has been most frequently used to measure the impact of communications is resident satisfaction with the council. This was a measure used within the government's Place Survey, which measured public opinion across England in 2008. This was a postal survey and figures were provided for each local

authority. The average score was a level of 45% satisfaction in 2008. There has been no Place Survey since 2008 but we estimate that if the survey was carried out today then satisfaction would be measured through this methodology at 49%. The reason for this is that there were two other surveys (LGinsight/LGA poll and the Citizenship Survey) in the time period between 2008 and 2013 which used different methodologies to the postal Place Survey. We can use these to identify the trend in public opinion which has been for a gentle uplift over the years.

Satisfaction with local council



Source: LGinsight/LGA series of polling based on telephone survey of c.1,000 adults 16+ per wave (GB). Citizenship Survey series of polling based on face-to-face survey of c.3,000 adults 18+ per wave (England). Place Survey based on a single poll of c.500K adults 18+ (England). Projections carried out by LGinsight and are indicative only

The methodologies do produce different results. This is due to the different ways the questions are asked and also the different sampling and weighting processes. There is a degree of evidence that in the Place Survey the order of the questions and the tendency of some groups in society to respond to a postal survey more than others depressed the figure. In the Citizenship Survey, which is face-to-face, a more representative sample is achieved. However, the question is in the middle of the survey and could be effected by some of the previous questions. Also in a face-to-face survey more people are likely to choose neutral answers due to the use of showcards from which people read the answers. In the LGinsight/LGA telephone poll a representative sample is achieved and the question is asked at the start of the survey.

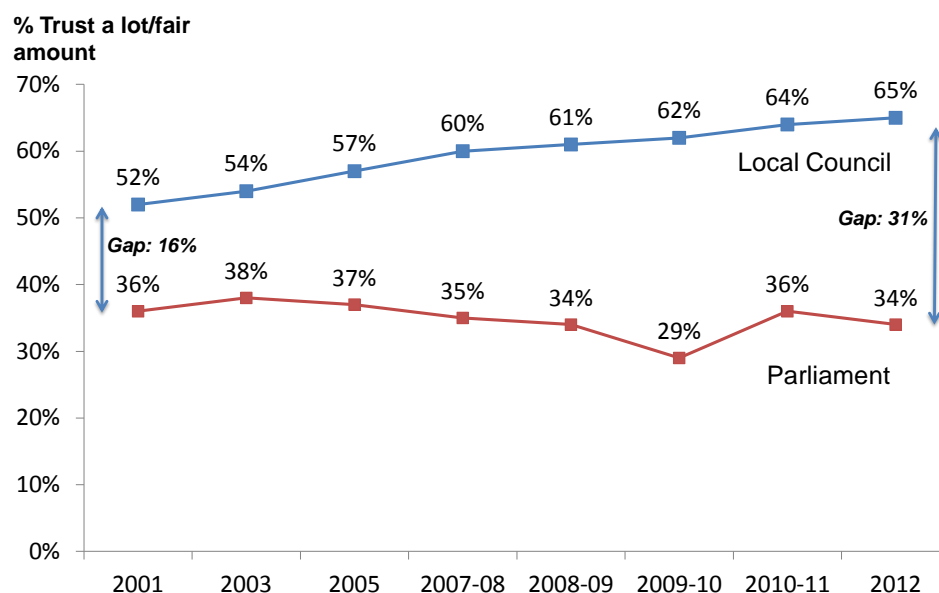
The government's face-to-face Citizenship Survey measured satisfaction between 2008 and 2011. During this period satisfaction stayed relatively constant at approximately 59%. At the end of this period the series of polling started by LGinsight and now continued by the LGA began. The overlap helps us understand the differences between the surveys. The consistency across the two surveys, within their own trend data, suggests that the Place

Survey score would be relatively similar now compared to that obtained in 2008, and some of the underlying variations suggest a slight increase.

This analysis naturally hides a wide degree of variation at a local authority level and for different areas. For example, a recent face-to-face survey in Hackney showed that resident satisfaction had increased from 53% in 2005 to 73% in 2013.³ Similarly, some local authorities that have repeated their Place Survey methodology in 2011/12 have seen a rise in their results. This includes Wolverhampton (40% in 2008/9 to 52% in 2011/12), Reading (40% to 49%) and Cambridge (50% to 58%)⁴. However, for the national average satisfaction levels to have only increased by a small margin, other authorities must have seen declines of a similar level to the increases seen elsewhere.

Beyond satisfaction levels, we have also noted that the number of people stating that they trust their local council has increased from 52% in 2001 to 65% in 2012.

Trust in Public Institutions



Source: Citizenship Survey (2001-2011), c.10,000 GB adults 18+, Community Life Survey (2012), c. 2,500 GB adults 18+

It is clear that ratings of trust and advocacy (which have increased considerably since 2005) are a different measurement to ratings of satisfaction with service delivery (which has only increased slightly if at all). However, they all contribute to reputation. The Reputation Campaign has in particular improved the relationship between councils and those who before felt relatively uninformed about what the council does. As Ben Page from Ipsos MORI said at the time of the 2005 Reputation Campaign:

“The Reputation Campaign is about doing well on the liveability agenda and linking everything you do for residents back to the council, rather than hoping residents

³ <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/publications/1551/Hackney-in-2013.aspx>

⁴ Wolverhampton: <http://www.wton-partnership.org.uk> Reading: <http://www.reading.gov.uk> Cambridge: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/www.cambridge.gov.uk/files/docs/citizens-survey-2011.pdf>

assume it was you. None of this means neglecting schools or big ticket services. It does mean getting the credit for services which the whole population values most.”

Conversely, it also means getting the blame if the council does not deliver. Therefore the second Reputation Campaign from 2010 focused less on outputs and more on strategy and driving service delivery. It highlighted three particular issues that are crucial:

- your leadership
- your brand
- your strategy.

