

Uttlesford District Council Communications Strategy – 2009 to 2012

Aims

- To build and manage the reputation of Uttlesford District Council
- To ensure that we communicate effectively and consistently with all key audiences in the community – customers, staff, councillors, partners, and members of the media
- To gain a commitment from the whole organisation to the following statement:

We will communicate clearly, openly and regularly with local people, partners and with each other to help all interested parties to understand and access the services Uttlesford District Council provides. We will recognise that everything we say and do has a direct impact on our corporate reputation, and we will all take responsibility for high quality communication with our stakeholders.

It is important to note that this strategy focuses on external communications only. The council's Internal Communications Strategy is set out in a separate document. Clearly, though, there are areas where the two will overlap.

Strategic context

Uttlesford District Council's vision is to *"sustain a high quality of life in which the benefits of the unique character of the district are equally available to all residents, workers or visitors."*

It has four key objectives:

- **Finance** - Effectively managing our finances and operating a decreasing budget so as to achieve a Use of Resources score of "2" by 2011
- **Partnerships** - Working to deliver effective and coordinated services with partners and others, at reduced cost while helping those in hardship
- **People** - Consulting and engaging fairly with staff and customers, and helping those in hardship
- **Environment** - Protecting and enhancing the environment

The importance of external communications

Effective communications are essential to the health and success of an organisation.

Following its survey 'What drives public satisfaction with Local Government?' MORI found:

"If an authority is perceived to provide generally good quality services and good value for money, then it is highly likely to also achieve strong satisfaction ratings... Communications are likely to be key here.... How residents feel about service

delivery (most of which they will not use directly) and value for money is likely to be shaped by direct council communications and local press coverage.”

The Improvement and Development agency for Local Government (I&DeA) Connecting with Communities paper states:

“Communications is a fundamental component of how local residents judge the overall image of their council. Getting it right is one of the simplest and most effective ways of improving satisfaction. It’s no longer an optional extra. Any council that wants to be seen as striving for high performance will need a communications strategy in place.”

Comprehensive Performance Assessment results have also shown that the best authorities manage their communications and engage with employees in ways that encourage, motivate and enthuse their stakeholders.

Improving the way we communicate with the people of Uttlesford district and other stakeholders can have a significant positive impact on the reputation of the organisation.

Where are we now?

Uttlesford has approximately 1.2 FTE communications posts. This level of resource has varied over time, peaking at 3 FTE in 2006 and is currently at the lowest level for several years.

The current team is made up of one fulltime Website and Communications Officer, along with part of the capacity of the Head of Community Engagement (0.2 FTE).

The team has a broad remit which includes:

- Providing a press office function
- Proactive publicity, predominantly in the form of regular press releases
- Strategic communications advice and guidance across all services (including attendance at high level meetings such as Chairs and Directors)
- Writing and editing the four times a year residents magazine Uttlesford Life
- Sole management of the council’s website
- Internal communications (including sole management of the intranet and the staff magazine)
- Some involvement in consultation
- Assumed responsibility for providing photographic support for the council, although the team has had no training in this area
- Writing and editing the quarterly Housing News magazine, distributed to the district’s 3,000 council house tenants.

The Council also has two key ongoing communications issues – the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport and the proposed Eco Homes development – although both of these have stalled for reasons outside the council’s control.

A benchmarking survey has been carried out with seven similar sized authorities to compare the level of resource dedicated to communications, the scope of the communications teams and to identify any areas of best practice which may be followed to provide improvements for Uttlesford District Council. The findings are set out in Appendix A.

As part of the Local Government Association's Reputation Campaign, MORI research identified 12 core actions that, when delivered well, have a marked and positive impact on a council's reputation (see Appendix B).

Five of these actions are communications related and Uttlesford District Council is already addressing these.

Results from the district-wide 2007 Best Value General Survey showed that the highest proportion of people – some 40% – said their primary source of information about the council came directly from the council with only 23% saying it came from the local media. This is a testament to the council's rounded approach to communications and recognition that local media coverage is only one route to providing information to the people of the district.

More recently, the Uttlesford District Council Place Survey 2008 also recorded very positive results which reflected well on the council and the services it provides.

Unlike the Best Value Survey, the Place Survey focuses more generally on how people feel about their local community as a whole, including quality of life factors, alongside their perception of the level of service provided by their local authority.

Results showed that Uttlesford District came top out of 14 councils in Essex in terms of general satisfaction with the local area (91.9% of residents polled said they were satisfied with the local area).

The district also rated well in terms of people feeling that they belong to their neighbourhood (67.8% of people answered positively) and that they receive fair treatment by local services (80.2% answered positively).

From a community engagement point of view, the results suggest that residents are comfortable with the level of involvement they have in decision making, compared with other Essex councils.

In the main, where a low score was recorded, it was in relation to a service which is not in Uttlesford District Council's control.

