



One council. One city.

Newcastle City Council
Communication Strategy

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What is this document about?

This communication strategy sets out the way in which the council will manage its reputation at a time when all local authorities are facing up to the challenge of diminishing resources and increased demands. It explains which types of communication activity have the biggest impact on the council's reputation, and it will be used to help prioritise communication resources so that they are focused on doing only those things which provide genuine value for money for council tax payers

What is reputation?

Every large organisation has a reputation. Sometimes good, and sometimes bad.

Councils touch the lives of millions, so people form an opinion about what we are like to deal with. Much of our reputation is formed by the things we do – the way in which people experience our decisions and services. But reputations can also be formed by what people hear about us from their friends and families or what they see in the media. People with “inside knowledge” such as our own staff can be particularly influential in shaping people's opinions of what we are like.

People who have different types of relationship with us may have different opinions about our reputation. For example, the leaders of public sector partners may have a view on our reputation as an organisation to work with, commercial organisations may be more interested in our reputation as an organisation to do business with, whilst local resident's focus whether their bins are emptied on time and the streets are free of litter.

Having a good reputation makes it easier to form relationships. It opens doors to people because they recognise that contact with us is likely to be worthwhile and rewarding experience. This is important on many levels. It helps the council be influential on a national and international stage –encouraging people to take our views seriously and recognise that we are a voice worth listening to.

At a local level it enables us to be influential amongst our partners and it helps local people appreciate that their council is working hard on their behalf, treating people fairly and providing good quality value for money service in return for the council tax they pay, and led effectively by the councillors they elect.

Amongst staff it is important that we have a reputation for being a good employer which recognises and rewards hard work and helps people to learn and develop. It is also very important that our staff understand the reputation we want to have with the public and other organisations so that they can make sure that their behaviour reinforces our vision and values. Employees who feel informed about and engaged in the big things that and organisation is trying to achieve are likely to be up to 43%

more productive , perform 20% more effectively and take 3.5 fewer sick days per year.¹

The reputation challenge

The challenge of managing the council's reputation is becoming more difficult. In the coming months and years the authority will face unprecedented reductions in funding which are certain to have an impact on services, staff and stakeholders. Difficult decisions will have to be taken and bad news will have to be shared. Sustaining a positive reputation in such a difficult environment requires a high level of self-awareness so that the reputational impact of decisions and the way they are taken is fully understood; and an explicit organisational commitment to a planned and coordinated management of message so that leaks, speculation and damaging hyperbole are avoided. Competence in the way we manage our communication through this challenging period will be almost as important to our reputation as the difficult decisions themselves.

What influences the council's reputation?

Research company Ipsos Mori has worked closely with the Local Government Association to develop a huge body of research² about the factors which influence the reputation of local council's over recent years. The standard indicator for reputation "satisfaction with the way the council runs things" is based on data gathered consistently across all council through Best Value Surveys and more recently the Place Survey. Using this indicator and other survey and demographic data Ipsos Mori has been able to isolate the factors which have the biggest impact on council reputation. Some of these are background factors which would be very difficult for us to influence, but others are things which are directly controlled by councils, and by doing things better or differently we can have an impact on levels of public satisfaction.

The main background factors influencing levels of public satisfaction are:

- Levels of multiple deprivation – the higher the level of deprivation the lower levels of satisfaction are likely to be
- Population density - cities where people live closely together are more likely to have lower levels of satisfaction
- Diversity – very diverse populations tend to have lower levels of satisfaction
- Population churn - places where a lot of people move in and out of the area tend to have lower levels of public satisfaction
- The proportion of people under the age of 19 - the younger the population the more dissatisfied people are likely to be.

¹ The communicating organisation NHS November 2009

² The New Reputation Guide LGA and LG Communication 2010

- Qualification levels – places with a high proportion of people with higher qualifications are likely to be more satisfied

Based on these six factors it is possible to develop a predicted satisfaction score for council areas. By weighing actual satisfaction scores against predicted Ipsos Mori have developed a standard reputation index which compares councils on a like for like basis taking into account their background factors. In Newcastle's case our public satisfaction score rises from 54% to 66% when background factors are taken into account - a positive reputation index of +12%. This represents top quartile performance when compared to other councils – but we have some way to go to match the very best performers which includes near neighbours Gateshead who have an exceptional positive reputation index of +20%.

