Heads of Communications Survey 2020/21

September - November 2021

Contents

Foreword

Welcome to the results of the LGA's 2021 Heads of Communications Survey.

This is the first time that research and reporting for this annual survey have been conducted during the response to COVID-19 in the UK.

We are very grateful to those who took the time to participate. Communications leaders are always busy but there have been exceptional pressures this year and demands on teams are currently very high.

Unfortunately, we believe that these pressures have affected the response rate to this year's survey, which was lower than in previous years. Those who did take part have submitted comprehensive answers, which provide an invaluable snapshot of the state of our profession and the priorities and challenges that heads of communications are facing.

To reflect the changes that we have all experienced during the pandemic, we introduced new questions this year to ascertain the impact the COVID-19 response has had on local government communications.

During the height of each lockdown, teams, quite rightly, deployed an emergency communications response and set aside a lot of 'business as usual' work. As lockdown measures have eased, communications teams have found they are busier than ever juggling the continued COVID-19 response, added winter pressures and campaigns to boost local economies.

Changes have taken place over the past 20 months affecting the way most teams work, as well as the corporate and communications priorities of councils. This has resulted in a need to re-create strategies, campaigns and narratives. It may also explain why 49 per cent of responding councils said they do not have a corporate plan and 61 per cent do not have an annual campaign plan currently.

As many of us have observed in our own organisations, the pandemic has led to an increased focus on internal communications. 83 per cent of those who responded said that it was now a bigger priority for them since the 2019-2020 survey and this has also led to an increase in the size of communications teams.

After viewing examples of excellent communications collaborations between local authorities, government, NHS, fire, police and other organisations we were not surprised to learn that 94 per cent of respondents said that COVID-19 has led to an increase in partnership work. This is a very positive statistic and the innovation and creativity demonstrated by councils and their partners has been inspiring.

Less positive were the findings regarding diversity at the senior level of our profession. It is important that communications teams reflect the communities they serve. The LGA will be working closely with partners such as LGcomms to make equality, diversity and inclusion a priority over the next year.

With regard to other areas of focus, the survey found that climate change is the biggest communications priority for the coming year. This is the first time climate change has topped the list; post-pandemic recovery came a close second.

The satisfaction rate with LGA support came in at 91 per cent and we are keen to maintain this by listening to the needs of councils and colleagues. It is clear from the survey that online events continue to be the support and learning platform of choice for those who completed this survey.

We are pleased to have been able to adapt to circumstances and deliver a virtual programme of events and workshops to support communications teams during the pandemic. This will continue to be our approach over the next year.

Our online offer will reflect the development needs identified by those who completed the survey; evaluation, behaviour change, and campaign planning were the three top priorities.

For the first time in this survey, we asked councils the extent to which online abuse of councillors and officers was a problem. 47 per cent of respondents said it was an issue, and the LGA will be looking to support councils in tackling this through our civility in public life campaign.

Finally, a key area of work in 2022 will be the development of a crisis communications cohort. We know that communications support when responding to emergencies can be very important and it was encouraging to see that 65 per cent of survey respondents said they would be willing to join this new cohort.

As 2021 draws to a close, we would like to thank everyone for their work and commitment. This has been an extraordinary time, but it has clearly demonstrated the power of communications to the vital work of local government.

Matt Nicholls
Head of Communications Improvement
Local Government Association

Summary

Background

Between September and November 2021, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey of heads of communications in councils and fire and rescue services in England and Wales, for whom contact details were available.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the current state of local government communications at the local authority level and to enable the LGA to assess the sector on issues such as the size and structure of communications teams, budgets and future strategies. A copy of the survey questions can be seen in Annex B.

The survey asked about a range of topics including, reporting structures, partnership work, pandemic response and internal communications. It also explored issues including online abuse and intimidation of members and officers. Communications priorities, training needs and the level of awareness that heads of communications had about the support available from the LGA were also covered. The survey achieved a response rate of 22 per cent.

Key findings

- More than nine out of 10 (89 per cent) heads of communications were from a white English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British ethnic background and just over three-fifths (63 per cent) were aged between 35 and 49 years.

