

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

**Communications Working Group (February 2013)
Endorsed by Regional Transition Committee (March 2013)**

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1. Mission Statement

The communications strategy is a framework to guide all external stakeholder and internal staff communications in the local government reform process.

2. Introduction

Communication is of vital importance to the change process. It will enhance motivation, secure commitment and demonstrate openness. This is a time of uncertainty, and for some reticence and fear, so organisations must recognise the emotional challenges and the impact that will have on communications.

Now the shape and extent of the change has been determined, communication needs to move from the general to the specific. It is important that this communication strategy and subsequent local communication strategies are a two-way process to ensure that staff and stakeholders are involved and able to contribute. They should give a progress report on communication activities, identify a proposed action plan, factor in evaluation and focus on key stakeholders.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Ensure that staff and stakeholders understand the broad context of Local Government Reform; are kept informed of developments within local government, within the DOE, and where appropriate, within other government departments;
- Support the reform programme through timely, interactive internal and external communication that creates an understanding of and commitment to the reform programme;
- Provide key information to stakeholders relating to the future provision of local government services;
- Provide key information for staff relating directly to their future employment arrangements. Overarching messages delivered to all staff, supplemented by relevant, targeted messages to specific groups of staff;
- Ensure staff and stakeholders have the opportunity to have their views heard; and
- Ensure consistency in all communications from local government and departments transferring functions. (see Figure 1 overleaf)

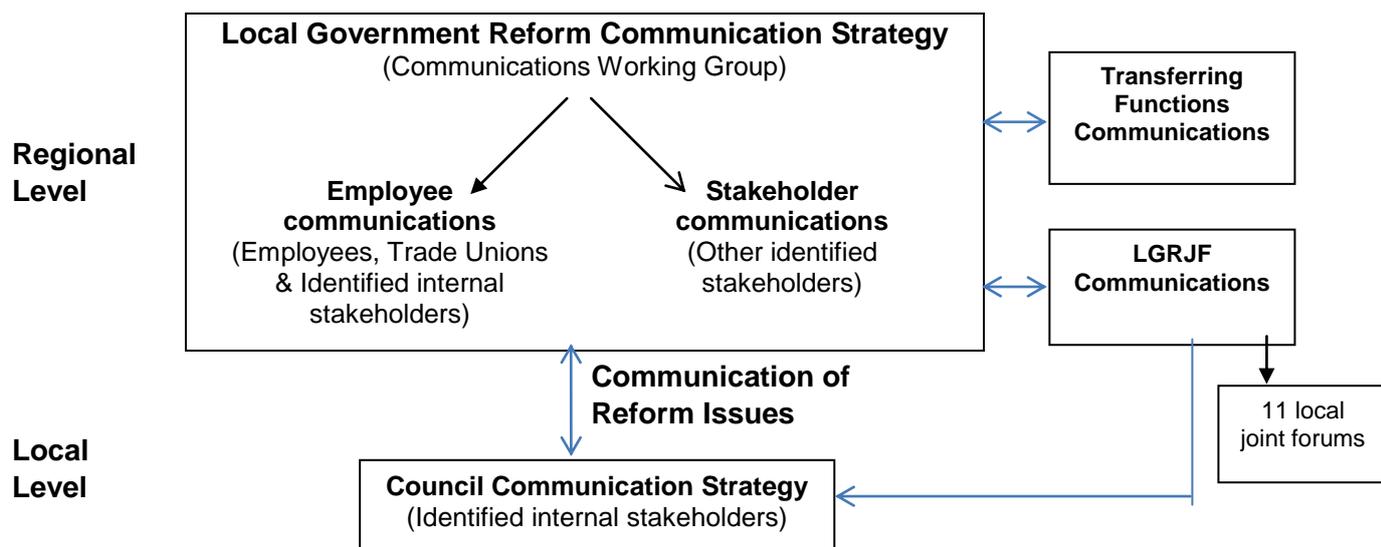


Figure 1: Communications Links and Flows

4. Roles & responsibilities

For the communication process to work effectively, it is necessary to define the roles and responsibilities of the various organisations involved.

Appendix 1 outlines the current roles and responsibilities of:

- the DOE
- the Communications Working Group
- legacy councils, new councils and members
- departments with transferring functions
- the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
- Task & Finish Working Group chairs
- the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC)

This list is not definitive. As the programme progresses towards 2014, the strategy will review the roles and responsibilities and include those of the incoming councils.