It also set out the five areas that we all need to focus on in order to improve reputation:

- prove you provide value for money
- always inform and engage residents and staff
- build trust and confidence in what you do
- improve key services and show you are doing so
- focus on changing lives for the better

We do not think these have changed in 2013. They apply to local councils but also to local places. However, what has changed is the means to achieve these goals and the higher aspirations we now have for what communications can deliver.

We observe that the best councils took the information from the two campaigns and developed them further to meet local needs. They went beyond measuring service satisfaction and focused on understanding their community. Compared with 2005 the local government sector has many more good communication teams who deliver for their authorities, local people and local places.

Given that many of the actions from the Reputation Campaign are nearly a decade old we consider this model to need refreshing. This is further reinforced by the steady but slow increase in advocacy and trust in local government. The path is right but it needs to accelerate. The principles are sound but they need to be developed further. In particular we need to address new challenges and the areas where the Reputation Campaign did not deliver.

What the Reputation Campaign did not deliver

The amount of money spent on local government communications, and the activity undertaken, is always quite rightly subject to intense scrutiny. Many people see communications as at best a low priority for a local authority and at worst wasteful and politically motivated. Managing the reputation of the authority, and local government more generally, is seen by some as an unhealthy focus. This piece of work will further develop and help to articulate the benefits to the community of a local council and area having a good reputation and the role of communications.

The Reputation Campaign provided tools that encouraged openness, clearer local leadership and truthful communications. For example a council newspaper or magazine can be seen as a clear statement of council plans, activity and delivery. If this statement is tangibly seen to be untrue or not telling the whole story then local residents can hold the

authority to account. Local media can also challenge these statements. Real world experience of service delivery and what it is like to live in the local area will always trump anything written in a council publication.

In the best councils, communications activity helps them organise their thoughts and plans and develop an open and engaging approach with residents and other groups in society. Overall good performance, encompassing good service delivery and communications, therefore leads to a good reputation. The campaign originally addressed the concerns of councils that were performing well in terms of service delivery, but that felt that residents rarely had the necessary information to form a rounded view of their performance. We have seen that councils have managed to maintain, if not improve, levels of satisfaction, and that overall levels of trust and advocacy have increased.

However, in poor performing authorities, using the communication tools of the Reputation Campaign in the style of a high performing authority is more likely to fail. If a council does not deserve a good reputation then no amount of communications activity will get it one. Instead, these authorities need to focus much more on using the challenge of the Reputation Campaign to focus on improving service delivery and local leadership. Communications should focus more on telling the story behind the journey that the local authority is going on to improve, not just highlighting positive aspects to protect reputation. There should be a clear focus on outcomes not outputs. Some originally poor performing authorities have done just that and their communications has supported their improvement by bring the public with them. It has been a long journey for these authorities, lasting for many years, but those working within those authorities have perhaps had the biggest personal reward from playing a part in that, and also are now in a position of having a more engaged public than they might otherwise as done.

Intended as a core set of actions and principles to be adapted locally, there are still many councils which have not engaged with either of the reputation campaigns and do not measure what their residents say about them. This work now focuses on the next steps which should aim to better engage residents in conversations about reputation and what the core actions of their council should be. Along with the original reputations campaigns, which provide useful management tools to monitor outcomes and enable councils to organise their decision-making processes, provide clear local leadership, improve service delivery and be more efficient in their communications. However, we now need to provide more advice on engaging with the public and to flag up that people change their views.

The Trust Test: What does being “informed” mean?

The golden rule, which still applies, is that the more informed people are about an organisation the more satisfied they are likely to be. This still holds true in a number of public opinion surveys and many councils have seen satisfaction rise as they increase the number of people who feel informed. However, we think the concept of “informed” is more complex than previously thought. People can be well informed about certain aspects (such as services) but not about others (such as plans for the future). We are able to show, through the initial LGinsight but now regular LGA polling, that external factors, such as criticism from central government, can cause satisfaction to dip. People feel no less informed but become more uncertain about the information.

This complexity has only come to light in recent years through the development of regular local authority telephone surveys which track public opinion a number of times a year. This has enabled a far greater understanding of when things change and the reasons why. Some of these authorities have recently seen record levels of people feeling informed about the services and benefits that they provide, but have also seen their satisfaction levels plateau or even fall. We have followed up in some of these authorities with focus groups to unpick more about what being “informed” means and have established four possible areas which councils should consider. A high performing council communication team will have been following best practice for at least a decade. However, just because something worked in the past does not mean that it will continue to do so.

The first part of the “Trust Test” we have developed can be measured as a series of self-assessment qualitative questions. These can be used as the basis of discussions with elected members, chief officers, communication professionals and members of the public:

1. **Are people too familiar with your communications?** When we say that people are informed we usually mean that they are “informed about the “services and benefits” they receive (the actual wording of this question). This is a very specific thing to be informed about. In 2005 this was a real weakness in local government communications so people responded well to even the most basic of information, such as receiving a council magazine or A-Z. Two in five local authorities (40%) introduced a council publication between 2000 and 2006, and by 2008 most councils had one.⁵ In 2013, people understand the role of their local authority far better than they once did, and they are very used to the style of communications from local authorities. For many this is a quite passive and detached style in which local authorities talk about themselves in the third person and repeat stories or cover similar topic areas. While this does not apply to all local government communications we would encourage councils to look at their publications and assess whether the style and content is fresh and dynamic. In particular how can we engage rather than interrupt people in their lives and conversations.