- On average, 10.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were working in corporate communications teams in respondent authorities.

- The type of council with the highest average number of communications staff was shire counties, at 21.3 FTE staff. Shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff at 4.1 FTE staff.

- Three-fifths of respondents (60 per cent) had staff performing core communications functions in other parts of their council, with the average number of staff involved in this being 5.4 FTE.

- The type of council with the highest average number of staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the authority was shire counties, at 19.8 FTE staff. Again, shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff, at 2.4 FTE staff.

- Almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondent heads of communications reported to a service head or director and just under a quarter (24 per cent) reported to the chief executive.

- Just over two-fifths (43 per cent) of heads of communications in respondent councils sit on their council's corporate/senior management team or equivalent.

- More than half of respondents (54 per cent) said their non-staffing budgets had remained roughly the same between the current financial year (April 2021 to March 2022) and previous financial year.

- The skills distributions of most communications teams in respondent authorities were characterised by multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms (61 per cent).

- More than four-fifths (83 per cent) thought that their council's response to COVID-19 has increased the priority given to internal communications.

- Just less than half (47 per cent) of respondents agreed that 'online abuse and intimidation of councillors and officers in (their) local authority is a problem'.

- The top three communications priorities for respondents' authorities over the next 12 months were: the environment and climate change (45 per cent); post-pandemic economic recovery (42 per cent); and economic development/regeneration (35 per cent).

- Respondents and their teams work with partner organisations most frequently through regular meetings (96 per cent), joint campaigns (83 per cent) and shared resources (51 per cent).

- 58 per cent of respondents had used communication support offers provided by the LGA in the last 12 months, and over nine out of 10 respondents were satisfied with the LGA communication support provided.

- The top three types of training and professional development that respondents thought would be useful were: evaluation and insight (63 per cent); behaviour change (59 per cent); and campaign planning (43 per cent).

Methodology

In September 2021 the LGA sent an online survey invitation via email to heads of communications, or their equivalent, in councils and fire authorities across England and Wales, for whom it had contact details.

The survey was sent to 383 heads of communications, or their equivalents, in councils and fire and rescue services in England and Wales and 83 provided a response, giving a response rate of 22 per cent.

This level of response rate means that these results should not be taken to be more widely representative of the views of all councils. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

Some respondents did not answer all questions in the survey, so within this report findings are based on different numbers of responses. This number (the base) is shown below all tables.

Where the response base is less than 50, figures can be skewed due to the small sample size and care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables have been rounded to one decimal place – percentages may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Survey Findings

The survey asked respondents about their ethnic background and age group. Most respondents (89 per cent) were from an English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British ethnic background. Approximately two-thirds (63 per cent) of respondents were 35 – 49 years old whilst approximately three out of 10 (29 per cent) were 50 – 64 years old. A full breakdown of these findings is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Ethnic background of respondents

	Per cent
English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	89
Any other White background	8
Irish	3
Any other Asian background	1
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0
Roma	0
White and Black Caribbean	0
White and Black African	0
White and Asian	0
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
Caribbean	0
African	0
Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background	0
Arab	0
Any other ethnic group	0
Prefer not to say	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Table 2: Age group of respondents

	Per cent
Under 25 years	0
25-34 years	6
35-49 years	63
50-64 years	29
65 years or over	0
Prefer not to say	1

Base: 79 (~95 per cent of all respondents)

Respondents were asked how many full-time equivalents (FTE) staff were working in their council's corporate communications team performing core functions. Core functions were defined as:

- media relations
- crisis communications
- campaigns/marketing
- reputation management
- internal communications
- print/design
- web/digital/social media communications

The overall average (mean) number of staff was 10.7 FTE, ranging from a minimum of one to a maximum of 38. It should be noted that not all teams deliver all the core functions listed above, and that core functions may not encompass the same activities in all councils.