5. Key principles

The following principles will underline *all* communications activity and ensure that the key audiences, internal and external, understand what is happening. These principles are:

- a proactive approach
- open and transparent
- timely, regular and accessible
- relevant, clear and consistent – messages must be jargon free and in plain language
- accurate and comprehensive information
- two way – to give stakeholders and staff the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers

6. Delivering key messages for external audience

The external audience is identified as:

- **Regional Transition Committee or equivalent**
- **Regional Transition Operational Board**
- **Statutory Transition Committees or equivalent**
- **Task & Finish Working Groups**
- **Local Government Reform Programme Office**
- **NILGA**
- **Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)**
- **Public Sector People Managers' Association (PPMA)**
- **Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC)**
- **LGSC**
- **Elected members / political representatives**
- **Citizens**
- **Media**
- **Business sector**
- **Community and voluntary sectors**
- **Wider trade union movement**
- **DOE, Councils' and Departments' (transferring functions) press offices**

External communications should abide by the general objectives with additional communications principles as below:

- In liaison with DOE Press Office, all proactive activity will consider the timing of the release of stories in terms of the overall media context and wider news and political environment;
- Communication will be fully integrated to ensure that all relevant audiences and stakeholders, including the council communications managers, receive information in a timely manner;
- Ongoing media relations (proactive and reactive) will be used as a vehicle to position the Local government reform programme and communicate with the wider public;
- All requests from the media will be responded to succinctly and to deadline. Queries will be clarified with advice and guidance provided on key issues. Requests for interview will be facilitated, often at short notice and news releases and statements issued;
- A range of proactive tools will also be utilised in planning for events that will draw media interest;
- Key stakeholders are engaged in shaping communications from the programme in order for communication to meet their needs. Such a collaborative approach facilitates the continued development of trusted relationships;

- Communication recognises that various organisations know the best way to communicate with their audiences but DOE will give direction to the overarching message and provide support and cohesion for the overall communications programme. All communications therefore should be aligned through effective partnership working.

7. Delivering key messages for internal audience

The internal audience is identified as:

- **Local government employees**
- **Central government employees including transferring function departments**
- **Trade unions and representatives**
- **Councillors**

Internal communications should abide by the general objectives with additional communications principles as below:

- Recognising and acknowledging the key role that employees play in the overall programme;
- Communication is delivered with sensitivity and understanding, demonstrating management support and commitment by clearly indicating the sources of information and the context in which they are provided. Relevant officials and managers are properly equipped to develop, deliver and provide advice on key messages to be communicated;
- Simple, explicit and easily understood communications which take account of what employees want to hear and how they want to hear it. Communication should answer the question “how does this affect/ benefit me?”
- Communication is in consultation with identified communicators from the 11 new council areas who are responsible for information dissemination in their areas. This includes consultation with locally established Trade Union consultative committees. See LGRF/4/2012;
- Communication is kept to a reasonable frequency and level of detail that is suitable for the audience;
- Employees should be made aware of the principles of the Public Service Commission (PSC) and that there are processes in place to safeguard their interests which are being adhered to. (see Appendix 4);
- Communications are subject to Trade Union consultation where applicable and the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC), Public Sector People Managers Association (PPMA) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers’ Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) as appropriate;

Communication methods should follow Public Service Commission (PSC) advice that a variety of communication channels are used. These will include direct contact through staff meetings, seminars and conferences, emails, websites and intranet sites and the prudent use of regular newsletters.

8. Communication methods

The information to be communicated should be tailored to meet the audience's particular needs at the right time. The methods used will depend on:

- the importance of the information being communicated;
- the level of engagement required;
- the interest of the audience in the message;
- how the target audience prefers to receive information and whether it involves relaying information or requires two-way communication.

Internal channels

The main methods for most staff communication should be electronic (e-mail or intranet) and team meetings. When significant issues are to be communicated, face to face meetings between managers and staff is the preferred method. This will enable early concerns to be aired and addressed.

See Appendix 2 for a list of suggested internal communication tools.

External channels

All main external channels should be used including news releases, media briefings, central and local government websites and publications, ezines and where appropriate, social media, leaflets, events and seminars.

See Appendix 2 for a list of suggested external communication tools.

9. Action plan

An Action Plan to advance the objectives contained in this strategy is attached (see page 21)

10. Evaluation

Communication activity should be evaluated, reviewed and monitored on an ongoing basis. This will provide flexibility to adapt and adjust to staff and stakeholders' communication needs and deliver the best information.

A template is attached in Appendix 3 to assist in the monitoring process and an evaluation report is attached in Appendix 7.

Roles and Responsibilities

DOE

- To undertake proactive media activity publicising the work and position of the Minister, Department, Executive and the Regional Transition Committee in relation to local government reform. DOE will keep councils and other departments with transferring functions informed on such activity;
- To provide reactive communications to media queries received, and where appropriate, respond to coverage. Where appropriate, the department will work with or keep relevant councils / departments with transferring functions informed on such queries / responses;
- To act as the link between the DOE Local Government Reform Programme Office and the Communications Working Group;
- To provide stakeholders with regional information on programme activity, developments and decisions;
- To keep local government and departments with transferring functions informed should a timetable milestone slip;
- Evaluate DOE communication activity with key stakeholders
- To provide a secretariat function to the Communications Working Group.

Communications Working Group

- To identify communication needs across central and local government, and other stakeholders impacted upon by reform;
- To create, implement and evaluate an effective plan to communicate with these audiences, identifying appropriate methodologies;
- To exchange information and ideas to help develop communication strategies;
- To review the communications action plan on a quarterly basis;
- To act as a warning flag for communication issues and ensure that any problems within the communication workstream, which have the potential of having a significant impact on the programme as a whole, are escalated to the Regional Transition Operational Board in good time.