⁵ Proving Communications Works, the impact of council publications, 2009, LGcommunications.
<http://www.lgcomms.org.uk/asset/72/PrvngCommsWrks-ImptOfcnclPubs.pdf>

2. Have local people changed their relationship with communication channels?

Having become well informed about “services and benefits”, people become increasingly interested in more complex or different information. The media and communications world has also changed rapidly with many now addicted to smart phones and tablet devices.⁶ Moreover, the OECD has reported between 2007 and 2009 newspaper readership in the UK declined by 21%.⁷ Many councils are responding well to their residents’ changing needs in terms of communications, but the fragmentation of the market, with different groups of people requiring different messages and using different channels, has added an extra layer of difficulty and complexity to council communications. General communication messages can struggle to get through in a world where people are used to more targeted communications based on their interests.

3. Has your council changed what it is communicating about? It is no longer simply enough to communicate what services and benefits are available. There are far more complex and difficult messages to get across. Many of these require local authorities to move from simply being a supplier of services to their “customers” and maximising satisfaction to managing their expectations. This can require different tools and approaches to communications than the ones that have served in the past.

4. Do local people feel they have less influence? The original Reputation campaign looked at the impact of feelings of influence on local decision-making. This was more recently developed by from the Community Development Foundation on perceptions of influence which established three activities that “can impact on feelings of influence: provision of information; consultation – listening to views and acting on them; and attitudes towards local authority and partners.”⁸ Their conclusions were based on analysis of Place Survey public opinion data and depth interviews with members of the public. “The analysis [of Place Survey data] shows a relatively strong link between perceived feelings of influence and attitudes to the local authority, and this link was reinforced by the interviews..... residents explained that local information was important because being informed about local issues was vital to deciding if they wanted to influence them or whether it was possible to.” People need to be informed about “ the services and benefits the council provides” and “issues affecting the local neighbourhood” and “how to get involved in local decision-making.”

This is our current theory and we envisage the Building Trust project testing out what is really going on. This new shift in perceptions is backed up by some focus groups findings that have been shared with us from a couple of local authorities.

“At one time I used to read them, and then I found that if I compared last month’s with this months’, they’re saying the same things, churning out the same stuff, and it’s all just people saying how lovely things are.” Female

⁶ <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2011/08/a-nation-addicted-to-smartphones/>

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/sti/ieconomy/oecdexaminesfutureofnewsandtheinternet.htm>

⁸ Citizens and local decision making: What drives feelings of influence?, 2010, Community Development Forum, http://www.cdf.org.uk/nep-microsite/files/resources/Research/citizens_and_local_decision_making_full_report.pdf

“Maybe [the council email] would learn from how I respond and my preferences so that it would get smarter all the time. So it wouldn’t send me things which don’t really apply to me.” Male

“I read it online. I get the bulletins sent through, and I’m of the age where I’ve got my iPhone, I’ll read it on the Tube on my iPhone rather than get this print [council magazine] and start reading it, and just the way I am.” Female

“I think [the council’s] website is just awful. It makes it really difficult for you to find things when you want to find them. You really need to be committed to finding something, because it will take you through a million links, from one to another, to another, back to the first one, somewhere else.. It can’t compete with all these new websites that just look so nice and accessible.” Male

The second part of the Trust Test establishes that the impact of addressing these issues can be measured in a quantitative way through public opinion surveys. Some of these have been set out by the LGA in their regular polling of public opinion, and as part of their LGINform series of questions they recommend local authorities ask the public. We will develop this further as the Building Trust project progresses:

- 1. How much do you trust your local council(s)?**
 - Current level: **61%** of Britons say great deal/fair amount⁹
- 2. To what extent do you think your local council(s) acts on the concerns of local residents?**
 - Current level: **63%** of Britons say great deal/fair amount
- 3. Overall, how well informed do you think your local council(s) keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?**
 - Current level: **66%** of Britons say very/fairly well informed

Why we need to develop trust rather than just focus on reputation?

Reputation management in local government can be misinterpreted. As part of a survey of public sector leaders carried out by Ipsos MORI in early 2013, just 3% stated that the most important issue facing their sector was reputation.¹⁰ Only 3% said that the most important issue facing their sector was the reputation of their sector. No local government leaders saw reputation as their top priority: this was, understandably, to be seen to be responding to budget cuts.

But we argue that rather than ignoring reputation, that instead reputation is at the forefront of how local areas will deal with budget cuts. This is what we are looking to explain through the concept of trust. We are looking to articulate the essence of what a good reputation delivers, rather than seeking a good reputation in itself. We believe that the best areas in managing budget cuts will be those with a good reputation for delivering services well. Communications

⁹ LGA polling on resident satisfaction with councils, July 2013, 1,002 British adults 18+ interviewed by telephone

¹⁰ Ipsos MORI, Public Sector Leaders Survey, Jan- Feb 2013. 200 interviews were carried out with chief executives, directors and senior managers in the public sector, 50 each in central government, NHS, local government and education. <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3156/Public-Sector-Leaders-views-on-public-services-and-economy.aspx>

plays a role in amplifying the impact to achieve greater outcomes for the local authority by keeping people informed, engaged and involved. This supports them in ensuring residents understand the value for money their local authority provides and also that their council listens and acts. This was highlighted in PwC's annual local government survey for 2013.¹¹ This looks at the views of local authority Chief Executives and Leaders as well as the general public. The report states:

“The public remains largely unaware of any reductions in their council services. However, while they feel marginally better informed than last year, there is increasing public opposition to service reductions and concern where they have been experienced in practice. There is particular public sensitivity about perceived service reductions in universal environmental services. The challenge for councils to engage with the public around the impact of their financial pressures is now even more marked than ever.”

According to PwC three quarters (75%) of council leaders think that the public are well informed about the reasons for the savings they are planning to make; only half (55%) of Chief Executives think likewise. However, the same study shows that amongst the general public stated awareness has only gone up from 26% in 2012 to 36% now. This disconnect in understanding suggests that local leaders need to appraise whether they are able to get the basics of their communications right, and in particular whether or not their messages are getting through.