Table 3: Number of FTE core communications staff

	Number
Minimum	1
Maximum	38
Mean	10.7

Base: 83 (all respondents)

The type of council with the highest average number of communications staff was shire counties, at 21.3. Shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff at 4.1.

Table 4: Number of FTE core communications staff by authority type

	Average	Min	Max	Base
Shire county	21.3	13	29	9
Shire district	4.1	1	7	32
London borough	14.8	10	22	6
Metropolitan district	15.4	10	21	8
Unitary authority	14.4	4.5	38	22
Fire authority	5.6	3	9.5	6
Total	**10.7**	**1**	**38**	**83**

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just under two-thirds of respondents (60 per cent) reported that there were staff in other parts of their council performing core communications functions. On average the number of these staff was 5.4 FTE, with a minimum of 0[1] and a maximum of 60. Respondents were asked to specify which other teams these staff are located in using an open text box. This included: web team and digital services, marketing, economic development, print and design, service improvement, art venues, housing, sports development, HR, environmental services, tourism and business, corporate relations, leisure services, social care, schools, waste and recycling.

Table 5: Number of FTE staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the authority

	Number
Minimum	0
Maximum	60
Mean	5.4

Base: 50 (~60 per cent of all respondents)

The type of council with the highest average number of staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the authority was shire counties, at 19.8. Again, shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff, at 2.4. However, it is worth noting that only one fire authority confirmed that they had staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the authority, and they could not provide data on this specific figure.

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[1] Note: it is possible that respondents only had part-time or temporary FTE staff working in core communications roles in other parts of the authority, hence the minimum reported number is 0.

Table 6: Number of FTE staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the authority by authority type

	Average	Min	Max	Base
Shire county	19.8	4	60	4
Shire district	2.4	0	8	20
London borough	7.7	3	13	3
Metropolitan district	6	2	20	7
Unitary authority	4.6	0	15	15
Fire authority	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Total	**5.4**	**0**	**60**	**50**

Base: 50 (~60 per cent of all respondents)

Just over two-fifths of respondents (43 per cent) said that the responsibility for their organisation's website and website staff sit in communications. Approximately one-fifth of respondents said that responsibility was with customer services and one-fifth with IT. Respondents who answered 'Other' were asked to specify where responsibility sat using an open text box. This included: business transformation team, web and digital services, and customer intelligence.

Table 7: Area in which responsibility for the organisation's website and website staff sit

	Per cent
Communications	43
Customer services	21
IT	21
Other	16

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just under two-fifths of respondents (39 per cent) said that there had been no changes to communications staff numbers since April 2020. Approximately one-fifth (20 per cent) said that permanent communications staff had been affected and approximately two-fifths (40 per cent) said that temporary/fixed-term communications staff had been affected.

Table 8: Authorities reporting changes to the number of staff performing core communications functions since April 2020

	Per cent
There have not been any changes to communications staff numbers	39
Temporary/fixed-term communications staff	40
Permanent communications staff	20

Base: 83 (all respondents)

In those organisations which reported changes in staff numbers, the number of temporary/fixed-term communications staff went up by approximately two FTEs on average, whilst the number of permanent communications staff went up by approximately one-half FTEs.

Table 9: Changes to numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff performing core communications functions since April 2020

	Mean	Min	Max
Temporary/fixed-term communications staff	1.9	-5	14
Permanent communications staff	0.5	-2	3

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just over two-thirds of respondents (69 per cent) expect no change or a decrease to the number of staff performing core communications functions in the next financial year. Approximately one-fifth of respondents (22 per cent) expect the number of staff performing core communications functions to increase.

Table 10: Whether the respondent expects the number of staff performing core communications functions to increase in the next financial year (April 2022 to March 2023)

	Per cent
No	69
Yes	22
Don't know	10

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of respondents reported to a service head or director, approximately one-quarter (24 per cent) reported to the chief executive or equivalent and 2 per cent had another officer as their line manager. Table 11 shows these findings, and the other line managers reported to are in Annex A.