Legacy Councils, new councils and members

- To review the local communication strategy with the new council bodies, update and agree responsibilities for legacy and new councils;
- Communications will be a vital tool for successfully establishing the new council, its relationship with staff and external stakeholders. As such new councils should prepare to lead on communications;
- Within the local communications strategy, identify other areas of the organisation that have a role to play in successful communications and determine any necessary training and development needs in that respect.
- To ensure staff are aware and fully understand the implications on their roles regarding the upcoming transfer of functions.
- To review the strategy of communications with local voluntary, community and business sector stakeholders, update and address further communication needs within the local communication strategy;
- To evaluate their communications activity with key stakeholders
- To ensure that messages are consistent with the regional DOE messages;
- To copy DOE into communications issued to staff on local government reform;
- To share with, and when appropriate work with DOE, on any proactive and reactive media activity specific to the Council / department with transferring function.

Departments with transferring functions

- Within the departmental communications strategy, identify other areas of the organisation that have a role to play in successful communications and determine any necessary training and development needs in that respect.
- To ensure staff are aware and fully understand the implications on their roles regarding the upcoming transfer of functions.
- To identify local voluntary, community and business sector stakeholders, and address their communication needs within the departmental communication strategy;
- To evaluate their communications activity with key stakeholders
- To ensure that messages are consistent with the regional DOE messages;
- To copy DOE into communications issued to staff on local government reform;
- To share with, and when appropriate work with DOE, on any proactive and reactive media activity specific to department with transferring function.

NILGA

- To facilitate elected member and wider council involvement in the Local Government Reform Programme
- To provide elected members, council chief executives and council communication heads with regular updates through the local government reform bulletin.
- To provide elected members with focused briefing before and after each of the Regional Transition Committee (RTC) meetings
- To co-ordinate and manage elected member engagement and development events to support the sector in relation to local government reform.
- To identify the policy positions on crucial issues such as staffing and the transfer of functions and working with , STCs (or equivalent) and individual councils to identify regional positions for presentation to the RTC.
- To regularly evaluate communications activity and effectiveness with elected members and councils.

Task & Finish Working Group Chairs

- To provide bi-monthly communication updates on the progress and work of the group to the DOE Programme Office for publication on the DOE website.

Local Government Staff Commission

- To lead on communications of HR and staff related updates / decisions for local government;
- To keep the DOE Local Government Reform Programme Office and Chair of the Communications Working Group briefed well in advance of significant announcements.

External and Internal Communications - methods, key tasks & action points

1. External communication methods

- Identify a communication point of contact for external stakeholders. The point of contact (probably communications department) will be responsible for ensuring reform information is cascaded and can respond to reform queries as appropriate;
- Baseline research undertaken by DOE showed that over 50% of respondents have found and prefer information on reform to be presented through their local newspaper. As such, news releases and regular briefings through normal local media channels can be utilised;
- Include reform information in council publications. Council publications were the second most popularly reported method of gaining information on reform according to DOE's research;
- Use of internet and social media can supplement local media briefings;
- When appropriate, tailor articles to trade/ sector publications (e.g. Agenda NI, Ulster Business, Business Eye);
- Keep website up to date with reform information and link to DOE reform web pages for further information;
- Avail of 'Reform Inform' and distribute to stakeholder organisations or tailor content for your own publications;
- Include information in community group mail shots within your area;
- Identify appropriate speaking opportunities (e.g. conferences, business breakfasts).

2. Internal communication methods

- Identify a communication point of contact within the organisation. This person will be responsible for ensuring that information issued on a regional level is cascaded to *all staff* in an accessible manner. The point of contact will also be to whom specific reform queries can be directed and from whom staff might seek reform specific information;
- Establish regular senior management briefings;
- Team Briefings. Monthly (or as required) staff meetings should be used to summarise key messages for local staff;

- Regular face-to-face employee presentations / briefings, particularly for those staff directly affected by the changes. Information should be fed to managers to impart to all staff affected. Consider producing a video / series of videos as an aid to help managers brief staff in a consistent manner;
- Staff email briefings (monthly, or as required), including all up-to-date information on reform as it arises;
- In-House. Employee news bulletin / staff magazine can be used to keep staff up to date on broader reform issues;
- Direct contact should also be supplemented by seminars, workshops, conferences and CEO road shows, where and when needed;
- Include reform as standing item on internal meeting agendas;
- Use intranet and internet. Information on the reform programme should be posted with a link provided to the DOE website;
- Consider how to reach staff without email access – information with payslips, Chief Executive briefings, information on notice boards, central telephone message;
- Consider having a phone helpline for staff to ask questions;
- Utilise your Council's Committee System to communicate with councillors.