To understand how we can hold or improve our reputation score we need to consider those factors which are within our control, and which Ipsos Mori have identified as having the biggest impact on satisfaction levels.

How can we have an impact on reputation?

It might seem very obvious, but the starting point for councils is to be very clear about the reputation they want to have, and then to show leadership and determination in making sure that the organisation consistently acts and behaves in a way which is in keeping with that reputation. We sometimes refer to this desired reputation as our 'brand' i.e. what we want the council to be known for – and how we want other to see us.

Our brand will only be recognised by others if the organisation fully understands what it wants to be and builds its brand values and behaviours into all aspects of its day to day work. There are lots of great examples of this in the commercial world – Tesco's "every little helps" being perhaps one of the most successful.

There are a number of brand behaviours which appear from research to have a significant impact on the reputation of council brands:-

Value for money – Are council services effective and providing good value. This doesn't just relate to low levels of council tax, though this helps, services need to be seen as being effective and well run. Wastefulness and non-effective services can have a very detrimental impact on reputation, as can unduly bureaucratic processes, complexity or seemingly perverse decision making.

Do people feel that they can have their say? – The ability of people to have a voice on decisions which impact on them is also related to overall satisfaction. Councils which have clear mechanisms for listening to local people and who can demonstrate how they have taken local opinion into account tend to have higher levels of satisfaction.

Keeping people informed - There is very strong correlations between how well informed people feel about council services and decisions, and their level of satisfaction. People in particular want to know about the range of services provided by the council and how they can access them. To ensure this happens services need to be clearly badged and identifiable as being provided by the council. There can be real problems where core council services are delivered in partnership or by third party providers and are badged in a way the public do not recognise or do not relate the benefits to the council.

There is also evidence that accessible information about the level of performance of the council services has a positive impact on satisfaction. For most people this is most accessible in the form of good news stories about achievements and successes rather than complex performance data – though this can play its part.

Keeping a focus on services people think are really important - Research shows that in virtually all councils there are service areas which have the biggest impact on public satisfaction. These are street cleaning, refuse collection, recycling, leisure facilities and parks and open spaces. Demonstrating that we share the public's concerns about these issues is important. In particular the effectiveness of clean and green issues – notably street cleaning can be shown statistically to account for up to 40% of the variation in council satisfaction.

Changing places and changing lives - The council plays the leading role in making Newcastle a great place to live by pulling together partners from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to address important quality of life issues. Research³ shows the factors which the public regard as being most important in making somewhere a good place to live are levels of crime (61%), health services (45%) , clean streets (44%), affordable decent housing (33%) and public transport (31%). None of these issues can be addressed by any one agency acting on their own – and the council plays an important role in convening partnerships to address them. It is important that in this partnership world that the democratic accountability of councils isn't lost amidst a host of partnership logos and competing identities. We need to work hard to understand that our role in changing places and people's lives is fully understood.

³ Place Survey CLG 2009

What do we want our reputation to be?

The council has developed the concept of '**One Council, One City**' to encapsulate its leadership role in galvanising energy and capacity from all parts of the council and the community to continue Newcastle positive progress towards becoming a great modern European city. The success of our brand will be judged on how we behave and whether we effectively address our priorities and deliver our vision.

With our partners we have identified five key challenges which we need to address if our vision is to be achieved.

We are all working together to make Newcastle;

WEALTHIER - leading Newcastle and its people into prosperity.

HEALTHIER - make our people healthier and more content. Encouraging people to move to and stay in Newcastle.

GREENER - look after our environment and encouraging green businesses to thrive.

SAFER - make sure everyone feels safe and secure across the city. Make sure people feel they can have their say about what we do.

LIVEABLE - create good quality lasting places for people to live in.

INSPIRATIONAL- end child poverty and inspire our young people to succeed.

To help us achieve these priorities the council has done a lot of work to identify the values and behaviours it wants to encourage amongst staff and to display to the outside world.

LEADERSHIP: We speak up for Newcastle and take decisive action to secure the future of our city. We take responsibility at all levels of the organisation to do all we can to make Newcastle a great place to live, work and visit.