Table 11: Heads of Communications' line managers

	Per cent
Chief executive (or equivalent)	24
Service head / director	74
Other	2

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just over two-fifths (43 per cent) of heads of communications sit on their council's corporate/senior management team or equivalent. These findings are shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Heads of Communications sitting on councils' corporate/senior management team or equivalent.

	Per cent
Yes	43
No	57

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Over half of respondents (54 per cent) reported that their authority's non-staffing communications budget had stayed the same in the current financial year (April 2021 to March 2022) when compared to the previous financial year (April 2020 to March 2021). Approximately one in 10 respondents (11 per cent) reported that their authority's non-staffing communications budget decreased. Approximately one-third of respondents (32 per cent) reported that their budget had increased – most of these (22 per cent) reported the increase was used to cover response to COVID-19.

Table 13: Changes to non-staffing communications budget in the current financial year (April 2021 to March 2022)

	Per cent
Increased from previous financial year to cover response to COVID-19	22
Increased from previous financial year to cover other planned activity	4
Increased to cover both COVID-19 response and other activity	6
No change – the budget stayed more-or-less the same	54
Decreased from previous financial year	11
Don't know	4

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Three-quarters (75 per cent) reported that their organisation had a communications strategy that was aligned to the corporate priorities.

Table 14: Communications strategy aligned to corporate priorities

	Per cent
Yes	75
No	25
Don't know	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Almost half (46 per cent) reported that their organisation had a corporate narrative.

Table 15: Whether the organisation has a corporate narrative

	Per cent
Yes	46
No	49
Don't know	5

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just over three-fifths of respondents (61 per cent) described their communications teams as being composed principally of multi-skilled communicators. Approximately one-third (34 per cent) said they were a mixture of multi-skilled communicators and retained subject specialists. Approximately 5 per cent described their team as being composed solely of retained subject matter experts and specialists.

Table 16: Skills distribution of respondents' communications teams

	Per cent
Retained specialists/subject matter experts working on one discipline or service area	5
Mixture of multi-skilled and retained specialists	34
Multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms	61
Other	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Figure 1. Skills distribution of respondents' communications teams

Multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms
Mixture of multi-skilled and retained specialists
Retained specialists/subject matter experts working on one discipline or service area

Just over four-fifths of respondents (83 per cent) thought that their council's response to COVID-19 had increased the priority given to internal communications.

Table 17: Whether the respondent's council's response to COVID-19 has increased the priority given to internal communications

	Per cent
Yes	83
No	16
Don't know	1

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just under half of respondents (48 per cent) agreed that 'online abuse and intimidation of councillors and officers in [their] local authority is a problem'.

Table 18: Agreement with the statement 'online abuse and intimidation of councillors and officers in my local authority is a problem'

	Per cent
Agree (total)	**48**
Somewhat agree	22
Agree	21
Strongly agree	5
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	15
Somewhat disagree	19
Don't know	4

Base: 83 (all respondents)

The top three communications priorities for respondent's authorities over the next 12 months were the environment and climate change (45 per cent), post-pandemic economic recovery (42 per cent) and economic development/regeneration (35 per cent). The priorities are shown in Table 19 below. 5 respondents specified other priorities for their authorities. These included:

- Developing a communications strategy aligned to new business plan priorities
- Local government reorganisation
- Local government review of communications, both external and internal
- Prevention campaigns
- Levelling up

Table 19: Top communications priorities for respondents' authorities over the next 12 months

	Per cent
Environment and climate change	45
Post-pandemic economic recovery	42
Economic development/regeneration	35
Internal communications and employee engagement	33
Resident engagement	28
Internal change/transformation programmes	27
Reputation	19
Response to COVID-19 (public health and safety communication)	16
Behaviour change	12
Place branding	12
Budget communications	7
Crisis communication (other than response to COVID-19)	5
Marketing income-generating services, for example leisure or tourism	5
Social care campaigns	2
Achieving income targets	2
Public affairs/influencing	2
Partnership working	2
Tackling online abuse and intimidation	0
None	0
Other	6

Base: 83 (all respondents). Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options.