When compared to findings from the 2006/7 Best Value Survey, the results remain fairly consistent (see Appendix C). The number of residents who felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area has risen from 24% to 31% compared to only a year earlier.

As mentioned, the MORI study (outlined on page one) concludes that a perception of good quality services and good value for money tends to lead to strong satisfaction ratings and a key to achieving both of these results is good communication.

Such positive satisfaction ratings for Uttlesford would therefore suggest that the council is already a strong performer when it comes to communications, particularly when the current level of resource is taken into account.

Over the past few months a review has been carried out to gain a clearer understanding of how the organisation's current approach to communications is perceived by senior managers, staff and councillors. Local media (as a key communications customer), were also asked to give their views of the current level of service they receive.

The main findings are set out below, with further information provided in Appendices D and E.

Senior managers

A series of questions about the way the council currently communicates were posed to 15 senior managers.

When asked how they felt about how the council's communications is perceived, the key responses were:

- Our perception has struggled due to the recent financial situation
- We're not proactive enough
- People don't understand which services we provide
- The biggest challenge is managing customer expectation of what the council provides with diminished resource.

The reputation of the communications team was broadly seen to have improved over the past year, though stretched capacity was noted. Managers said that the team responds quickly and is helpful especially in terms of writing press releases and loading information onto the website. However, people aren't clear about the role of the team, and the level of responsibility that falls to other staff in terms of communications.

The managers identified that the main weaknesses of the organisation's current communications are capacity and the need for the team to have a higher profile in the organisation.

Strengths ranged from the team's approach to challenging the media when inaccurate stories appear and speed of response, to the fact that 'they never say no'.

Overall there seems to be some confusion about the scope of the communications team, and clarification on this would be welcomed.

There was some concern about the media coverage the council receives, with the perception that this is often overly negative and 'anti-council'. Concerns were also raised about the level of party political coverage to appear, particularly on the letters pages, and the potentially negative impression this gives residents about the council as a whole.

A wide range of suggestions were made as to the one action that could improve the organisation's external communications. Ideas included:

- regular visits from the communications team to each of the services
- a recognisable and consistent corporate identity
- a year's worth of schedules for Uttlesford Life so services could plan the stories they would like to submit in advance.

A more detailed list of suggestions is set out in Appendix D.

Staff

Seven members of staff from a range of services took part in a focus group session to discuss communications.

In general, the service received from the Communications Team was thought to be good, though capacity issues were raised along with the opinion that the team are more focused on short term issues than longer term planning.

Strengths included their ability to get the most coverage from a story and to write in easy to understand language.

There was some interest in the idea of having guidance sheets to help officers when they need to write press releases or respond to a media query, and media training was seen as a good idea so long as it was delivered cheaply.

The group agreed that across the board there is a good mix of media coverage locally.

There was a concern that the council doesn't do enough to help people to understand what services it provides though it was also recognised that this is a far broader problem of people in general not understanding the role councils play rather than something unique to Uttlesford.

The group recognised that Uttlesford is an affluent area, and people have high expectations of the council. There was a fear that a 'Rolls Royce' service is still promoted Politically when there is not the money or resource there to deliver it, which in turn makes the reputation of the council suffer.

Staff favoured taking an honest approach with customers, making them aware if there are delays to services and being on the front foot.

Councillors

Five key Uttlesford district councillors from all three political groups were asked to share their thoughts on the current approach to communications. The main points to arise are set out below:

- The reputation of the communications team has improved considerably over the past year

- There is mixed understanding of the scope of the communications team – general view is that the team focuses mainly on press and media work, though there is broad recognition of capacity issues
- Changes to Uttlesford Life are seen as positive in the main, though several raised the need for some reader research to check how well it is received by the community and if people are aware that it is now distributed as part of the county council's EssexWorks magazine
- There is a need to be more proactive/ attention grabbing and ensure good relationships with local media. Coverage is thought to often be negative towards the council
- The councillors spoken to in the main see their primary link into communication as face to face meetings with the community
- Some broader communications issues which sit outside the remit of this strategy and the Communications Team were raised such as the need for a way to easily access email when on leave, more of a 'one-stop shop' approach to customer services, and focus groups to ensure people are fully consulted.

Local media

The response from the local media to a brief satisfaction survey was very positive. Ten responses were received covering all of the key local media.

An impressive 100% of those who responded said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they receive from the communications team.

Deadlines are met (60% said usually, 40% said always), the necessary level of detail is provided (90% said usually, 10% said always) and council quotes are usable (40% said usually, 50% said always).

Council press releases are frequently covered with almost half of the media which responded using 60% to 100% of these.

The full results are set out in appendix Appendix E.

Where do we want to be?

As a baseline, all of our communications will be:

- Open and honest
- Accessible and approachable
- Clear and consistent
- Inclusive, involving and engaging

- Impartial
- Clearly branded
- Cost effective

Although issues of capacity have been raised throughout the review of the organisation's current approach to communications, there is currently no additional resource available to increase the size of the team.