3. Key Tasks and Action Points

The following lists a series of tasks and action points that may prove useful for various levels within councils and departments with transferring functions:

Key tasks and actions for Chief Executive / senior management

- Awareness of the First Guiding Principle and associated recommendations, 'An Effective Communications Strategy'. See Appendix 4;
- Ensure there are appropriate, accessible and timely mechanisms for communication with staff and elected members;
- Ensure that there is an internal communication strategy for informing and consulting with *all* employees and their trade union representatives;
- Nominate a senior person to be responsible for the council's communication strategy and provide adequate resources and support for the role;
- Ensure that all managers have the information they need in a timely manner;

- Ensure that information from all people involved (project groups, working parties etc.) is pooled and that systems exist for those involved to be kept up-to-date with relevant progress;
- Establish a programme of meetings for all staff, with a suitable frequency;
- 'Walk the job' in order to keep in touch with the level of staff motivation, concerns and related work problems;
- Ensure that line managers have the information and skills they need to be able to inform their own teams;
- Give full and prompt responses to staff enquiries and be available as a main point of contact for officers and elected members;
- Monitor communication channels and their effectiveness through the communications contact;
- Where necessary, clarify media reports for staff;
- In the event of restructuring, make sure that decisions continue to be communicated to staff and that their morale is maintained as far as possible.

Key tasks and actions for all managers

- Engage with employees about key management decisions;
- Listen to staff concerns;
- Liaise with HR staff about staffing issues - managers are likely to be the first person that employees will approach for an answer;
- Be clear and consistent about information given to staff. If managers are ill-informed they will lose the credibility of their staff;
- Maintain the motivation and morale of staff - the continuing delivery of effective services is dependent on managers' ability to keep their staff motivated;
- Take responsibility for keeping staff informed and updated, and regularly disseminate this information to employees;
- Find answers for employees and ensure that they have the necessary information to answer enquiries they may receive from the public;
- Establish a programme of one-to-one meetings with team members.

Key tasks and actions for HR and / communications professionals

- Take the lead in setting up staff / union consultation arrangements;
- Brief line managers on personnel policy to be cascaded to all staff;
- Ensure HR personnel are informed about developments;
- Ensure that staff are kept informed about changes happening in the organisation;
- Regularly update staff lists, telephone lists, circulation lists, and information about people moves, secondments, departures and new appointments;
- Ensure that communication systems are in place (and procedures publicised) for staff regarding decisions made by the Local Government Reform Joint Forum;
- Include training on communication skills in management training and development programmes.

Key tasks and actions for elected members

- Ensure that you are familiar with the Council's internal communication strategy and be confident that it is followed through in spite of any possible changes in management as a result of the reform process;
- Be aware of the work involved in gathering information;
- Be clear at the end of every formal meeting what decisions need to be communicated and by whom, in line with your Council's communication strategy.

Local Government Reform Communications Strategy – Evaluation Template

Stakeholder	Key issues to evaluate	How	When
Local Government Employees Central Government Employees DOE Transferring Functions Trade Unions and Representatives Councillors	All need to be well briefed and kept informed	Briefings by Senior Management Local Government Reform Newsletter Newsheets Questions and Answers Sessions Observation Feedback Intranet	As and when required
Citizens	Participate in local democracy Encourage them to continue to use Council services Reassure them that business is as usual	Media relations Council publications and Magazines Consultation event Local radio Social media Internet Reports of meetings	As and when required
RTC RTOB VTC Task and finish working groups Local Government Reform Programme Office NILGA SOLACE NILGOSC Local Government Staff Commission	Strong two way communication Well briefed DOE informed (This will be updated when STCs come into being)	Briefings Minutes Reports Communication Group Meetings Newsletters	As and when required

Stakeholder	Key issues to evaluate	How	When
MLAs MPs MEPs	Well briefed and kept informed	Local Government Reform Newsletter Newsheets Questions and Answers Media clippings Feedback	As and when required
Media	Positive and negative coverage, Information accurate and relevant	Releases and briefings Local and Regional Regional Level DOE	As and when required
Business sector	Proactive engagement	Breakfast seminars, Use of Economic Development staff to attend meetings/seminars Use of Chambers of Commerce Use of E-commerce sites for latest update Regional Level DOE	As and when required
Community and voluntary sector	Proactive engagement	Regular Interagency Meetings Use of Community Development Staff Releases Briefings Meetings CAB if appropriate NICVA Regional Level DOE	As and when required
Wider Trade Union Movement	Engaged with and informed	DOE /TU Movement Briefs	As and when required



Commentary

The Public Service Commission acknowledges that different sectors are working to different timeframes and that some organisations are already involved in the change process and may have embarked on their own communications strategies. Nevertheless, the Commission wishes to distinguish between communication and consultation in the context of safeguarding the interests of staff.

The Commission attaches a great deal of importance to the need for employers to have due regard to statutory obligations^[1], or the application of good practice flowing from those statutory obligations, so that employees, and their staff representatives, are informed, and consulted, in a timely way. That being the case, the Commission calls on the Steering Group to ensure that any proposed actions should be subject to existing industrial relations arrangements, before formal communications are conveyed to staff. Where no appropriate industrial relations machinery exists, organisations should proceed, urgently, to establish suitable mechanisms.