FOCUS: We have a clear vision for what it takes to make Newcastle a great modern European city and we will not be distracted from our purpose. Our services will offer real value for money and we will not waste time on things which are not worthwhile.

PERFORMANCE: We expect to provide the very best services we possibly can on behalf of the people of Newcastle. We recognised and reward good performance and we will take all possible steps to deal with underperformance to improve in areas where we are not doing so well.

WORKING TOGETHER. We know it is important to listen to the views of local people, because they know best about what goes on in their communities. We also know that we can do more for Newcastle by working with other organisations and we

will take lead in bringing people together to do great things for our city. We respect the views and values of others and always treat people fairly.

By addressing these challenges and demonstrating these behaviours the City Council will lead the way in delivering our vision for Newcastle:

Our vision for 2030 is that Newcastle will be a vibrant and sustainable city with a thriving, high skills based economy. People in Newcastle will be happy, healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty. Our young people will be equipped to contribute to their own and the city's future wellbeing and prosperity. Local people will be engaged in decisions about their neighbourhood and community and helping to shape local services.

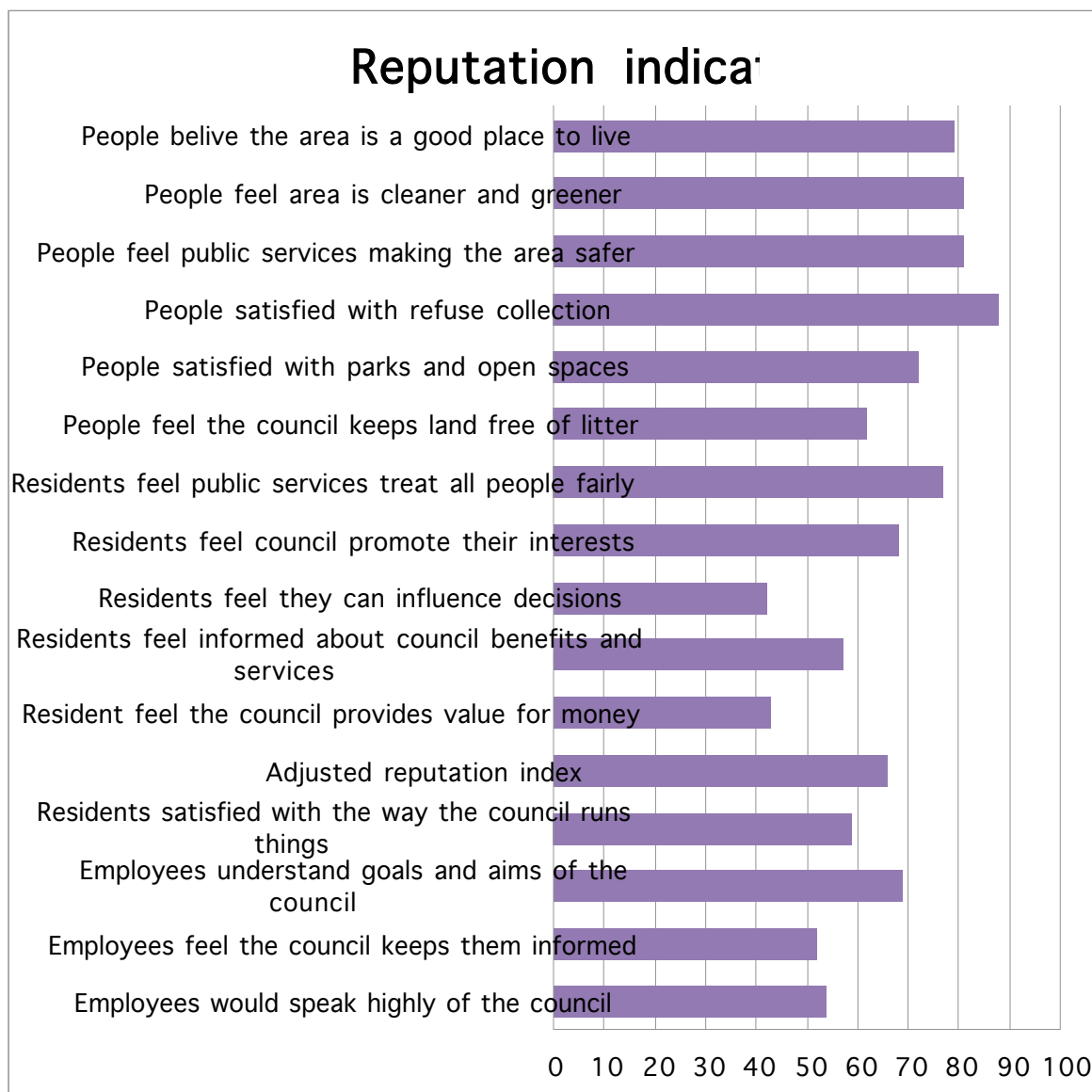
By 2030 we will be an established international city of science, education and innovation. We will attract and retain talent from all over the world, and provide opportunities for local people to realise their potential. Newcastle will be a fairer and more equal city, with our growing population participating fully in the economic, social and cultural life of the city. Our economic growth will not have been achieved at the expense of the environment - Newcastle in 2030 will be a sustainable city with excellent green infrastructure and air quality, low waste levels, low carbon emissions and high recycling rates.