Therefore, this strategy aims to identify a number of small scale actions that can be carried out within existing capacity to improve the organisation's communications delivery, alongside actions already identified in the Community Engagement Division Plan 2009/10 (Appendix F).

The review showed that one of the strengths of the communications team is its can do approach and the fact that the team 'never says no'.

However, with a small dedicated resource and an understanding from the organisation that capacity is often stretched, it is important the Communications Team remains focused on the right things – not everything.

To help achieve this we will:

- Listen to people, agree what we will do and then do it
- Never promise what we can't deliver
- Help others in the organisation to understand the role they play in communications, and how the Communications Team can support the delivery of high quality communications.

To improve the way we communicate as a council there are five areas we will focus on. These are set out below along with the actions we will carry out:

- **Protect and enhance the council's reputation and ensure high quality communications are an integral part of the work of all staff**

Actions

- Define the role of the Communications Team and others within the organisation (managers, officers and councillors) in achieving high quality communications
- Agree service standards for the Communications Team to help others throughout the organisation better understand what level of support to expect from the team
- Write a media protocol for the organisation, to ensure everyone is clear about the role they play in providing information to the media
- Provide guidance sheets for officers via the intranet, offering quick and easy advice on how to write a press release, and pointers for media interviews. These self-help aids would complement the support offered by the Communications Team rather than replace it. Depending on capability and capacity, these would help officers understand all of the information the Communications Team needs to create a release or respond to the media. In some cases officers may feel they are able to use the guides to make a start at crafting a release or response

themselves. The Communications Team would issue all releases and be involved in requests from the media at varying levels depending on the support required. This action recognises the issue of capacity with the aim of encouraging officers throughout the organisation to become more involved in the communications process.

- Investigate the possibility of providing media training for key councillors and officers, perhaps in partnership with a neighbouring local authority, to help ensure quality and consistent responses to media interviews which reflect the council's vision and objectives.
 - Investigate possibility of basic photographic training for Communications Team to improve quality and quantity of photographs being sent with releases
- **Identify communication as a priority activity for the council and ensure it is reflected in service plans throughout the organisation**

Actions

- Communications Team to secure a slot at team meetings throughout the organisation over the coming months to introduce the communications strategy. The slot will be used to explain the role of the team, the responsibility of all officers in providing quality communications, capture forthcoming issues and opportunities and encourage open and honest approach to communications
 - Monthly service visits. A different service to be visited each month by the website and communications officer. The visit would span up to half a day and would be publicised within that service in advance. Staff would be encouraged raise and discuss information about forthcoming communications issues, opportunities and service changes and work with the website and communications officer on resulting actions to address these
 - Work with managers to encourage full consideration of communication issues during the early planning stages of any service changes via discussion at high level meetings such as SMB
 - Gather local newspaper readership figures to help illustrate the need to continue to use other communications tools and approaches alongside local media coverage to help the council's messages to reach the wider community.
- **Provide a focus and sense of direction for all council communication activity in line with our vision and objectives**

Actions

- Produce a set of key messages for the organisation which reflect our vision and objectives in easy to understand language that can be used throughout all of our communications.
- Create a 12 month schedule, identifying significant communications issues and opportunities to enable improved forward planning where possible.
- Provide 'frequently asked question' sheets when key issues arise to help staff throughout the organisation to feel better equipped to

respond to queries from the public and create more consistent communications that are in line with our vision and objectives.

- Continue to challenge inaccurate reporting in the local media

- **Help ensure the council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity**

Actions

- Carry out a review of the council’s corporate identity to help ensure the council receives the credit for the work that it is responsible for and where it is working in partnership with others.
- Introduce a set of brand guidelines
- Build in a review stage to document production to ensure all documents produced by the organisation are clear, consistent and are designed to brand.

- **Improve access to, and information about, the council's services**

Actions

- Carry out reader research for Uttlesford Life to assess how well it is received by readers and identify any potential improvements
- Ensure coverage in Uttlesford Life reflects the broad spread of services the council provides by including a ‘submit a story idea’ section on the intranet, and by providing production schedules for the coming year to allow services to plan ahead for deadlines
- Ensure all publicity about council services includes an ‘action box’ detailing how members of the public can access services/more information. Ensure this includes a phone contact as well as website/email address for those without internet access.
- Create a development plan for the website, identifying improvements to be made to increase functionality, plans to increase engagement with the services and consideration of how the site will be publicised to boost usage in the community. Identify any budgetary requirements.
- Introduce a ‘sign up for latest news’ function to the council’s website. This will help to build a bank of email contacts which can be used to complement the dissemination of information about changes to services, emergencies (eg flooding) and other council news items.

A detailed plan is set out below offering more information about when these actions will be delivered and who by.