The Commission regards the principal aim of the communications strategy to be *“to guarantee that timely, consistent and relevant information reaches all staff, in all of the organisations affected, and in such a way as to ensure that relevant queries are dealt with efficiently and effectively.”*

SID McDOWELL
CHAIRMAN
Public Service Commission

15 May 2006

^[1] The Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005

PSC FIRST GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Introduction

The Public Service Commission’s first guiding principle and associated recommendations, under its remit *“to make recommendations to government on the guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of government decisions on the Review of Public Administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”*, deal with the absolute requirement for an effective communications strategy.

Context

The Public Service Commission welcomes the establishment of the Steering Group which will oversee the implementation phase of the Review of Public Administration. The Commission understands that the Steering Group will focus its attention on those significant, cross-cutting, themes which are central to delivering an extensive change programme. The indications are that more than 100,000 people, in central and local government and a host of other public sector organisations, will be affected by the changes announced by the Secretary of State in November 2005 and March 2006.

Guiding Principle

Government, and the Steering Group, should be guided by the principle that the support and involvement of staff, and their staff representatives, is required to give positive effect to change. The Commission considers that such cooperation will be readily forthcoming provided that people are treated with dignity and respect. Regular communication, particularly in relation to the personal and specific effects of change, will provide a large degree of comfort and reassurance to each individual person who is proud to serve in the public sector.

Recommendations

The Public Service Commission recommends that the Steering Group ensures that arrangements are put in place, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that all staff are informed, in a timely way, about how change is to be implemented and what arrangements are planned to safeguard the interests of staff and secure their cooperation during, and after, the period of change. Such arrangements should be subject to industrial relations procedures to ensure staff representatives are properly involved in the processes.

The Commission further recommends that each organisation provides its staff with an identified contact point (or contact points) to which RPA specific queries might be directed, or from which staff might seek RPA specific information.

In relation to formal communications, the Public Service Commission recommends that electronic means of communication, including e-mails and websites, should be supplemented by the prudent use of regular newsletters, and direct contact through seminars, workshops, conferences and staff meetings.

Summary of lessons learned & key points for consideration from previous change programmes.

The main lessons learned related to:

- The need for the boundaries of the change process to be clear from the outset since this has important implications for communication;
- The particular importance of face-to-face communication during a time of major change and the need to complement this with a range of other methods of communication;
- The need to address the 'people issues' and distil communications down into 'What does this mean for me?'
- The need for appropriate infrastructure to be in place to support e-communication;
- The potential risk that major change, and job insecurity in particular, can have on staff feeling confident to voice concerns;
- The level of change which it is feasible for an organisation and its staff to manage simultaneously;
- The potential risk to staff well-being if they are trying to sustain significantly enhanced workloads during a period of transition;
- The importance of clarifying job roles across the organisation and promoting awareness of these in order to facilitate the development of new teams;
- The need for recruitment and selection processes to be, and to be seen to be, transparent, consistent and fair;
- The importance of examining the merits of different policies and practices in a collegiate manner before determining which would be the most appropriate to adopt within any new organisation;
- Being aware that many staff will not have experienced a change on this scale before and recognising the potential need for emotional as well as practical support;
- The Public Service Commission and its need to consider what profile would be appropriate to its role.

The key points for consideration included suggestions on:

- Ensuring that the boundaries of the change process are known;
- Increasing the extent of face-to-face communication;
- Addressing the key issue of 'What does this mean for me?' as far as possible;
- Aligning IT systems in advance of the change process;
- Creating guidelines for the cascading of information;
- Enhancing the change management skills of those leading the change process;
- Suspending, if possible, initiatives that would otherwise make the change process unduly complicated;
- Reviewing the resource requirements of a major change process;
- Clarifying job roles to reduce the risk of 'role drift';
- Involving staff in a more collaborative and inclusive manner regarding the decisions about the choice of new policies and practices; and,
- What type of profile would be most appropriate for the PSC.

This information is from the PSC website: www.pscni.gov.uk

Public Service Commission - context

The Public Service Commission (PSC) was established to recommend to Government “guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations”. All those organisations affected by the Reform are required to comply with the PSC recommendations. The PSC has recommended that there must be an effective communication strategy implemented to inform all staff about what is happening (Appendix 4).

This strategy is to comply with the PSC Guiding Principle to assist with informing local government and transferring functions employees of changes affecting them during the implementation of the Reform of Local Government and to secure the commitment of all staff, senior management and trade unions to enable the change to be delivered effectively.

The communications strategy has been cross referenced with the learning from the *“Review of the Effectiveness of Communication in Relation to the Implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA); The Views, Attitudes and Experiences of Health and Social Care Staff Affected by the RPA; and Other Associated Issues”*. This report was prepared by Social Market Research & Associates for the Public Service Commission and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Northern Ireland).

REPORT FROM EVALUATION SUB-GROUP

The paper outlines the draft approach to evaluating the Communication Strategy and Action Plan. It contains the following detail:

1. **Objectives of the Communications Strategy**
2. **Research to Date**
3. **Good Practice examples**
4. **Key Stakeholders involved in Evaluation**

ANNEX 1 Good Practice Case Studies

ANNEX 2 Action Plan and Evaluation Methods

EVALUATION SUB-GROUP

The Evaluation sub-group aim is to recommend on mechanisms to ensure that the right messages are reaching the right people within councils, transferring departments, Trade Unions and Elected Members. This paper should be utilised by councils to ensure that their communications methods and tools are fit for purpose and aligned with the overall Departmental Communications Strategy and Action Plan.