Almost all respondents (94 per cent) agreed that COVID-19 led them to work more closely with their communication counterparts in partner organisations, such as the police, fire and rescue authorities and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Only 6 per cent reported no change.

Table 20: Whether COVID-19 has led respondents to work closely with their communication counterparts in other councils or partner organisations

	Per cent
Yes	94
No	0
No change	6
Don't know	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Almost all respondents worked with partner organisations through regular meetings (96 per cent). Following that, the top ways in which communications teams worked with partner organisations was through joint campaigns (83 per cent), shared resources (51 per cent) and mutual aid during crisis (35 per cent). Less common ways of working together include shared staff (8 per cent) and joint budgets (5 per cent). Four respondents specified other ways of working with partner organisations, which included:

- WhatsApp sharing of information and ideas
- Peer support
- Joint events
- Partnerships e.g., jointly running FAQ sessions for residents

Table 21: Ways that communications teams work with partner organisations

	Per cent
Regular meetings	96
Joint campaigns	83
Shared resources	51
Mutual aid during crisis	35
Shared staff	8
Joint budgets	5
Other	5

Base: 83 (all respondents). Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options.

Over half (57 per cent) of respondents anticipate their relationship with partner organisations to stay the same over the next 12 months. Approximately one-third expect to be working more closely with partner organisations (34 per cent).

Table 22: What respondents expect to happen to their relationships with partner organisations over the coming twelve months

	Per cent
Stay the same	57
Work more closely together	34
Work more separately	7
Don't know	1
Other	1

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just over two-fifths (43 per cent) reported that their organisation worked with partners to develop a new narrative to encompass their area's recovery from COVID-19.

Table 23: Whether the organisation has worked with partners to develop a new narrative to encompass their area's recovery from COVID-19

	Per cent
Yes	43
No	57
Don't know	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Just under two-fifths (39 per cent) reported that their organisation had an annual campaign plan that was signed off by senior leadership.

Table 24: Whether the organisation has an annual campaign plan signed off by senior leadership

	Per cent
Yes	39
No	61
Don't know	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Those who reported having an annual campaign plan were asked to specify some of their most recent or future campaign themes. The most common responses to this question are shown in the word cloud below, and include 'climate', 'covid',

'recovery', 'recruitment', 'change', 'regeneration', 'economy', 'health', 'recycling', 'waste', 'safety' and 'community'.

Figure 2. Recent or future campaign themes

Just over one-fifth (23 per cent) of the respondent's team's time was devoted to COVID-19 response and recovery in comparison to 'business as usual' work. This ranged from 0 per cent to 90 per cent.

Table 25: Proportion of the respondent team's time devoted to COVID-19 response and recovery in comparison to 'business as usual' work

	Per cent
Mean	23
Min	0
Max	90

Base: 82 (~99 per cent of all respondents)

Just over two-fifths of respondents (41 per cent) had used communication support offers provided by the LGA in the last 12 months.

Table 26: Whether communication support offers provided by the LGA had been used in the last 12 months

	Per cent
Yes	41
No	58
Don't know	1

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Approximately nine in 10 people (91 per cent) were satisfied with communication support offers provided by the LGA. Only 9 per cent of people were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 27: Satisfaction of respondents with the LGA communication support offers provided

	Per cent
Satisfied (total)	**91**
Very satisfied	50
Fairly satisfied	41
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9
Fairly dissatisfied	0
Very dissatisfied	0
Don't know	0

Base: 83 (all respondents)

Respondents were asked about the types of communications support they would find most useful over the next 12 months. Seven out of 10 respondents (70 per cent) thought that online workshops, events or seminars would be useful over the next 12 months. Other communications support that respondents thought would be useful includes training or professional development (52 per cent), networking and contact-building (45 per cent) and case studies/online resources (43 per cent). Communications support that respondents thought was the least useful includes crisis communications support (8 per cent) and bespoke support via email/telephone (8 per cent).

The full list of communications support evaluated is shown in Table 28, below.