Protect and enhance the council’s reputation and ensure high quality communications are an integral part of the work of all staff			
Action	Responsible	Timetable	Outcome
Define the role of the Communications Team and others within the			Clearer organisational understanding of who has responsibility for

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organisation (managers, officers and councillors) in achieving high quality communications			which elements of communications
Agree service standards for the Communications Team			Better organisational understanding of level of support can be expected from the communications team
Write a media protocol for the organisation			Individuals and organisation have clearer understanding of the role they play in providing information to the media
Provide guidance sheets for officers via the intranet, offering quick and easy advice on how to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - write a press release - carry out a media interview. 			Greater understanding of all of the information needed to create a release or respond to the media. Officers throughout the organisation to become more involved in the communications process.
Investigate the possibility of providing media training for key councillors and officers, perhaps in partnership with a neighbouring local authority			Greater quality and consistency of response to media interviews which reflect the council's vision and objectives.
Investigate possibility of basic photographic training for Communications Team			Improved quality and quantity of photographs being sent with releases
Identify communication as a priority activity for the council and ensure it is reflected in service plans throughout the organisation			
Action	Responsible	Timetable	Outcome
Secure a slot at team meetings throughout the organisation to introduce the communications strategy, and explore future opportunities			Greater understanding of the role of the team, the responsibility of all officers in providing quality communications, and the council's open and honest approach to

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			communications
Monthly service visits.			Improved dialogue between the communications team and the services resulting in a more planned approach to communications
Work with managers to encourage full consideration of communications issues during the early planning stages of any service changes via discussion at high level meetings such as Chairs and Directors.			More strategic approach to communications
Gather local newspaper readership figures			Greater understanding within the organisation of the need to look at other communications tools and approaches alongside local media coverage to help the council's messages to reach the wider community.
Provide a focus and sense of direction for all council communication activity in line with our vision and objectives organisation			
Action	Responsible	Timetable	Outcome
Produce a set of key messages for the organisation			Staff find it easier to articulate vision and objectives throughout all communications.
Create a 12 month schedule, identifying significant communications issues and opportunities			Improved forward planning where possible.
Provide 'frequently asked question' sheets when key issues arise			Staff throughout the organisation feel better equipped to respond to queries from the public and create more consistent

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			communications that are in line with our vision and objectives.
Challenge inaccurate reporting in the local media			Inaccuracies are addressed
Help ensure the council is seen as a single organisation with a strong sense of identity			
Action	Responsible	Timetable	Outcome
Carry out a review of the council's corporate identity			The council receives the credit for the work that it is responsible for and where it is working in partnership with others.
Introduce a set of brand guidelines			Consistency of material and voice
Build in a review stage to document production			All documents produced by the organisation are clear, consistent and are designed to brand.

Improve access to, and information about, the council's services			
Action	Responsible	Timetable	Outcome
Carry out reader research for Uttlesford Life			Greater understanding of how well it is received by readers and potential improvements
Include a 'submit a story idea' section on the intranet, and by provide production schedules for the coming year to allow services to plan ahead for deadlines			Coverage in Uttlesford Life reflects the broad spread of services the council provides and services feel engaged with the process
Ensure all publicity about council services includes an 'action box' detailing how members of the public can access services/more information (including a phone contact as well as website/email address for those without internet access).			Improved access to information for people using council services
Create a development plan for the website			Improvements identified, and budget allocated accordingly
Introduce a 'sign up for latest news' function to the council's website.			A bank of email contacts is created to complement the dissemination of information about changes to services, emergencies (eg flooding) and other council news items.

Appendix A

Overall findings from benchmarking exercise

As part of the communications strategy background work, seven similar sized authorities were asked a series of questions about their current communications activity and approach.