1. Objectives of the Communications Strategy

The objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

- Ensure that staff and stakeholders understand the broad context of Local Government Reform; are kept informed of developments within local government, within the DOE, and where appropriate, within other government departments;
- Support the reform programme through timely, interactive internal and external communication that creates an understanding of and commitment to the reform programme;
- Provide key information to stakeholders relating to the future provision of local government services;
- Provide key information for staff relating directly to their future employment arrangements. Overarching messages delivered to all staff, supplemented by relevant, targeted messages to specific groups of staff;
- Ensure staff and stakeholders have the opportunity to have their views heard; and

- Ensure consistency in all communications from local government and departments transferring functions.

2. Research to Date

The Local Government Staff Commission undertook research with focus groups in 7 councils in November 2012 and intends to repeat this process by year end. This research centred on staff attitudes to the reform process along with gauging development needs and current levels of communication about the process. The research report was issued in June to all stakeholders and currently Commission officers are undertaking similar research within a cluster. These research findings and recommendations have been integrated with the Communications Strategy and will be revisited to further gauge effectiveness at appropriate intervals.

3. Good Practice Examples

The sub group believe that the most effective evaluation and learning points, as reflected in the Strategy, can be derived from current good practice examples. Appendix 1 details a number of current good practice examples at local level which may assist organisations when developing their own communication mechanisms.

4. Key Stakeholders Involved in Evaluation

Individual stakeholders should evaluate communications, in line with the Strategy, in their own particular areas to ensure communications are effective. These stakeholders include:

- DOE
- Communications Working Group
- Councils, members and departments with transferring functions (STCs)
- NILGA
- Task & Finish Working Group Chairs
- LGSC
- Community & Voluntary Sector
- Ratepayers/local business

See Appendix 2 for detailed tasks and recommended evaluation methods.

5. Ensuring Strategy is Updated and Relevant

The Communications Working Group and secretariat will ensure that the reform timetable and action plans are regularly updated and issued to all relevant stakeholders.

The Communications sub-group will meet on a regular basis and update/amend the 'good practice' case studies and ensure that the action sheet and evaluation methods are updated when necessary.

Good Practice Case Studies

The following details a number of good practice case studies in communication

Newry and Mourne and Down are appointing “Communications Ambassadors”

Fermanagh and Omagh have issued a number of joint press releases in regard to the Reform programme and how it will affect their area.

A number of STCs are developing websites

Question cards have been developed for staff and some Change Managers have developed a general Q & A section on their intranet for staff use.

Social media is being explored by a number of councils

ACTION SHEET & EVALUATION METHODS (Refer to Appendix 1 Communications Strategy & Action Plan)

Group	Task	Evaluation method	Training Requirements
DOE	<p>To undertake proactive media activity publicising the work and position of the Minister, Department, Executive and the Regional Transition Committee in relation to local government reform. DOE will keep councils and other departments with transferring functions informed on such activity;</p> <p>To provide reactive communications to media queries received, and where appropriate, respond to coverage. Where appropriate, the department will work with or keep relevant councils / departments with transferring functions informed on such queries / responses;</p> <p>To act as the link between the DOE Local Government Reform Programme Office and the Communications Working Group;</p> <p>To provide stakeholders with regional information on programme activity, developments and decisions;</p> <p>To keep local government and departments with transferring functions informed should a timetable milestone slip;</p> <p>Evaluate DOE communication activity with key stakeholders</p> <p>To provide a secretariat function to the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake market research through omnibus survey to gauge public awareness / attitude to local government reform. • Undertake survey(s) on 'Reform Inform' with internal and external stakeholders. • Seek feedback from the Communications Working Group (CWG) and the CWG sub-group on effectiveness of the process. • Monitor media coverage. • Seek Chief Executive Feedback on usefulness of power point presentations. 	

	Communications Working Group		
Communications Working Group	<p>To identify communication needs across central and local government, and other stakeholders impacted upon by reform;</p> <p>To create, implement and evaluate an effective plan to communicate with these audiences, identifying appropriate methodologies;</p> <p>To exchange information and ideas to help develop communication strategies;</p> <p>To review the communications action plan on a quarterly basis;</p> <p>To act as a warning flag for communication issues and ensure that any problems within the communication workstream, which have the potential of having a significant impact on the programme as a whole, are escalated to the Regional Transition Operational Board in good time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Group will continue to meet and ensure that feedback from all stakeholders is considered. • The Communications Strategy and Action Plan will be updated as required. 	
Councils/STCs	<p>To develop and implement a local / departmental communication strategy in line with guidance from the Communications Working Group;</p> <p>Within the local communications strategy, identify other areas of the organisation that have a role to play in successful communications and determine any necessary training and development needs in that respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Communications is a standing item at STCs/local JCCs/SMT meetings • Councils may undertake staff surveys on a cluster or council level • Ensure there are communication links 	

