



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

The 2017/18 Service Plan for Communications

Executive Member: Cllr Lynda Needham

The service plan is a key component of NHDC's Corporate Business Planning Process. It supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan, and the delivery of the day to day business activities of the Council, within agreed budgets.

These plans, specific to each service cannot be written in isolation. The Senior Management Team works together to identify areas where synergy, cross authority working or additional skills or temporary resource may be required to deliver an individual project. The service plans will provide the detailed actions which ensure delivery of the priorities.

The Council has three Objectives from 2017/18 form the basis of the corporate business planning process. These will be the areas on which the Council will concentrate resources and activities for delivery.

Actions arising from the corporate business planning process will feed into personal objectives for individual members of staff via appraisals and 1:1 meetings. The clear lines of responsibility, outcomes and target dates will be monitored as part of the Council's project governance and performance management reporting.

As part of the Corporate Business Strategy, this service plan should also outline any service area that Corporate Board have indicated will be subject to review in 2017/18.

The following are descriptions of the Council's Objectives:-

Objectives

- **Attractive & Thriving**
To work with our partners to provide an attractive and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and the disadvantaged are supported
- **Prosper & Protect**
To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage
- **Responsive & Efficient**
To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints

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1. INTRODUCING THE SERVICE

Corporate Manager: Kerry Shorrocks

Executive Member(s): Cllr Lynda Needham

Service Manager: Sarah Kingsley

Number of FTE's: 3.46

1.1 The purpose of the Team

The key outputs of the Communications team are:

- Dealing with media enquiries
- Production of press releases and statements for the media
- Liaison with journalists
- Production of Council's quarterly resident's magazine 'Outlook'
- Production of internal communications – Insight and other ad-hoc communications
- Corporate consultation – external and internal
- Management of website and intranet including technical issues and editorial control
- Production of communications plans and provision of communications advice on Council projects.
- Political liaison on communications issues with Members
- Management of Council's social media presence e.g. twitter and Facebook
- Emergency planning and business continuity communications role.

1.2 How the service links to our Objectives

The communications function links with the three corporate objectives by providing communications support to other service areas across the Council, in essence ensuring service areas communicate what they are doing and why and in turn protecting the reputation of the Council. The communications and consultation function can be described as a 'Discretionary core service as it supports the delivery of front-line services.

1.3 Budget

The budget for this service area for 17/18 is attached as Appendix C

2. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

2.1 Performance Profile

The performance indicators for the service areas set out how well the service is currently performing against a range of criteria, measures, targets and customer expectations. The performance indicators below are reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition to these, there are management information indicators that are used to ensure the service strives to improve or deliver services more efficiently.

PI	Description	Annual 2017/18 Target	Latest Data	Status
	There are no specific communications performance indicators reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee			

Although the Communications team has no formal performance indicators, it does monitor both the level of media enquiries and resulting media coverage and its presence on the social networking site, Twitter.

- In 2016/ 2017, the Communications team wrote and distributed **215** proactive press releases compared to **162** in 2014/2015 - this does not include reactive comments to stories or Letters to the Editor.
- Media enquiries to the Communications team have increased since last year with **623** compared to **537** enquiries to the team in 2014/15 compared to **437** media enquiries in 2013/14.
- There were **802** items of media coverage in 2016/17 compared to **823** in 2014/15 and **800** in 2013/14 – appearing either in print, online or broadcast media. Please note this does not include any letters in the letters pages of the media. We also only count online articles where they have not also featured in the print editions of newspapers.
- On 4 April 2017, the Council had 8,486 followers of its Twitter feed i.e. people who receive updates from the Council when we post new information. This is over 1000 more followers than a year before (7,282 in April 2016 and 6004 in April 2015).
- The Council's Facebook page was launched in 2014/15. In April 2017 we have 647 people liking our page. In April 2016 there were 364 people liking our page, compared to 154 people liking our page in April 2015.

2.2 Public Perception

The customer's perception of the service is analysed to ensure the service responds to feedback. This includes analyses of information obtained from the Council's Compliments, Comments and Complaints process.