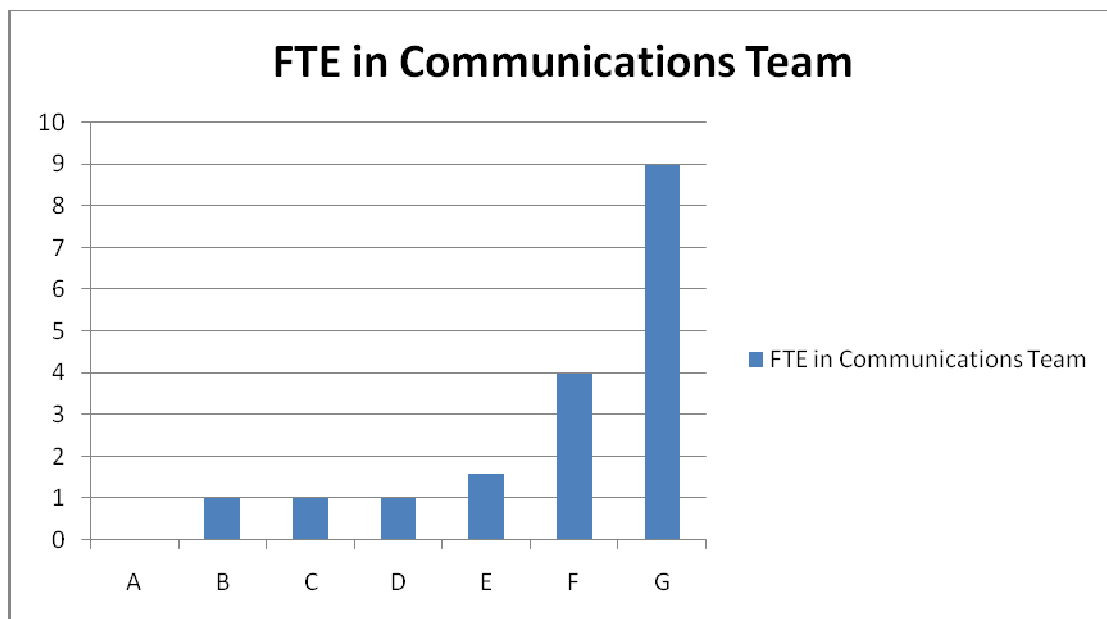
The authorities who contributed to this research were:

- Babergh
- Castle Point
- Maldon
- Melton
- North Norfolk
- Stroud
- Tendring

Key findings from this research are set out below.

Please note - the order of councils above does not correspond to the letters below.

Number of communications FTEs



At the time of interview Council A had one FTE communications officer, and the answers included in this research are based on her output while in post. However this post was due to be made redundant during 2009.

It's important to note that Council G included reprographics and graphic design in its communications team, alongside two dedicated web posts.

Uttlesford has 1.2 FTE communications posts. However, this includes management of the website, unlike all the councils above except Council G

Where does the Communications function report to in the organisation?

The service communications reports into is called something different in each of the organisations spoken to as part of this research as set out below

Council A – HR, Communications and Democratic Services

Council B – HR

Council C - Democratic Services

Council D – Organisational Development

Council E - Corporate Services

Council F – Policy and Communications

Council G - Information Directorate

Communications reports into the third tier of each of the organisations spoken to as part of this research apart from one where it reports into the fourth tier. Most felt that this was the right level in terms of structure, as on a day-to-day basis they had good access and working relationships with the Chief Executive and other key officers and councillors.

The Uttlesford Communications Team report into the Director of Central Services, the second tier in the organisation. Similar to those surveyed, the team members feel they sit at the right level in the organisation.

Scope of the Communications Team

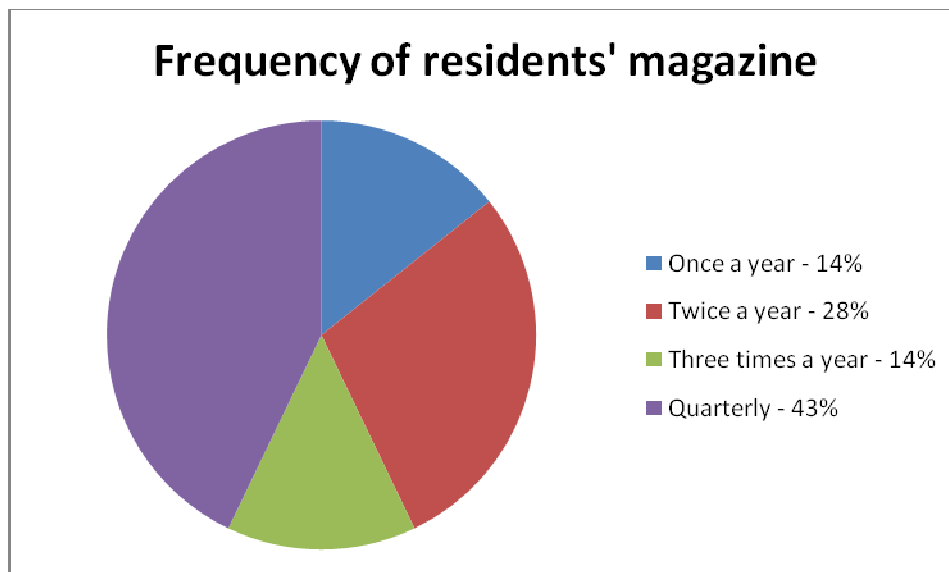
The scope of the communications team varied from council to council.

Consistent elements were:

- Media management – media calls and press releases
- Residents' magazine (though level of involvement varied)
- Internal communications (again, activity varied from council to council)
- Ad hoc projects where communications advice/support is needed.

Over and above this, the communications teams were responsible for a variety of tasks from taking photographs and providing design to attending key strategic meetings and providing media training.