	<p>To identify local voluntary, community and business sector stakeholders, and address their communication needs within the local communication strategy;</p> <p>To evaluate their communications activity with key stakeholders</p> <p>To ensure that messages are consistent with the regional DOE messages;</p> <p>To copy DOE into communications issued to staff on local government reform;</p> <p>To share with, and when appropriate work with DOE, on any proactive and reactive media activity specific to the Council / department with transferring function.</p>	<p>with Change Mangers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils to continue to monitor press/media coverage on reform. 	
<p>NILGA</p>	<p>To facilitate elected member and wider council involvement in the Local Government Reform Programme</p> <p>To provide elected members, council chief executives and council communication heads with regular updates through the local government reform bulletin.</p> <p>To provide elected members with focused briefing before and after each of the Regional Transition Committee (RTC) meetings</p> <p>To co-ordinate and manage elected member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Ensure that feedback is considered from elected members and other stakeholders. • Regular meetings with stakeholders to ensure that the correct messages and tools are being utilised. 	

	<p>engagement and development events to support the sector in relation to local government reform.</p> <p>To identify the policy positions on crucial issues such as staffing and the transfer of functions and working with VTCs, STCs and individual councils to identify regional positions for presentation to the RTC.</p> <p>To regularly evaluate communications activity and effectiveness with elected members and councils.</p>		
Task & Finish Working groups	<p>To provide bi-monthly communication updates on the progress and work of the group to the DOE Programme Office for publication on the DOE website.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure regular updates on DOE website and minutes available once they are agreed 	
LGSC	<p>To lead on communications of HR and staff related updates / decisions for local government;</p> <p>To keep the DOE Local Government Reform Programme Office and Chair of the Communications Working Group briefed well in advance of significant announcements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure regular updates to staff and stakeholders 	

COMMUNICATION ACTION PLAN

Communications Working Group – April 2014

The action plan is a fluid document, which will be reviewed and reissued by the Communications Working Group on a quarterly basis.

To facilitate the communication process and ensure that there is up to date information available, the following Local Government Reform information channels have been established. These are 'official' channels to communicate the latest, accurate information and can be used by Councils and Departments to inform their own internal communication activity.

1. DOE 'Reform Inform' news sheet

Currently produced around once a month. In January 2013 it was developed to include VTC and working group information. It now frequently includes a DOE Planning section and is extended to other departments with transferring functions.

2. DOE website

In addition to the general reform programme information being kept up to date, Working Groups Chairs now provide bi-monthly updates on the work and progress of their Groups, as well as meeting notes for publication on the website.

3. News releases

DOE will lead on 'regional' news releases to publicise the work of the Minister, his Department, the Executive and the RTC in relation to local government reform. As Task & Finish Working Groups aren't 'decision makers', news releases relating to their areas of work will be filtered up through the RTC and issued by DOE.

4. Power point presentation

Quarterly presentation on the programme's key messages produced by DOE (to aid Chief Executives in their briefing process)

5. Local government engagement events

When required, events are held for senior local government officials to facilitate engagement beyond RTOB membership.

COMMUNICATION ACTION PLAN			
Stakeholder	Communication method(s)	Timing	Ownership
NI Executive	Executive papers / legislation	As required	Minister
Env Committee	Presentations / papers	As required	Minister & officials
Council Chief Executives	RTOB meetings & papers RTC papers Local Government engagement events VTC/STC meetings Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates Local government reform PowerPoint presentation LGRJF bulletin	Bi-monthly Bi-monthly Quarterly As required Monthly Bi-monthly Quarterly As required	DOE DOE DOE Councils DOE Working Group Chairs DOE LG Staff Commission
Departmental leads (of those transferring functions)	RTOB meetings & papers RTC papers Engagement events / briefings Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates Local government reform PowerPoint presentation LGRJF bulletin	Bi-monthly Bi-monthly As required At least monthly Bi-monthly Quarterly As required	DOE DOE DOE DOE Working Group Chairs DOE LG Staff Commission
Council and Transferring Depts communication managers	Briefings with Chief Executives / Departmental leads Sub group membership of Comms Working Group Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates	As required Quarterly updates / meetings Monthly Bi-monthly	Council Chief Executives / departmental leads Communication Working Group DOE Working Group Chairs

COMMUNICATION ACTION PLAN			
Stakeholder	Communication method(s)	Timing	Ownership
Local government staff	Internal communication methods detailed in local communication strategy, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chief Executive briefings - team meetings - seminars - staff brief - intranet - Council internet 	As required	Council Chief Executives
Staff from Departments with transferring functions & local joint consultative forums	Internal communication methods detailed in local communication strategy, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior Management briefings - team meetings - seminars - staff brief - intranet 	As required	Departmental lead
Public	DOE website NI Direct website - web chats / videos NI Executive & NI Direct social media channels Council websites Central government websites Council social media channels Advertising / direct mail campaigns / posters Road shows / community information days Media - news releases, platform pieces	Bi-monthly updates & as required As required As required As required As required Daily monitoring As required As required As required	DOE DOE / Departmental lead DOE / Departmental lead Councils Departmental leads Council Chief Executive DOE / Councils / Depts DOE / Councils / Depts DOE / Councils / Depts