Our built cultural and community heritage will remain unique and be treasured by residents and visitors alike, as will our natural green spaces and water environment that act as wildlife havens and green lungs within our city. Our modern, integrated transport system will link the major employment centres and residential areas. Newcastle will also boast better national and international connections. People will be connected to the rest of the world through advanced broadband and other wireless technology, helping to drive the growth of the knowledge economy in the city.

Newcastle will be a cosmopolitan, diverse city where families and people of all ages are healthy and happy. Newcastle will be established as a 'City for Peace' due to its commitment to working for understanding, respect and harmony among all its people and communities. We will continue to welcome ever greater numbers to visit, live and work here.

What is the council's reputation now?

We use a number of methods to understand the council's reputation with the public and with our employees. We refer to these indicators as our 'reputation dashboard'.



What impact could public spending reductions have?

There is clearly a risk that the spending reductions could have an impact on council services and levels of satisfaction. Understanding the factors which influence reputation help us to understand how these impacts could be felt. Any sense that the public are getting a lower level of service could lead to the conclusion that the council is providing poorer value for money - a key factor in reputation. This risk will be exacerbated if the public perceive that the implementation of spending reductions

is being poorly managed and mishandled. Having a clear message and rationale for any difficult decisions will be vitally important, as will demonstrating very clearly that we have a managed and controlled process for addressing financial pressures.

The risk to reputation is heightened when spending reductions impact on services to which the public attached particular importance – such as cleaner/greener services. Even though it is very likely that these service areas will share the impact of spending reductions, we must demonstrate a continuing commitment to delivering a good quality service.

Research shows that the public are able to simultaneously hold the general view that public spending cuts are inevitable and have to be implemented, whilst rejecting any specific cutbacks. This makes it more important than ever to ensure transparency in the decision making process – helping the public see and understand the totality of the difficult decisions which councillors have to take. A key aspect of this process will be effective consultation – not necessarily about where savings should be made because these are decisions which councillors are elected to make – but certainly about how options for savings are likely to have an impact and how they might be implemented in ways which minimise the risk to most vulnerable and needy.

Budget reductions are likely to impact on staff and this is very likely to have an impact on morale. Effective communication through the change process is essential to ensure that employees feel informed, not kept in the dark. They also need to feel that the council retains a sense of purpose and a direction of travel – so continuing to paint the big picture as well as communicate the details is important. Employees will expect the opportunity to ask questions and feed in their views – so feedback mechanisms and opportunities for direct contact with managers and leaders will be essential parts of the change process.

Reputation objectives.

Objective	Targets 2010/11
<p>To contribute to improved public satisfaction with the way the council runs things</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase our reputation index from +12% to +15% • Increase the proportion of people who feel the council provides value for money from 43% to 48% • Increase the proportion of people who feel the council keeps them informed from 57% to 62% • Increase the proportion of people who feel able to influence decisions which impact on them from 42% to 47%