The following details consultation that has highlighted areas of success or the need for improvement:-

2.2.1 District Wide Survey 2015

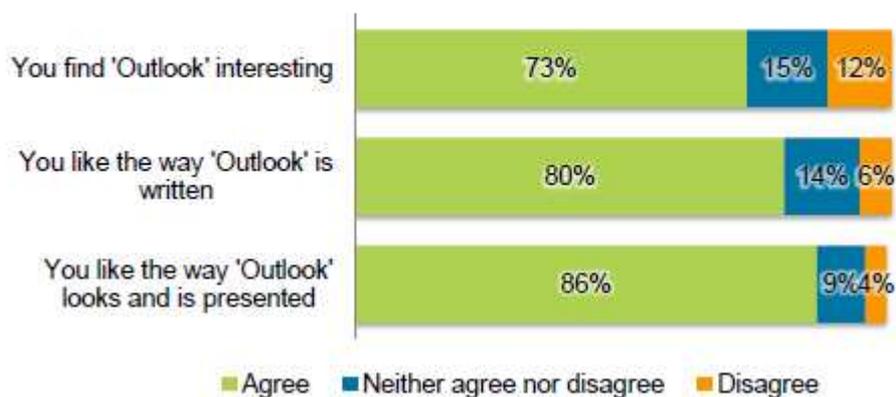
Questions were included in the latest District Wide Survey on people's perceptions of the Council. With 30% of people disagreeing that the Council makes an effort to find out what local people want

and 24% disagreeing that NHDC fully involves or consults residents on important issues, this has the potential to have a serious impact on the Council's reputation and on resident satisfaction with services. These issues were considered as part of the Council's Consultation Strategy 2016-2020, reported to Cabinet on 29 September 2015. The results do not necessarily mean the Council needs to increase the volume of consultation undertaken, but could mean that existing opportunities need to be publicised more widely or made more accessible using a range of methodologies. It could also mean that we need to publicise how we have utilised the feedback from consultations, including any suggestions or comments which are not adopted in the final policy or service change (You said we Did approach), so that residents understand how they have played a role in the process.

Respondents were asked how they normally obtain information about NHDC. The highest proportion of residents obtain information from the NHDC website (60%), followed by Outlook magazine (17%) and local newspapers (17%). The top three sources have consistently made the top three in 2011, 2013 and 2015. There has been a marked shift to people wanting to find information on our website in recent years and to reflect this, the Council developed a new website strategy in 2014 and completely redeveloped the old website to ensure it is fit for purpose to meet customers expectations. A Channel Shift programme will be a feature of the 2016/17 work programme to encourage more people to carry out their transactions online.

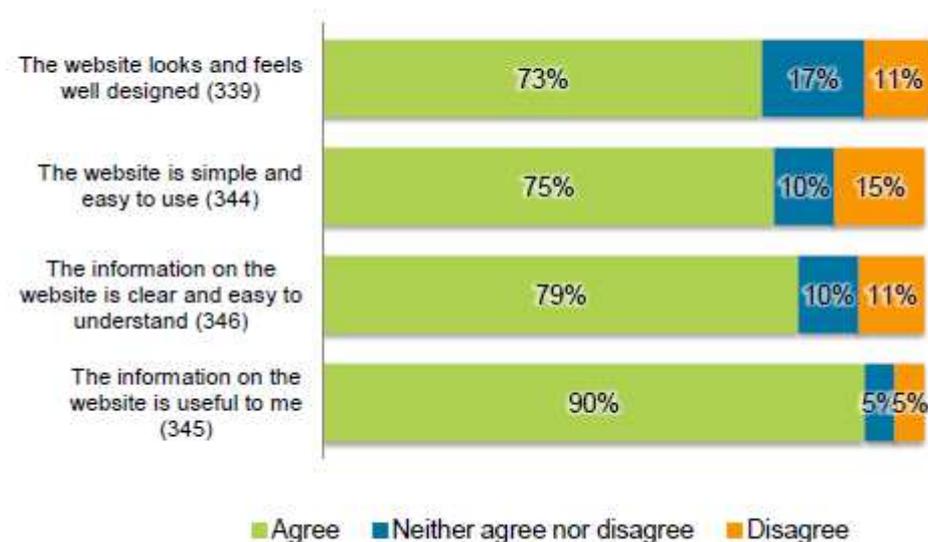
Feedback on the content and format of Outlook magazine remains positive. See Figure 13 below. Agreement levels on whether residents like the way Outlook looks and is presented and on whether they like the way Outlook is written are unchanged since 2013. Agreement that Outlook is interesting at 73% is marginally below the 76% observed in 2013.