COMMUNICATION ACTION PLAN			
Stakeholder	Communication method(s)	Timing	Ownership
Media	Media briefings News releases Minister interviews	As required As required As required	DOE / Councils / Depts DOE / Councils / Depts DOE / Councils / Depts
Elected representatives	STC (or equivalent) meetings RTC meetings Council meetings – reform updates Political Reference Group meetings Chief Executive updates Reform Inform news sheet Engagement events Information bulletins / packs Other NILGA activity TBC Familiarisation trips within council clusters	As required Bi-monthly Monthly As required As required Monthly As required TBC TBC As required	Councils DOE Minister Council Chief Executives DOE Council Chief Executives Council Chief Executives & NILGA to arrange distribution NILGA NILGA NILGA Council Chief Executives
NILGA	RTC meetings and papers RTOB meetings and papers Working group meetings and papers Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates	Bi-monthly Bi-monthly As required Monthly Bi-monthly	DOE Minister DOE Working group Chairs DOE Working Group Chairs
LG Staff Commission & Local Joint Consultative Forums	Membership in Working Groups & LGRJF Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates	As required At least monthly Bi-monthly	Working Group Chairs DOE Working Group Chairs
SOLACE	RTOB meetings	Bi-monthly	DOE

COMMUNICATION ACTION PLAN			
Stakeholder	Communication method(s)	Timing	Ownership
	Membership on Communications Working Group Reform Inform news sheet DOE website – working group updates	Bi-monthly Monthly Bi-monthly	Working Group Chair DOE Working Group Chairs
Business / community & voluntary sectors and wider Trade Union movement	Reform Inform news sheet Local information / updates Briefings / speaking opportunities News releases / articles	Monthly As required As opportunities arise As required	DOE / Councils Councils / /STCs DOE / DOE Minister DOE / Councils
Trade Unions (internal staff)	LGRJF meetings Communications Working Group Reform Inform news sheet	As required Monthly Monthly	LGSC CWG Chair TU Rep

Checklist

- Legacy and new councils to review communication strategy / plans and agree roles and responsibilities

Local Government Reform key milestones & messages

Date	Activity	What this means	Main Communication Issues	Methods
September 2013 onwards	Local Government Bill introduced into Assembly	This legislation will introduce new governance arrangements, a new ethical standards regime, community planning powers, a general power of competence, and an updated service delivery and performance improvement regime for the new councils. It will also make transitional provisions to provide for the transfer of staff, assets and liabilities etc from the current 26 councils to the new councils, and from departments transferring functions to the new councils.	<p>May be adapted to suit your council/cluster circumstances</p> <p>Educate internal & external stakeholders on the new roles & responsibilities local government will have, changes and benefits etc</p> <p>Update key stakeholders if milestone should slip</p>	<p>Press releases & media briefings where appropriate(DOE)</p> <p>Reform inform newsletter (DOE)</p> <p>DOE website updated (DOE)</p> <p>Councils / Depts local communication strategy</p> <p>Update emails to Chief Executives / key stakeholders</p>
Feb / March 2014	New council Chief Executives appointed	New voice / perspective for comment in media and leading communications	<p>Opportunity to drive forward positive messages, enhance profile & presence of the new councils</p> <p>Internal communication challenges</p>	<p>Press releases and media briefings (councils)</p> <p>Internal staff communications</p>
2014	Incoming councils during the shadow period are elected	Incoming councils during the shadow period will appoint senior staff, strike rates and approve business and financial plans for the new councils taking on full powers and responsibilities in April 2015.	<p>Regional messages here regarding elections, etc.</p> <p>Internally important that people are aware this is happening and their role in elections and appointment</p>	<p>Media briefings (DOE)</p> <p>Press release (DOE)</p> <p>Reform Inform</p> <p>DOE website updated (DOE)</p>

Date	Activity	What this means	Main Communication Issues	Methods
		The Secretary of State has agreed that elections will take place in 2014 but the actual date is to be confirmed.	processes. Educating the public on the interim dual system	Councils / Depts local communication strategy Update emails to Chief Executives / key stakeholders mail drop to all NI households with reform information Launch of 'Local Government Reform' section on NI Direct Reform video for public – hosted on nidirect & available to councils NI Direct, NI Executive & council social media sites DOE poster for council & departmental use
April 2015	New councils assume full responsibilities and functions are transferred		Educating stakeholders on the new councils' boundaries, roles and responsibilities, changes, benefits etc	Media briefings (DOE) Press release (DOE) Reform Inform DOE website updated (DOE) Councils / Depts local communication strategy Update emails to Chief

Date	Activity	What this means	Main Communication Issues	Methods
				Executives / key stakeholders
April 2015 and beyond	Communication becomes the responsibility of the 11 new councils and the need for / remit of the CWG will be reviewed.			