¹¹ PwC, The Local State We're In, March 2013, <http://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/local-government/publications/the-local-state-we-are-in.jhtml>

3. What do we mean by trust?

We do not have a set definition of trust. We want local authorities to define what it means to them in their local area, or indeed if “trust” is not relevant for them, to consider another banner to focus their attention on. We believe that it is relevant for all authorities as it encompasses a concept of building strong relationships based on mutual understanding, and this has value in delivering a higher return for communications activity. We want local authorities to aspire to get more from their communications for their local area and use this Action Plan process to establish what that return might be and the resources needed.

In our consultation the concept of Building Trust as a valid goal for local authorities divided opinion. Many respondents stated that the public simply want local councils to deliver the basic services well and clearly felt that “Building Trust” was a code for “Building Reputation”. A representative selection of the comments we received are included in the appendices. Yet, across all responses, including negative ones, there was a clear desire for communication activities to focus on outcomes. In particular there was a strong focus on the need to build strong engagement with communities to deliver these outcomes. We hope to present Building Trust in this context and in particular give local authorities, and communication professionals within them, the tools to deliver localism further.

Localism 2015 (NLGN)

As the New Local Government Network (NLGN) has identified, all the major political parties say they support localism:

“The 2010 manifestos from the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrats all outline a clear mandate for a more locally-led way of generating economic growth, providing services and reviving democracy.”¹²

Their report on what localism will look like in 2015 contains a number of articles from elected members across the political spectrum. Many highlight the creative solutions and strong leadership provided by local government. A key theme is also the role of trust both in terms of whether local government can be trusted to deliver by local people and central government, and also whether local government itself trusts the public.

“Let’s show we are serious about localism and local decision-making. Let’s trust local people to act as responsible adults and make decisions that balance the needs of the vulnerable and the aspirations of the many.” Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader, London Borough of Sutton

“[A]t the heart of a new localism must be a renewed relationship between central and local government and a renewed trust and vision of the role that councils can play in a post-austerity Britain.” Councillor Paul Carter, Leader, Kent County Council

“Localism’ should mean central government trusting councils and trusting citizens to take control of decision-making so they can shape their own neighbourhoods, rather

¹² NLGN, Localism 2015: Where next for the political parties?, September 2013, <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/2013/what-will-localism-look-like-in-2015/>

than their neighbourhoods being shaped around them... despite the steady rhetoric of localism, the everyday experience of communities around the country is one of powerlessness.” Councillor Lib Peck, Leader, London Borough of Lambeth

Rewiring Public Services (LGA)

The Local Government Association (LGA) has developed many of these ideas further by setting out a new challenge for local government as part of the “Rewiring Public Services” campaign launched at the LGA conference in early 2013.¹³ In particular the project clearly focuses on the role of local leadership facilitated by a different kind of local government. The first aim of the campaign is to enhance quality of life by “rejuvenating democracy and giving back to people real reasons to participate in civic life and their communities.” The immediate focus is on the need to shift power from central to local government. This analysis is backed by Ipsos MORI research that shows that only one in nine people (11%) trust central government to take decisions over local services. However, with greater powers come greater responsibilities and the longer-term goal is to “leap into a more grown-up relationship between central and local government.”

Trust in Practice (Demos)

A key report that has helped inform the development of the Building Trust project was produced by Demos in 2010.¹⁴ This report shows a clear link between trust, localism and improved outcomes.

“Politicians of all political parties are committed to devolving power to local government. This will require improving public trust in politics and politicians. The success of devolution depends on residents trusting their local councils enough to engage in decision making and welcome greater devolution.....

Efficient service design is increasingly seen to depend on earlier and more substantive engagement with service users. In the absence of trust, residents are less inclined to participate in such engagement exercises, viewing them cynically as ‘window dressing’. A more trusting relationship between local government and residents will lead to a better quality of engagement and better results stemming from it.....

The best approach to improving public trust is to increase the number of opportunities and spaces for local government to interact in order to allow local government representatives to demonstrate their own trustworthiness and allow the public to make a judgement on this basis. Demonstrating trustworthiness in this sense requires not only attention to the style and approach of communications – conversations, not communications – but also better considerations of what residents value. At its core, demonstrating trustworthiness demands that councils demonstrate their own willingness to trust the public. Trust is a mutual endeavour.“

¹³ LGA, Rewiring Public Services, June 2013, <http://www.local.gov.uk/rewiring-debate>

¹⁴ Trust in Practice, 2010, Demos <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/trustinpractice>

Their work specifically warns against “mechanistic” approaches to building trust and encourages us all to “put relationships at the heart of the equation”. They recommended focusing much more on personal experience and face-to-face contact with key visible services “getting the basics right.” They also set out clear policy recommendations:

- “Move beyond satisfaction measures as a measure of effectiveness
- Develop community capacity
- Create space for individual staff to build trust
- Prioritise community engagement in strategic decisions and understanding needs
- Hold open days to meet middle management
- Create citizen advocates
- Promote the role of councillors”

They provide three case studies which attribute the building of trust to successful policy outcomes in regeneration, social care and neighbourhood forums. People made the extra effort to deliver and found the experience far more rewarding.

Beyond Nudge to Demand Management (RSA)

Moving beyond localism, there is a clear business case for engaging more with communities. The RSA sets this out clearly in their report “*Beyond Nudge to Demand Management*.”¹⁵ They state that local authorities face two choices: to manage decline or redefine relationships. They accept that councils may have to carry out elements of both, managing immediate cuts in services while in the longer term developing a different relationship with citizens. However, it is clear in their analysis that successful demand management will only come about through a redefined relationship with the public. Focusing simply on the short-term restriction in the supply of services will not be enough to meet the long-term objectives of councils to reduce demand for their services.

Trust Barometer/Building Trust (Edelman)

The value of building trust applies not just to local authorities but also to other public and private sector organisations. Edelman articulates this most strongly through their own Building Trust analysis and their yearly survey which monitors trust levels across the world. This shows that reputation helps build trust.