Objective	Targets 2010/11
<p>Contribute to an understanding that the Council provides leadership for the city and is helping to improve quality of life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the proportion of the public who feel that local public services promote the interests of local residents from 68% to 73% • Increase the proportion of people who feel that local public services are working together to make the area safer from 81% to 85% • Increase proportion of local people who feel local public services are making the area cleaner and greener from 81% to 85% • Increase the proportion of local people who feel the area is a good place to live from 79% to 84%
<p>Help the council improve satisfaction with those services which the public consider most important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase satisfaction with parks from 72% to 77% • Increase proportion of people who feel the council keeps streets free of litter from 62% to 67% • Improve satisfaction with refuse collection from 88% to 90%
<p>Demonstrate that the council is trustworthy and fair</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the proportion of people who believe the council treats all types of people fairly from 77% to 82% • Increase the proportion of people who know how to complain about the council from 53% to 60%
<p>To support marketing communication campaigns which have the biggest impact on improving quality of life in Newcastle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol misuse • Domestic violence • Debt advice • Fostering • Our Newcastle
<p>To ensure that employees feel informed and engaged during a continuing process of transformation and change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the proportion of staff who feel that the council keeps them informed from 52% to 56% • Increase the proportion of staff who understand the goals of the council from 69% to 74% • Increase the proportion of our employees would speak highly of the council from 41% to 45%

Communication activities.

We have developed proposals for a programme of communication activity to help deliver these reputation objectives. Activities are designed to impact on those factors which evidence shows have the greatest impact on satisfaction with the council.

Reputation Project	Communication approach	Outputs and accountabilities
<p>“My City Council” – campaign demonstrating that the council provides value for money</p> <p>REPUTATION DRIVER: My council provides value for money</p>	<p>Value for money campaign for internal and external audiences to demonstrate to the public what services the council provides and to bring greater transparency to financial decision making and budget setting.</p> <p>The ‘my city council’ approach will help foster a sense of personal connection between the citizen/staff member and the council and also evoke a degree of personal responsibility for helping the council become more cost effective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My City Council” A-Z of council services online and as part of citylife • Enhanced council tax information which demonstrates link between council tax and outcomes • “My city council” marketing activity supported by City life and ward newsletter articles on ‘what your council does for you” • Big society message about how the public can help safeguard essential services through their ideas and their good citizenship • Clear branding of all frontline services so that they are recognisable in the community • Engaging and accessible budget consultation process. • Accessible annual report which links resources to activities and outcomes • Internal ‘value for money’ campaign

Reputation Project	Communication approach	Outputs
<p>“Have your say” - Making sure that residents, staff and partners feel informed and engaged</p> <p>REPUTATION DRIVER: My council listens and helps me to have my say on issues which affect me</p>	<p>A ‘Have your say’ campaign will bring greater visibility to the opportunities for the public to influence council decision making. The ‘Have your say’ brand will be used for community engagement events and formal consultation’ – and feedback will be provided consistently through a ‘you said: we did” approach.</p> <p>We will continue to foster an open and honest dialogue with the public through our existing communication channels such as Citylife and our website, and through our positive relationship with the media. We will continue to professionalise and enhance these channels – using new types of media to engage with a wider audience where appropriate.</p> <p>We will improve our approach to communicating with staff – providing a wider range of formats and generating a more regular flow of news and information around the organisation. We will also use a ‘campaign’ approach to improve understanding and awareness of the council values and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Have your say’ brand to be developed and used to badge engagement and consultation opportunities – in particular the ward charter process • Information traditionally shared through city life will be enhanced through more locally relevant ward charters and newsletters • The council’s website will be enhanced through improved content management systems and greater interactivity and feedback mechanisms • We will use social media and web 2.0 technology to improve access to the council and opportunities for engagement – such as ‘virtual neighbourhood meetings’ • Internal communication channels will be improved through better use of the intranet as a direct source of rolling news and information – and through the introduction of a monthly staff newsletter • A values and priorities campaign will to improve understanding and awareness amongst staff • We will develop a more accessible expression of the council plan to improve the prospect of staff at all levels making the link between council priorities and their own personal objectives.