Table 28: Communications support that respondents would find most useful over the next 12 months

	Per cent
Online workshops, events or seminars	70
Training or professional development	52
Networking and contact-building with other councils	45
Case studies/online resources	43
In-person workshops, events or seminars	28
One-day health check of your council's communications	23
Recruitment support	15
Two or three-day strategic review of your council's communications	12
Bespoke support via email/telephone	8
Crisis communications support	8
Don't know	5
Other	4
None of the above	1

Base: 83 (all respondents). Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options.

Respondents were asked to indicate which areas of training and professional development would be useful for their teams. Just over three-fifths (63 per cent) of respondents said 'evaluation and insight' would be among the most useful areas of training and professional development. Just under three-fifths (59 per cent) said behaviour change, and just over two-fifths (43 per cent) said campaign planning. Table 29, below, lists all the areas of training and professional development that respondents would find most useful for their teams.

Table 29: Training and professional development that respondents would find most useful

	Per cent
Evaluation and insight	63
Behaviour change	59
Campaign planning	43
Digital	41
Strategic skills	40
Stakeholder engagement	39
Video	39
Social media	36
Leadership skills	24
Political awareness	23
Crisis communication	17
Personal impact	16
Technical skills	15
Policy skills	13
Don't know	1
Other	1
None of the above	0

Base: 83 (all respondents). Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options.

Respondents were asked what support they thought they would benefit from in carrying out their role. Approximately half (51 per cent) selected training programmes. Approximately two-fifths (41 per cent) selected mentoring. Approximately one third (31 per cent) selected taking part in an LGA peer review. One respondent selected other, and noted another beneficial support option:

- Mentoring from colleagues following initial health checks

Table 30: Support that respondents would benefit from in their role

	Per cent
Training programmes	51
Mentoring	41
Taking part in an LGA peer review	31
Don't know	12
None	2
Other	1

Base: 83 (all respondents). Please note that percentages will sum to more than 100 as respondents could select multiple answer options.

Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to be a part of the LGA's pool of communications professionals to support councils, for example by helping to carry out peer reviews. Just over two-thirds (68 per cent) would be willing to do this.

Table 31: Whether respondents would be willing to be a part of the LGA's pool of communications professionals to support councils

	Per cent
Yes	68
No	32

Base: 82 (~99 per cent of all respondents)

Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to join the LGA crisis communications cohort and be contacted about their availability to support councils in times of crisis or major incident. Just under two-thirds (65 per cent) would be willing to do this.

Table 32: Whether respondents would be willing to join the LGA crisis communications cohort

	Per cent
Yes	65
No	35

Base: 81 (~98 per cent of all respondents)

Annex A

Other line managers specified by respondents

Table A1: Heads of communications' line managers
Service heads/directors
Assistant Director Assistant Director for Comms, Public Affairs and Engagement Assistant Director for Customer, Comms and Culture Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation Assistant Director for Partnerships Assistant Director for Customer, Engagement and Libraries Assistant Director People Assistant Director Planning and Improvement Chief Officer Digital and Communications Chief Operating Officer Corporate Director Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources Customer Services, Communications and COVID Manager DD Corporate Services Deputy Chief Executive Director Director of Policy/Performance Director of Communities and Wellbeing Director of Community Services and Improvement Director of Corporate Services Director of Customer Transformation Director of Finance and Resourcing Director of Governance Director of HR, OD and Transformation Director of Leisure and Community Director of OD & Policy Director of People and Development Director of Regeneration and Policy & Deputy CEX Director of Strategy and Participation Director of Strategy and Resources Director of Transformation Executive Director Corporate Services Executive Head of Operations and Resources Executive Lead for Strategy, Governance & Law Group Manager Organisational Development Head of Corporate Services Head of Corporate Strategy Head of Governance and Corporate Services Head of HR Head of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive Head of Service Head of Transformation and Communications Joint Reporting Deputy CEO and Assistant Director, Strategy and Performance Operational Director Legal & Democratic Services

Service Director Citizen Focus
Service Director for Business Improvement, HR and Communications
Strategic Director

Annex B

Copy of the survey questions
Heads of Communications Survey 2021

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will help to set a benchmark for communications teams across the country in the wake of the response to COVID-19.