Alan Vandermolten of Edelman sets out the three reasons why he cares about trust which we quote in part below:¹⁶

1. “**Trust is a Leading Indicator.** Unlike Reputation, which is the sum of perceptions of past behaviors, Trust is a leading indicator of how stakeholders believe a business and/or its leaders will behave in the future. If stakeholders grant Trust to companies, those companies have permission to lead. Trusted enterprises can drive the agenda of their organisations in explicit partnerships with stakeholders, leading to increased

¹⁵ RSA, Beyond Nudge to Demand Management, July 2013 <http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/community-and-public-services/2020-public-services/beyond-nudge-to-managing-demand>

¹⁶ <http://www.edelman.com/post/why-trust-matters/>

value for employees, customers, suppliers, communities, investors and, ideally, society.”

2. **“Trust is a Manageable Asset.** Unlike the outdated (and I would suggest false) notion of managing perceptions of companies to drive stakeholder behaviour towards those companies, Trust is a manageable and measurable corporate asset that delivers business value. “
3. **“Public Relations Professionals Should be the Keepers of Trust for their Organisations.** I fundamentally believe companies and their leaders know how to behave in ways which engender long-term trust. For reasons which are usually within their control, they sometimes lose their way, damaging the value of their companies and leading, in many cases, to leaders being removed from their jobs. In the modern practice of public relations, PR professionals have the responsibility to manage Trust in their organisations – to ensure that the organizations themselves and their leaders behave in ways that afford the granting of trust by stakeholders to those organisations. The more we know about Trust and how to manage it, the greater value the practice of public relations provides to business and society.”

Edelman go as far as to set out 16 specific attributes to building trust these can be grouped into five performance clusters which they rank in order of importance:¹⁷

1. **“Engagement**
 - a. Listens to customer needs and feedback
 - b. Treats employees well
 - c. Places customers ahead of profits
 - d. Communicates frequently and honestly on the state of its business
2. **Integrity**
 - a. Has ethical business practices
 - b. Takes responsible actions to address an issue or crisis
 - c. Has transparent and open business practices
3. **Products and Services**
 - a. Offers high quality products or services
 - b. Is an innovator of new products, services or ideas
4. **Purpose**
 - a. Works to protect and improve the environment
 - b. Addresses society’s needs in its everyday business
 - c. Creates programmes that positively impact the local community
 - d. Partners for NGOs, Government and third parties to address societal needs
5. **Operations**
 - a. Has highly regarded and widely admired top leadership
 - b. Ranks on a global list of top companies
 - c. Delivers consistent financial returns to investors”

¹⁷ <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/trust-2013/building-trust/>

All of these objectives fit well with our analysis of what is needed for local authorities to build trust - with the slight adjustment under “operations” to more of a focus on being a leading local authority and delivering consistent value for money.

Conclusions

We need to trust the public more

We agree that at present the majority of the public want us to get the basics right. We also agree that councils should focus on delivering this if they are not already doing so. However, this does not mean that we cannot attempt to engage with the public more and encourage them to take a more active role in their communities and local government.

We strongly believe that the biggest barrier to more advanced communication outcomes, such as behaviour change campaigns, is an assumption within local authorities that actually there is little capacity within the public to change. We want local authorities to reappraise the trust they have in the public to respond to communications. In our discussions with many local authorities they admit surprise in how well the public have responded to some of the issues they have been asked to address.

We need to show that we can be trusted

Trust is also important as it is relevant to the public. The last couple of years have seen a number of public institutions undermine their own reputation by showing that they cannot be trusted. We cannot trust the food we eat, the expenses claims of MPs, the behaviour of the iconic celebrities, the journalistic standards of the newspapers we read or the behaviour of the banks we invest our money with.

Local government needs to be trusted to deliver

We believe that local government has responded well to the challenges presented to it and therefore is best placed to lead the way in restoring trust in this country to deal with the issues we face. The tide has gone out and we need a radical redefinition of the relationship between public services (the state) and the people that we serve (the citizen). We have a compelling and rare (if not unique) set of reasons to build a new and sustaining trust bond through deeper dialogue and communications. Gone are the days when local government could seek to maximise the delivery of services to meet the needs of the public. With limited resources there has to be compromise and commitment on both sides. There has to be a sharing of risk and reward with safeguards put in place to guard against imbalances in power.

We call this project Building Trust as there is more progress to be made. There have been successes so far but we can do more. We believe that those in local government have the opportunity to lead the nation out of its current malaise. Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector and has maintained a robust, innovative and sustainable approach to severe budget cuts.¹⁸ Those councils that have achieved the most have done so by working with the public. Many have shown that local government can not only manage a

¹⁸ See Productivity and Commissioning <http://www.local.gov.uk/productivity>

more efficient supply of services but also the expectations and demands of the public. It is local government that is best placed to understand local needs, prioritise limited resources and drive economic growth and jobs. This will be done in part through improving the reputation of local places.

There is also an important role to play in terms of customer services and the touch points that residents, and others, have with the council. This is particularly important for the unengaged who may only be in contact with the council for a short period of time: a vital opportunity to engage and build a stronger relationship.

The Building Trust project is not only about setting these difficult objectives but also encouraging local authorities to provide evidence that they are delivering. Measuring short-term satisfaction or trust levels in a public opinion survey is important but does not go far enough. This is about delivering real world cost savings and service delivery outcomes and proving the role of communications. Therefore communication professionals are going to have to get more involved in understanding metrics about real levels of service delivery to understand how behaviours have actually changed.

4: How to evaluate success

We strongly support the need to provide a clear evidence base for the Building Trust project at a national and local level.