Figure 13: Views on Outlook content and format (Where read/receive a copy of Outlook and read it to some extent)



We asked a series of new questions in 2015 regarding whether people had visited the new NHDC website launched in April 2015. 36% of respondents said that they had visited the website, with 49% of those aged 35 to 44 having visited it. Visitors to the website were then asked a series of questions about how they felt about different aspects of the site, with all questions receiving positive ratings. See Figure 22.

Figure 22: Visitor views on Council website (Where visited North Hertfordshire District Council's website)



Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

The results for the new website are encouraging as they are favourable overall. The main area for attention is the 15% of respondents who disagreed that the website is simple and easy to use. It may be worth some more research into this area – for example are there particular areas of the website which are less easy to use than others? The Council also subscribes to a Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) service which gives the website a rating based on how easy it is to complete various top tasks. The results of the latest exercise (the first for the new website) are due shortly. As part of this survey however, the Council has just received 4 out of 5 stars for its 'Report a missed bin' e-form.

2.2.2 Staff Survey 2016

The fieldwork for the latest biennial staff survey was carried out in early 2016. Within the survey are a series of questions about communications, the results of which were used to further develop internal communications at the Council.

2.3 Key achievements and outcomes from 2017/18

Action	Output	Outcome
Delivery of Citizen's Panel Exercise	Focus group work and report completed and the results formed part of the review of the Green Space Management Strategy (GSMS).	The consultation work contributed to the approval by Council of the revised GSMS.
Internal Communications	Merged team Talk and NHDC news into one newsletter by creating a new staff eNewsletter	A new streamlined publication for staff. We are able to analyse readership and so provide engaging content. Staff feel more engaged with the vision and direction of the organisation.
Staff Survey	Report completed and communicated	Results used by HOS and corporate managers in their service planning
Outlook procurement	Contracts procured for Outlook magazine - print, design and	Ensure we are getting value for money through our contracts.

	distribution for 2 years.	
Support key projects: including the opening of Town Hall, Local Plan and Green Space management Strategy	To protect and enhance the reputation of the council by ensuring residents and other stakeholders feel informed about our work.	Gained positive and balanced media and social media coverage. Minimised negative comments by attempting to get on the front foot regarding controversial issues.
Channel Shift	Social media posts, Outlook articles, review of the use of telephone numbers on webpages and literature, review of Report it Online forms to make it easier to direct people.	Signpost residents to the easiest place for information and minimise contact with CSC while still giving them a good and user friendly service experience.

The following actions were not delivered in 2016/17 and will be carried forward into the 2017/18 action plan:

Action	Original Due Date	Revised Due Date
Channel Shift	31/03/17	31/03/2018
Development of Intranet	31/03/17	31/03/2018

Work is progressing on channel shift with the project team looking into the option of adopting a system which will allow for the directing of phone calls to the council straight to the website. The team are also looking at creating a corporate policy to embed channel shift across each service, the creation of an email list to shift engagement online and the creation of help and guidance tutorials. It also proposes to review E-Forms and organise digital inclusion workshops.

Intranet Strategy. The second project due to be completed in 2016/17 was the creation of an Intranet Strategy. However, work on this has been put on hold due to an emerging project from IT services on the potential use of Sharepoint for the organisation, which could include replacement of the Intranet.

3. WHERE DO WE NEED TO BE?

The focus of the Communications team's work for 2017/18 is the delivery of some of the key actions from the Communications Strategy 2014 / 2018 and a focus on maximising the value of the new NHDC website through a Channel Shift programme activity.