Please answer each question as fully as you can; details provided will help the LGA to work effectively to support and represent authorities.

How to complete the survey
You can navigate through the questions using the buttons at the end of each page. Use the 'previous' button at the bottom of the page if you wish to change your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the survey, you can come back to this page, using the link supplied in the email, and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'next' button at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

Data protection
All responses will be treated confidentially. Information will be aggregated, and no individual or authority will be identified in any publications without your consent. Identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA but will only be held and processed in accordance with our privacy statement.

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

If you are responding on behalf of more than one authority please note this in the 'authority' box below. If you are leading communications for more than one council or fire service, where budgets and teams are separate, please complete separate surveys for each authority.

Name   _____

Authority   _____

Job title   _____

Email address _____

How many full-time equivalent staff are employed in your authority's corporate communications team performing core functions?

Core functions are defined as media relations, crisis communications, campaigns, marketing, reputation management, internal communications, print, design and web/digital/social media.

If you are unsure please enter your best estimate or, if you cannot provide an estimate, please enter 'Don't know'.

_____

Are there other staff performing any of these core communications functions in other parts of your authority (e.g. web or marketing teams)?

    ❍ Yes (specify in which teams or services below)

        _____

    ❍ No
    ❍ Don't know

Approximately, how many full-time equivalent staff are performing these core communications functions in other parts of the authority?

If you are unsure please enter your best estimate or, if you cannot provide an estimate, please enter 'Don't know'.

_____

Where does responsibility for your organisation's website and website staff sit?

    ❍ Communications
    ❍ Customer services
    ❍ IT
    ❍ Other (please specify below)

        _____

If there have been changes in the full-time equivalent number of staff performing core communications functions since April 2020, please indicate which staff were affected.

    ❑ Permanent communications staff
    ❑ Temporary/fixed-term communications staff
    ❑ There have not been any changes to communications staff numbers

Please provide information about changes to numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff performing core communications functions since April 2020.

If you are unsure please enter your best estimate or, if you cannot provide an estimate, please enter 'Don't know'.

	Total FTE at April 2020	Current Total FTE
Temporary/fixed-term communications staff		
Permanent communications staff		

Do you expect that the number of staff performing core communications functions will increase in the next financial year (April 2022 to March 2023)?

❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Don't know

Who is your line manager?

❍ Chief Executive (or equivalent)
❍ Service head/director (please specify below)

_____

❍ Other (please specify below)

_____

Do you sit on your council's corporate/senior management team or equivalent?

❍ Yes
❍ No

Select an option that best describes your communications non-staffing budget in the current financial year (April 2021 to March 2022)

❍ Increased from previous financial year to cover response to COVID-19
❍ Increased from previous financial year to cover other planned activity
❍ Increased to cover both COVID-19 response and other activity
❍ No change – the budget stayed more-or-less the same
❍ Decreased from previous financial year
❍ Don't know

Does your organisation have a communications strategy aligned to your corporate priorities?

❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Don't know

Does your organisation have a corporate narrative?

❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Don't know

Which of the following best describes the skills distribution of your communications team?

❍ Retained specialists/subject matter experts working on one discipline or service area
❍ Mixture of multi-skilled and retained specialists
❍ Multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms
❍ Other (please specify below)

_____

Has your council's response to COVID-19 increased the priority given to internal communications?

❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ Don't know

Select an option that best describes whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: "Online abuse and intimidation of councillors and officers in my local authority is a problem."