At a local level you should have access to the following:

- Corporate wide and individual services business plans and papers
- Business intelligence data such as call centre volumes
- Traditional broadcast and social media monitoring and evaluation
- Website and email metrics such as Google Analytics
- Regular quantitative surveys of residents' opinions
- Regular quantitative surveys of other relevant audiences such as business leaders
- Qualitative tools such as focus groups, hall tests and depth interviews
- Involvement in consultations and community engagement activity
- Stakeholder database
- Staff survey

At a national level you will have access to the following;

- Continued research reports from a range of organisations on the importance of trust and the principles we have covered. This information will be disseminated through the LGA, LGcommunications and SOLACE
- Continued national polling from the LGA which includes questions on trust as well as satisfaction and informed levels.¹⁹

However, lack of evidence should not be used as an excuse for inaction. Evidence should support the decisions and ideas you have not stifle creativity. We also recommend reading the following reports to help you plan your evaluation

- **Evaluating government communications activity**²⁰, Government Communication Network (GCN), 2013
- **Evaluating the financial impact of public sector marketing communication**²¹, Government Communications Network (GCN), 2011
- **Test, Learn, Adapt – developing public policy with randomised controlled Trials.**²² Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team, 2012
- **MINDSPACE – Influencing behaviour through public policy**²³, Cabinet Office/Institute for Government, 2009
- **Squaring the circle – evidence at the local level**²⁴, Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2013

¹⁹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>

²⁰ https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/GCN-Evaluation-Book_v5.pdf

²¹ <https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/intro-to-payback-romi-and-cpr.pdf>

²² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62529/TLA-1906126.pdf

²³ <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/better-policy-making/mindspace-behavioural-economics>

5: Professional development

As part of the Building Trust project, we believe that all councils should focus on improving the skills of those already working within the organisation, identifying the new skills that need to be brought in and setting the vision for the new communication plan. This is why leadership, brand and strategy are so important as they provide the framework for organisational and professional development.

This has to be professional development across the whole organisation and local places. SOLACE, the LGA and Skills for Justice are developing further evidence around leadership skills. Trust will be embedded in the learning and development offer that SOLACE will be proposing for senior managers. Communicators are an enabler of change in the wider workforce and places as a whole.

This report in itself should hopefully bring you up to speed on at least some new ideas. Professional development should include debate and discussion: there are over 400 local authorities in this country and this should be a hotbed of creative and diverse communications.

In 2013, LGcommunications and Skills for Local Government developed National Occupational Standards (NOS) for local government communication officers²⁵. This skills map can be used to help develop job descriptions, appraisals and professional development programmes.

“Key purpose of Communications Role: the activity of conveying messages on a range of topics through the exchange of information using various methodologies to communicate with an audience and listen to an audience.

The first-level functions are the main functions undertaken to achieve the key purpose:-

- A. Provide a strategic overview for corporate strategies and priorities
- B. Develop and deliver communications activities and outcomes
- C. An ability to use or commission appropriate media, PR or marketing practices
- D. Reputational management and two-way communication

²⁴ <http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/squaring-the-circle2/>

²⁵ <http://sfjuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/LG-NOS-Maps.pdf>

E. Team work and self management”

For each element there are more detailed skills listed which can be used across a range of communication roles. LGcommunications will be developing this area of work further through their seminar, Academy and Future Leaders programme.

6: Developing a strategy

In using this Action Plan you will need to develop a strategy which covers not just your local authority but supports leaders across your local area. You need to set out clearly what you want to achieve, the resources you will need and the role that will be played by a range of organisations and of course local residents. This is your promise to your organisation regarding the impact that your work will have. It is also your expectation as to the role others will play. We would strongly recommend considering these elements:

- It addresses the three stages of Building Trust; your leadership, your brand and your strategy
- Engages a broad range of local leaders in developing an agreed narrative for the local place and establishes the role of the council and these other local leaders
- It sets out how you will ensure you:
 - focus on changing lives for the better
 - improve key services and show you are doing so
 - always inform and engage residents and staff
 - build trust and confidence in what you and partner organisations do
 - prove you provide value for money
- It identifies the way in which communications will deliver the following outcomes:
 - changes in the way services are delivered
 - manage demand for services
 - manage expectations of the people and organisations that you serve
 - deliver behaviour change
 - access capacity within the community to deliver services
 - reduce unnecessary contact with the council
 - increase engagement with the democratic process
 - improve community cohesion and local places themselves
 - improve access to and use of services
 - boost the morale of staff and elected member
 - improve the lives of residents
 - better join up local public services
- Sets out the audiences you plan to engage with and their role in delivering the plan
- Sets out the skills and resources you need from within your organisation and others
- Sets out how you will evaluate performance

There are numerous examples of communication strategies (and plans within them) for local councils and local areas which can be easily found online. We would also recommend looking at the “Government's vision for effective, efficient communications” and the advice they give on writing a strategy.²⁶

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/governments-vision-for-effective-efficient-communications> and <https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/writing-a-communication-strategy/>

7: Consultation Responses

We have included a selection of representative responses from our consultation. All comments were considered in writing the main report.

Building Trust

“I believe the public want us to get the basics right. They want their bins emptied efficiently. They want information to be readily available and easy to find. They want polite and efficient service when they contact us and they want all of this for a price they consider to be reasonable value. Engagement with the public only happens if they feel there is some benefit for them. ... I believe that a greater understanding about the role of communications and the need for it to be more strategically focussed and integrated into the management process is a key reason for improvement in trust. We need to be able to have honest and open discussions rather than regarding communications as 'fluff and window dressing' or just dealing with the media.” Communications professional, English District/Borough Council

“We have recently undertaken some focus groups with residents that made it very clear that what they want from their local council is good, efficient basic services which are easy to access and understand. As part of this they want, transparency and value or money and to be dealt with politely, honestly and effectively - both on and offline... Unless we get the basics right they have very little interest in our vision or ethical stance, we need to keep it real and do a good job if we are hoping for further engagement with our corporate priorities.” Communications professional, London Borough