Our aim throughout delivery of any service is that it should be inclusive. In order to ensure this and as is required of the Authority and ensuring we fulfil the requirements placed on us through the Equalities Act 2010, officers will be required to

- complete an Equality Analysis each time a proposal is made which changes the manner in which a service is delivered, where a project costs in excess of £50,000 (excluding utility contracts) or affects more than two wards
- Evidence of that assessment and its findings will be referred to and available as a 'background paper' for any report requiring a decision by members, so that the impact and its risks can be fully considered before recommendations for change or adoption are agreed.
- The positive **and** negative impacts of such analysis will be provided *in summary only* within the committee report using the standard report template available from the Committee Services section.
- The report must also be approved by a member of the corporate Policy Team in order to ensure it fulfils the requirements of the Equality Duty, 'that members are fully informed and aware of equality implications at the time they make a decision'.

From January 2013, under Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, local authorities were required to capture the 'social value' of their investment into local projects. Two comparative projects may have the same financial value, but it is the value to the local community, community groups or individuals which needs to be captured and reflected more accurately in order to better inform decision making; this should therefore be built into individual service plans, and the individual projects reflected within them. The corporate Policy team will be able to advise further if help is required.

In order to mitigate risks or improve governance arrangements the service needs to :-

- Complete agreed internal audit actions
- Ensure all documentation and IT records comply with the retention policy
- Ensure all relevant risks are identified, kept under review and efforts made to mitigate impacts/reduce risks etc
- Financial risks identified to be included into the corporate business planning process

- **HOW DO WE GET THERE?**

This is the framework for action, with clear indications of what needs to be done, by when and who is responsible for doing them.

4.1 Detailed action plans

The main actions and planned outcomes are outlined in the Service Action Plan. This includes the improvements required to service delivery identified by external reviews, internal audits, risk management and Assurance actions, legislative changes as well as key projects. It has been colour coded to show why the action is required.

This service plan predominantly focuses on actions to be delivered in 2016/17 but certain actions that impact on the service beyond this timeframe have been included with milestones to indicate the anticipated delivery date.

These need to be living plans, with performance, milestones and targets updated regularly, in the context of team meetings as well as during appraisals and 1:1's.

The Service Action Plan is attached as Appendix A.

4.2 Risk & Opportunities

Actions to mitigate risks thereby ensuring the delivery of projects by reducing threats to service delivery, are included within the Service Action Plan. The threats that will prevent the service from achieving targets have been identified and recorded.

Opportunities which may present themselves could include existing or emerging service sharing arrangements, or sharing parts of a service, especially going forward – and how will the benefits of those opportunities be measured?

5. HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE THERE?

Accurate and reliable information is important to ensure the Council can measure how well it is achieving its goals. The information held by the Service is accurate, reliable, timely, consistent, relevant, secure and of high quality to meet the needs of our partners, residents and fulfil audit and inspection requirements.

Progress against the Corporate Plan will be reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Budget monitoring reports are submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis and include information on our key financial health indicators.

In preparing the Service Plan local performance indicators have been considered and their continuing use reviewed and/or new indicators have been introduced with details shown in Section 2.

The performance measures for each of the Service indicators have been reviewed. These will be finalised, via the target setting workshop that includes consultation with members. The risks to the achievement of the targets are evaluated and where necessary entered onto the Risk Register held on Covalent.

Performance against indicators is reported quarterly to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Where performance is below target Heads of Service/Corporate Managers are required to provide information as to what action is being taken to remedy the situation in order that members can review proposals for improving performance levels.

Every member of staff has an annual appraisal when individual performance is reviewed against individual objectives linked to the service plan. In addition, managers are required to have a formal appraisal review every 6 months. This ensures delivery against the service plan is kept on track.

The Council's Top Risks are reported to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to ensure that key risks are being identified and managed.

Media, social media and website management information is communicated on a quarterly basis to members of the Senior Management Team as a key performance management tool.

6. ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The Council has an assurance framework to map the Council's priorities to risks, controls and assurances. An essential part of this framework is a Management Assurance Statement that is completed by all Heads of Service and Corporate Managers.

This Assurance Statement is a critical review of the service area against the Council's Local Code of Corporate governance and provides evidence for the Annual Governance Statement published with the Council's Annual Accounts.

The Head of Service/ Corporate Manager's Assurance Statement is attached as Appendix B.

Appendices:

- A. Service Action Plan**
- B. Assurance Statement**
- C. Budget for 17/18**