The scope of the Uttlesford Communications Team is similar to that set out above along with the sole management of the website (both from an editorial and development point of view). When looking at scope, it is worth remembering that communications makes up a small part of the Head of Community Engagement's role – for example his division contains 23 members of staff, and he manages nine budgets.

Residents' Magazine

All authorities spoken to as part of this research have a residents' magazine, however approaches differed both in terms of frequency (as set out above) and level of involvement. The bulk of authorities spoken to provide the full writing, editing and design process internally with pagination ranging from 8 pages to 32 pages per issue. Three used external suppliers to write and/or design their magazine. One used an external supplier to source advertising.

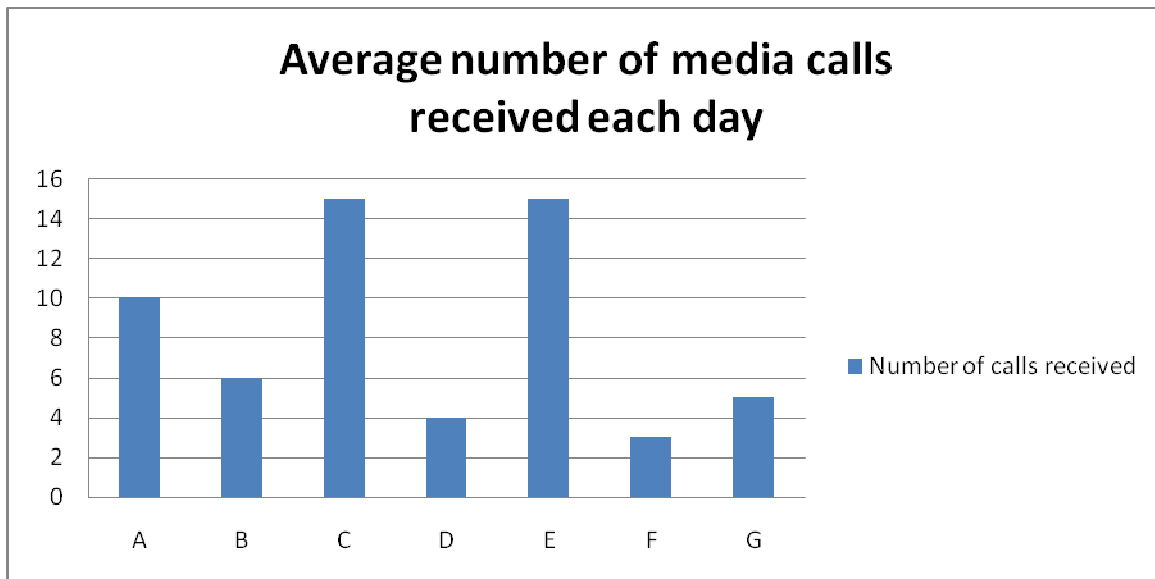
Uttlesford District Council's residents' magazine Uttlesford Life is now distributed four times a year, inserted in Essex County Council's EssexWorks magazine. The Communications Team has sole responsibility for writing and editing the content, along with sourcing or taking all of the photographs

Media management

As expected, media management is a significant part of the communications teams' work in each of the authorities spoken to.

On the whole the authorities felt they received fair/balanced coverage.

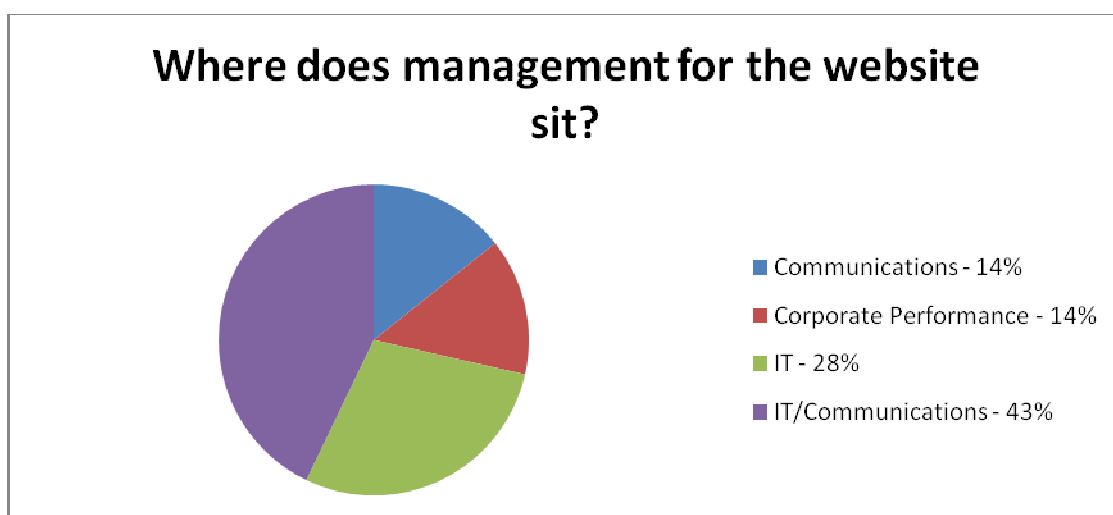
The number of media calls received on an average day differed quite considerably, as shown below.