“We're definitely moving away from building, or even maintaining satisfaction levels. In the face of further cuts - it's just not going to be possible. We're going to need to build up our credibility with residents, so that we can explain the reasons for change, and we are listened to. This requires trust. Most people largely misunderstand the role of their council. But generally, they're looking for value for money from public services in general. Engagement is driven by face to face interaction with local people; credible spokespeople who aren't afraid to stand up and explain decisions; and useful information which makes sense to people. Eventually, local services will be co-designed and delivered by the people and councils. Trust in local councils has improved because people can see more accountability in local government than national.” Communications professional, English County Council

“I would like the public to see local councils as being on their side, championing their cause and being in this together to tackle the issues about dwindling budgets and increasing demand. I wish the public would identify with the council and vice versa. If there is mutual respect and trust it allows and encourages people to take risks and do things differently - so the prize is greater flexibility and willingness of communities to be involved.” Communications professional, English unitary authority

“They [the public] want to see the Council be a force for good in their area. They also want right first time communications.” Chief Executive, English district/borough council

“Trust has improved through more centralised communications teams working closely at a senior level to explain clearly what the council does, clear messages, thought through campaigns, customer focus, better insight and understanding, less reliance on local press and media, more open dialogue through social media. Prize is local government makes local decisions for local people that improve local place and develops kind, supportive communities that look after their area and each other.” Communications professional, English Metropolitan Borough

“Building Trust is indeed essential. Representative democracy (at all levels) requires participation in elections and then trust that elected representatives working with the public servants that they employ are working for the common good. We (as members of the public) need to support the common good rather than fall back on single issue interests or indeed self-interest alone.... As paid officials the prize is respect from others and pride in what we do. For society, it is more responsive and emotionally connected councils that are ensuring that local communities are well-served.” Officer, English County Council

Role of Elected members

“Members need to create a clear vision for the local area that is realistically rooted in the services that the council and its partners can realistically deliver. Members then need to demonstrate real leadership to make sure the best people are in place to deliver the vision.” Communications professional, English district/borough council

“Trust builds when users of council services see delivery. Councillors should be advocates for delivery and challenge where it is not happening. Turn-out will rise when voters recognise the true value of local govt - as councils shrink, that will be more difficult. A campaign based on what councils deliver would have been better, rather than an ephemeral, abstract campaign about trust.” Communications professional, London Borough

“Elected Members can build trust by being accessible and transparent in their work as councillors. Democracy is changing because councils are having to act and react in a more decisive manor through lack of funding. We can boost turn out at elections by being more open about what councils and councillors do and also by making the democratic process less stuffy and more practical.” Communications professional, English district/borough council

“I think the most effective councils have really strong officer member relationships where the quite different but mutually supportive roles are understood and boundaries respected. The best senior officers nurture a culture of respect for democracy, which is what makes local government unique. The best members keep their focus on the outcomes they want to achieve for their communities and keep out of the operational detail. Quite apart from their democratic accountability, members tend to be much more focused on public opinion than officers, which is why they

must be at the heart of any initiative that is designed to influence the relationship between local government and the public- whether that be defined as building trust, improving service or reputation.” English unitary authority

“Elected Members are crucial in setting direction and being the face of the Council. Need to use social media and engage under 30's. Better training awareness of role before nomination stages. Members and Officers need to work and respect each other's roles which should be clearly stipulated.” Senior Officer, Scottish Unitary Authority

“There needs to be a more natural balance and public awareness of how a member led organisation operates, with politicians working closely with the employed staff delivering products and council services on a daily basis. Most residents will refer to their local authority as "the council" irrespective of its political colour. With officers and members sharing the profile on certain public facing agendas there is potential for all to benefit. Politicians do make good decisions, often advised by officers. Public sector staff are experts in their field, and can deliver services to a political agenda. Utilising the key skills and strengths of both groups provides the best outcomes for residents.” Communications professional, Welsh Unitary Authority

Role of Officers

“More than ever staff engagement needs to lie at the heart of effective communication between the local authority and local people including staff and partners. Staff are the greatest advocates and brand champions the council can have but to achieve this level of advocacy senior managers provide real leadership to champion the council's vision and own the message. Increasingly engaged managers are the key not just to good internal communication but engaged staff and excellent external communication.” Communications professional, English district/borough council

“Senior managers need to understand overall aspirations of their various communities and stakeholders, and ensure that these are broken down to deliverable actions for staff to follow through on. This includes consultation with communities and communications, engagement & feedback. It means empowering and trusting staff, giving them the right tools, to go to communities in a positive way and engage with them on their terms and their turf. Senior managers need to do this too - be visible, be the ones that support Members' promises and take responsibility for delivering on them.” Communications professional, English unitary authority

“The problem is that local people, often led by the local media, have the impression that council workers are overpaid and do little to deserve what they receive. People do not understand what council staff do or the responsibility they carry. There is a default belief that as they're paid public money they must be getting too much. Senior managers also need to get out into communities and engage with people face to face - it makes the public feel listened to and they are also much less aggressive generally in a face to face situation than they would be online or by letter. Managers need to empower staff, let them come up with ideas, free them up to be creative

(within the proper legal and financial framework). I think many staff in local gov may be feeling bruised by the drastic changes in recent years. We need to build up enthusiasm for public service again - a sense of being in it together and working towards a common, understood goal. Job satisfaction is higher among staff who have direct contact with the people we serve - maybe we need to ensure all staff have that contact with their customers to see the impact they can and do have for local people.” Communications professional, English County Council

Role of communication staff

“Communications should have one purpose: to support the organisation to achieve its corporate objectives. An agreed comms strategy should focus on this. Everything else should be challenged. Communication teams will undoubtedly be leaner, so they'll need to focus on the right thing, not everything.” Communications professional, English County Council