Reputation Project	Communication approach	Outputs
<p>Building trust and confidence</p> <p>REPUTATION DRIVER: My council is stands up for the city, provides good services and treats people fairly</p>	<p>We will demonstrate openness and honesty in our communication with the public – particularly through the media. And we will always seek to reinforce our competence at managing difficult issues – but we will acknowledge mistakes when they happen.</p> <p>We will show leadership by speaking up for the city, developing an influential voice at a regional, national and international level.</p> <p>We will recognise and promote our achievements and successes. We will welcome comments and complaints as a positive opportunity to learn and improve.</p> <p>We will be transparent in our decision making and we will invite external views and opinions - demonstrating how we listen and respond to different views and concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the ward charter process as the basis for “You said-We did” campaign to demonstrate how the council listens and responds to concerns • Promote complaints channels • National and regional influence activity – including trade press PR; lobbying programme; and stakeholder engagement activity – particularly with the business community • STEP/Budget communication plan to demonstrate competence an control • Embed professionalism of communication planning approach and issues management across the council • Develop targeted awards programme to ensure council’s areas of excellence are widely recognised

Reputation Project	Communication approach	Outputs
<p>“Our Newcastle” Demonstrating that we are improving key council services</p> <p>REPUTATION DRIVER: My council invests in the services which are really important to me</p>	<p>To recognise that the public place great importance on services which make their community feel cleaner and greener and to demonstrate to residents that we are committed to improving these core reputation services.</p> <p>Our approach will be to build on our existing and very successful ‘our Newcastle ‘ campaign</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To deliver a cleaner greener campaign with three key components <li>- Love your city - to promote personal responsibility and civic pride – this campaign will include initiatives to reduce litter, graffiti and dog fouling and also promote green spaces, cultural and leisure facilities <li>- Reduce , reuse, recycle - to increase recycling rates <li>- Energy awareness – to contribute to the sustainability and carbon reduction agenda <li>• The campaign will make use of street level media and frontline service vehicles to carry messages <li>• We will also use our core communication channels to carry these campaigns <li>• We will celebrate and demonstrate excellent customer service by using our annual Star Awards to recognise the many council staff who go the extra mile to serve the community – best practice will be highlighted in Citylife and in ward charters <li>• We will develop simpler and more accessible methods to demonstrate excellence and improving performance - particular through greater use of human interest case studies which make a clear connection between council activities and improved quality of life for individuals and communities

Reputation Project	Communication approach	Outputs and accountabilities
<p>Changing lives</p> <p>REPUTATION DRIVER: My council is making a real difference to life in Newcastle</p>	<p>To tell a clear story about how the city council is leading partnerships with others to improve quality of life in the city.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a clear narrative about how the city council is leading partnership working to improve quality of life in Newcastle - this narrative should be shared with partners through the LSP so it becomes a coherent and coordinated 'one city' narrative which all partners share and use to inform their own communication • To run campaigns, with partners where appropriate, which will have the biggest impact on improving quality of life in the city – for 2011 we propose that the councils priority campaigns for 'changing lives" should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newcastle Debt Advice - Fostering and adoption - Domestic Violence - Alcohol misuse - Our Newcastle • Work with partners – particularly NGI to develop a place brand for the city which encompasses our attributes as a destination for tourism, investment and liveability. • Develop city marketing partnership as owners of destination brand • Be clear about the democratic accountability of the city council and don't confuse the public with a raft of partnership brands which have very little resonance – all branding decisions will follow the principles in the LGA guidance attached at <i>appendix A</i>

Communication Team – ways of working.

The programme of work described in this strategy is comprehensive and delivering it will be a significant challenge. The corporate communication team has been restructured to be fit for purpose to deliver – but limited resources must be focused on this programme which will, in future, be the team's core business. There are many other demands placed upon the team and expectations often exceed capacity.

It is not unreasonable for the organisation to expect marketing and communication over and above that which is outlined in this strategy. However, the corporate communication team is not in a position to provide this additional support directly within its existing resources and budget. It will however develop the ability to commission the capacity to meet additional communication and marketing requirements through a network of freelance communication specialist and through framework arrangements with a range of strategic and creative services. No additional communication and marketing support will be commissioned without an effective business case which demonstrates that the work is a priority and reflects value for money. Work valued under £1000 must be signed off by a head of service anything over this amount must have explicit sign off from a Directorate Management Team.

The processes for implementing this proposal will be developed as part of the Communication and Marketing STEP review.

A key aspect of the restructure of the communication team has been to broaden and deepen the professional skills of the staff, and to clearly align them with service directorates in 'account manager' roles. It is intended that this should help build the team's knowledge and understanding of service issue – and give directorates a greater clarity about the professional support available to them and much improved customer service.