On average the Uttlesford Communications Team receive three calls from the media a day. A handful of media calls also go direct to officers in other parts of the organisation, usually from trade or specialist publications. Media queries tend to come mainly in the first half of the week as a result of weekly paper deadlines.

Website

Although responsibility for the website only fell directly to communications in one of the authorities spoken to, all have input into their organisation's website, to varying degrees.



Many of the authorities have taken a devolved approach to both their website and intranet, designating staff in different services as 'web editors' or 'super users' giving

them responsibility to keep their sections up to date. This appears to be in response to the role of web editor or webmaster being treated as a technical post in the main. The level of resource available for the website varied significantly:

- One authority has two officers dedicated to maintaining the website and intranet
- Three authorities have one dedicated post
- One authority has two posts responsible for the website, though they carry out a variety of other roles too
- One authority has one post responsible for the website, as well as a variety of other roles too
- One has a dedicated webmaster role, however this is currently vacant.

In Uttlesford responsibility for the website falls to the Communications Team's Website and Communications Officer. Roughly half a post dedicated to the upkeep and development of the site. The idea of devolving responsibility for content has been tried at Uttlesford but was not successful.

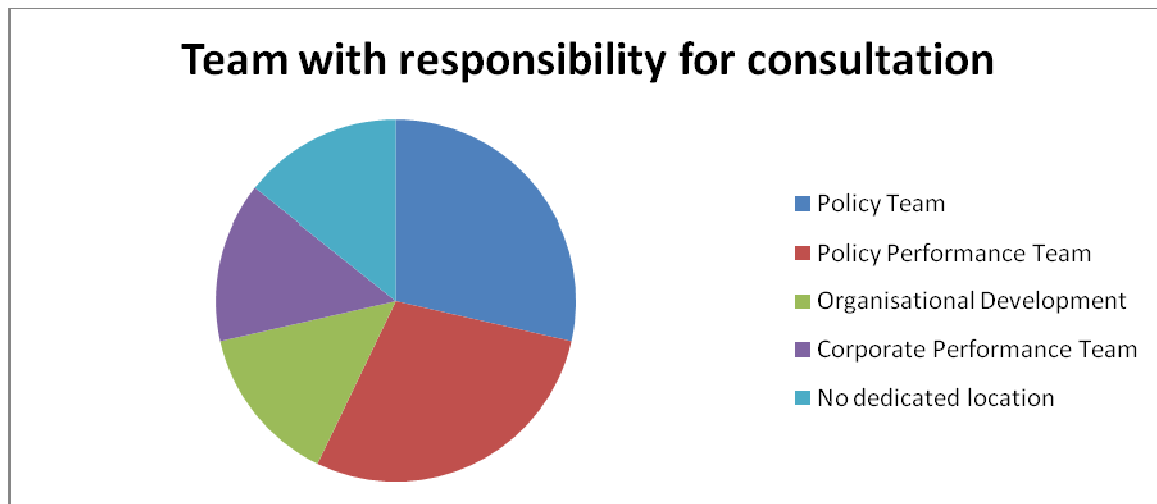
Branding

Branding guidelines are in place in all of the authorities spoken to as part of this research. Although it was recognised that due to capacity the teams are unable to produce all written publications direct due to capacity, all said they have sight of the vast bulk of material before it is sent to print.

Currently there are no official branding guidelines in place at Uttlesford District Council. However, this has been highlighted as an issue by the Communications Team, and a branding project is underway to address this. There is no currently no official requirement for publications to be seen/approved by the Communications Team at Uttlesford before they are sent to print.

Consultation

Responsibility for consultation only fell directly to one of the communications teams whose wider team includes a dedicated part-time Corporate Research and Policy Officer. Many of the other organisations said they are sometimes involved with consultation but from an information provision point of view rather than becoming involved with the mechanics of the consultation exercise.



At Uttlesford, responsibility for consultation doesn't fall to the Communications Team, however as it sits within the Business Improvement and Performance Team management responsibility is with the Head of Community Engagement.

Appendix B

The Reputation Campaign

Cleaner, Safer, Greener

- adopt a highly visible, strongly branded council cleaning operation.
- ensure no gaps or overlap in council cleaning and maintenance contracts.
- set up one phone number for the public to report local environmental problems.
- deal with 'grot spots'.
- remove abandoned vehicles within 24 hours.
- win a Green Flag award for at least one park.
- educate and enforce to protect the environment.

Communications:

- ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services.
- manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council.
- provide an A-Z guide to council services.
- publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents.
- step up internal communications so staff become advocates for the council.