“To support members and officers in their roles, but also acting as the internal challenge and prompt for action.” Chief Executive, English District/Borough council

“Comms can help explain what councils do in a more joined up way than services themselves and help provide an engaging tone of voice and personality. They can identify the top ten things people care about and make sure awareness and understanding of good work in those areas is well known. They can myth bust around persistent niggles that are out of date or untrue. We can provide honesty, focus and clarity and make sure that pathways to information and transactions are clear and easy to navigate.” Communications professional, London Borough

“Communications teams need to frequently showcase good practice through all available public channels and clearly explain how their council is effectively dealing with challenging situations. Increasing the frequency of communications officers working directly with service-based staff in their workplace, taking part in service-based team meetings, online discussions and being a key part of project planning can all help communications officers to get more involved in service delivery. Challenging well-intentioned but ill-informed service requests for costly publications must be balanced with evidence of equal (if not improved) effectiveness using digital channels. This could lead to service behaviour change, defaulting to a new communications mix for a more technical society. More frequent press briefings and meetings are important mechanisms to gain more balanced reporting. Good communications is crucial to behaviour change at local level, but this cannot be left to traditional channels.” Communications professional, English County Council

“Communication teams are at the heart of building trust. They must ensure honesty, openness and integrity of communication with communities. They need to work with frontline staff who know communities, who are subject experts and who deliver on a day to day basis. They need to understand the pressure on Customer teams and support them in their responses. Communication teams need to be at the centre of the digital public realm engagement activity - horizon scanning for issues-based groups and online communities and ensuring the organisation engages appropriately

- which may not necessarily be via the Comms Team, but be facilitated by it and have appropriate governance in place. Communications teams need to be able to support services in behaviour change needed amongst customers and communities in order to help services achieve savings. Full marcomms campaign skills need to be available, including digital, proper audience segmentation and understanding - what motivates change and will help messages that facilitate behaviour change to be heard and acted upon. Communication teams must push senior managers to understand the value of research in projects and service changes.” Communication professional, English unitary authority

“They need to a) effectively market towns and cities as places to invest b) engage with residents to ensure their priorities are reflected in difficult budgeting decisions c) support behaviour change campaigns to encourage citizens to do more for themselves, d) engage employees and stakeholders in a joint vision to improve local areas e) support the organisation's leaders in establishing a story of place and sense of what the authority needs to achieve. Media need to understand the role they have to play in improving perception of a local area and the financial rewards that will produce for citizens, themselves and the wider communities they call their customers.” Communications professional, English unitary authority

“I think this is the key question - we should forget about trust and concentrate on improving service delivery, changing behaviour and reducing demand on services. Our Fire Service campaigns have consistently shown that, working together with service providers, we can change behaviour. Relationships with the media are important, and should be based on mutual understanding, regular interaction, and comms teams focusing on a commitment to being open, honest, and doing what they say they will do. But building up our own communication channels via social media will be equally important in the future. In terms of the best people, the profession as a whole has a reputation for being slippery at the top end, and (rightly) a reputation for being largely technical press officers or providers of pretty pictures. In this respect, Cormac [Smith, Chair of LGcommunications] is spot on in his assertion that comms needs to be a science not an art - comms needs to be sold as a profession that, in the public sector at least, can make people's lives better, improve services, and reduce costs to taxpayers.” Communications professional, Fire and Rescue Service

How should means of communications change?

“More strategic and evidence based use of all channels More of the council's staff behaving in accordance with the organisations values, working towards the vision and delivering the message there needs to be more two way communication but also better management of expectations – don't consult if you have no intention of acting on the results in a meaningful way. there needs to be greater integrity in communications – doing what we say we will.” Communications professional, English district/borough council

“If I could keep one channel it would still be our residents magazine - the only channel with which almost everyone has access. Digital and online media is becoming more powerful and useful but it continues to discriminate between groups

in terms of access/availability. Our style of coms needs to become less institutional and more human in approach. Why do we still refer to ourselves as 'Authorities'? We are not supposed to be in control of our residents - we are supposed to be serving them.” Communications professional, English district/borough council

“We must research and exploit to the full the use of locally developed channels which may not be council-led. The rise of social media channels and local parish and community Facebook pages offer a real opportunity for councils to engage in conversation with residents on their terms and this must be a primary focus of communications. Micro-level communications have much deeper local impact and help build credibility and trust.” Communications professional, English County Council

“Local newspapers should offer platforms for public sector bodies to openly present their message. The media rely on councils for advertising income. They use their websites to collect information for their stories. They present their agenda to their readers. There needs to be a democratic opportunity for councils to present their views to the readers of local papers, in the same way editors provide a summary of their views in a daily column.” Communications professional, Welsh Unitary Authority

“Clearly electronic channels are increasingly important. The influence of the local media - in particular the printed versions - is waning. However people do like hyper-local info - parish mags etc which are very specific to their area. We need to be trying to cater for that. Our websites and social media channels are the shop window for our organisations - yet we often don't treat them like that. We don't 'market' ourselves - we just punt out info and hope people will come and find us. We need to go and find people where they gather - either physically or virtually - and point them to where they can find valuable info and transactional services that make their lives easier.... Our comms need to be targeted, appropriate for the audience, open and honest.” Communications professional, English County Council

“Communications leads and develops but doesn't control everything - let things go to services. Set them up and train them then let them fly! Website is THE most important communication channel. Develop social media more. All communications should be tailored and audience based. Style - human, personal, real, down to earth, direct, clear, open, friendly. No more faceless, process driven, bureaucratic organisational comms.” Communications professional, English Metropolitan Borough

“The role of social media is changing the communication role, which puts Councils as one player amongst many, rather than being in control of the message. This raises interesting issues and reinforces the use and strong retention of the Council's brand locally, so people can trust the source of the information it receives. If I had one communication channel to keep it would be the website.” Chief Executive, English District/Borough council.