Appendix C

The table below is taken from recent research by BMG on behalf of Uttlesford District Council. This compares results from the 2008 Place Survey with data from the 2006/7 BVPI Survey.

3. Comparisons with 2006/07 BVPI

	2008/09	2006/07
% overall satisfaction with the way the authority runs things	49	55
% satisfied with local area as a place to live	92	87
% satisfied with doorstep recycling collection	73	72
% satisfied with sports and leisure facilities	43	63
% satisfied with libraries	63	68
% satisfied with museums/ galleries	45	48
% satisfied with theatres/ concert halls	23	28
% satisfied with parks and open spaces	70	75
% who feel level of crime is important in making somewhere a good place to live	52	64
% who feel level of crime needs to be improved	13	24
% agree can influence decisions affecting local area	31	24

Appendix D

Feedback from senior managers

Which one action do you believe would significantly improve the organisation's external communications?

- Comms team need to get out and talk to people.
- Be more on the front foot.
- We need to become better at selling Uttlesford
- Making sure that we have lots of different access channels and we don't err towards just providing information on the website to make sure that we reach all areas of the community. Very important from an equality and diversity point of view.
- A recognisable and consistent corporate identity
- No one thing springs to mind – think we are getting the balance right.

- I would welcome a year's worth of schedules for Uttlesford Life
- I would like to be clearer about what the communications team is responsible for and guidelines/ a protocol for managing communications in the authority.
- There ought to be a plan in mind around communications and the future of the council – look at issues such as how we are progressing financially, showing how we are recovering and how we plan to plan to improve further in the future.
- Try to understand the impact Uttlesford Life has (though not a big customer satisfaction survey)
- Possibly introduce some sort of customer feedback mechanism on the website (really simple such as smiley faces rather than a heavy exercise).
- I would question the resilience of the team. Every service is stretched and at the moment there is not a lot of scope for additional staff, but in time it ought to be considered.
- Making sure we are communicating what we are doing and that people are aware of it so there are no surprises internally and externally.
- Promote our successes. Need to be more dynamic. The website could be developed further – it's better but very functional.
- One of the problems we often have is a lack of coherence to messages – not the view of the whole organisation. Might help if we moved towards a cabinet model.
- I also don't like the corporate image though I imagine we are committed to it because of the expense of changing it. It's not challenging or dynamic.
- An email list so we can contact people direct. Would help a great deal with urgent information. Also greater links with Parish and church newsletters.
- Make Utterings more personal so that it helps staff to feel more part of a family, which would encourage better cross team working.
- I think media queries should be dealt with centrally.
- Possibly weekly press briefings
- Diversity day at Audley End House was really positive – need to use similar experiences to be more visible and say 'do you realise what we do?'

Appendix E

The results of a recent satisfaction survey carried out with local media are set out below.

Responding to your needs

Q1 Uttlesford District Council Communications Team

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Always</i>
Are they easy to contact?	0.0%	0.0%	70.0%	30.0%
Do they respond in time for deadlines?	0.0%	0.0%	60.0%	40.0%
Does the response meet your needs in terms of detail required?	0.0%	0.0%	90.0%	10.0%
Do they provide usable Council quotes?	0.0%	10.0%	40.0%	50.0%
Do they provide usable interviewees?	0.0%	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%

Providing information

Q2 Does the communications team

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Always</i>
Provide you with a weekly supply of usable stories?	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%
Provide briefings and/or explanations when requested?	0.0%	10.0%	20.0%	70.0%

Q3 Approximately what percentage of releases from the communications team do you estimate you use?

<i>0-30%</i>	<i>31-60%</i>	<i>61-90%</i>	<i>91-100%</i>
10.0%	50.0%	20.0%	20.0%

Q4 Please rate how satisfied you are with the overall performance of the media service:

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Very satisfied

0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%
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Appendix F

Below are the actions from the Community Engagement Divisional Plan which relate directly to communications. A full copy of the divisional plan is available on request.

Title	Description	Expected outcome
Intranet Redesign	Creation of new intranet	Useful and useable new intranet to help staff carry out their day to day business. Large sections of intranet will be rewritten and design will be based on current website, bringing most commonly used functions to the front
Planning section rewrite	Review and rewrite of the planning section of the website, which is the most frequently visited section	Easier navigation for visitors to the most popular section of the council's website ensuring the most relevant information is upfront and easily accessible
External Communications Strategy	New strategy to look at how we communicate with the public over the coming years	Improved communications within limited resources (both financial and people). Independent assessment of current strengths and weaknesses
Corporate Design and Branding	Develop corporate design standards and templates	Consistent and professional approach to all council publications, leaflets, documents etc
Website Compliancy	Work with website providers VerseOne to further improve website to meet AA compliancy criteria	Potentially Uttlesford could be the first council in the country to have an AA compliant website. At this stage, the cost of the project is not known. If this goes ahead, it would improve even further the current accessibility of the site.