❍ Strongly disagree
❍ Disagree
❍ Somewhat disagree
❍ Neither agree nor disagree
❍ Somewhat agree
❍ Agree
❍ Strongly agree
❍ Don't know

What are the top three communications priorities for your organisation over the next 12 months?
Please select three priorities

- ❑ Partnership working
- ❑ Reputation
- ❑ Response to COVID-19 (public health and safety communication)
- ❑ Post-pandemic economic recovery
- ❑ Crisis communication (other than response to COVID-19)
- ❑ Resident engagement
- ❑ Internal communications and employee engagement
- ❑ Behaviour change
- ❑ Tackling online abuse and intimidation
- ❑ Budget communications
- ❑ Place branding
- ❑ Economic development/regeneration
- ❑ Social care campaigns
- ❑ Internal change/transformation programmes
- ❑ Marketing income-generating services, for example leisure or tourism
- ❑ Achieving income targets
- ❑ Public affairs/influencing
- ❑ Environment and climate change
- ❑ None
- ❑ Other (please specify below)

_____

Has response to COVID-19 led you and your team to work more closely with communication counterparts in other councils or partner organisations (e.g. police/fire and rescue/NHS)?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ No change
- ❍ Don't know

In what ways are you working with communication counterparts in other councils or partner organisations currently?
Please select all that apply

- ❑ Joint campaigns
- ❑ Joint budgets
- ❑ Shared staff
- ❑ Shared resources
- ❑ Regular meetings
- ❑ Mutual aid during crisis
- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Other (please specify below)

_____

What do you expect to happen to your relationship with your partner organisations over the coming twelve months?

- ❍ Work more closely together
- ❍ Stay the same
- ❍ Work more separately
- ❍ Don't know
- ❍ Other (please specify below)

_____

Have you worked with partners to develop a new narrative to encompass your area's recovery from COVID-19?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Don't know

Does your organisation have an annual campaign plan signed off by your senior leadership?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Don't know

Please provide brief details of your most recent or future campaign themes (e.g. waste and recycling, social worker recruitment, return to the high street etc.)

_____

What proportion of your team's time is currently devoted to COVID-19 response and recovery (reactive and proactive) in comparison to 'business as usual' work?

Please provide an estimate as a percentage of all communications work carried out by your team e.g. 10per centor 25per cent). If you are unsure please enter your best estimate or, if you cannot provide an estimate, please enter 'Don't know'.

_____

Have you used any of the communication support offers provided by the LGA in the last 12 months?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Don't know

How satisfied were you with the LGA communication support offers provided?

- ❍ Very satisfied
- ❍ Fairly satisfied
- ❍ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ❍ Fairly dissatisfied
- ❍ Very disatisfied
- ❍ Don't know

What types of communications support would you find most useful over the next twelve months?
Please select all that apply:

- ❑ Bespoke support via email/telephone
- ❑ Case studies/online resources
- ❑ Crisis communications support
- ❑ Networking and contact-building with other councils
- ❑ One-day health check of your council's communications
- ❑ Two or three-day strategic review of your council's communications
- ❑ In-person workshops, events or seminars
- ❑ Online workshops, events or seminars
- ❑ Training or professional development
- ❑ Recruitment support
- ❑ None of the above
- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Other (please specify below)

       _____

Which areas of training and professional development would be most useful for your team?
Please select all that apply

- ❑ Strategic skills
- ❑ Political awareness
- ❑ Policy skills
- ❑ Campaign planning
- ❑ Evaluation and insight
- ❑ Personal impact
- ❑ Leadership skills
- ❑ Technical skills
- ❑ Crisis communication
- ❑ Stakeholder engagement
- ❑ Behaviour change
- ❑ Digital
- ❑ Social media
- ❑ Video
- ❑ None of the above
- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Other (please specify below)

_____

What support would you benefit from in carrying out your role?
Please select all that apply

- ❑ Mentoring
- ❑ Taking part in an LGA peer review
- ❑ Training programmes
- ❑ None
- ❑ Don't know
- ❑ Other (please specify below)

_____

Q23. Would you be willing to be part of the LGA's pool of communications professionals to support councils? For example, by helping to carry out peer reviews.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Would you be willing to join the LGA crisis communications cohort and be contacted about your availability to support councils in times of crisis or major incident?

○ Yes
○ No

Are you happy for your responses to this survey to be shared with other local authorities on request?

If you agree, your responses will not be shared outside of the local authority context.

○ Yes, on a named basis
○ Yes, but only anonymously
○ No

Do you have any other comments?

If so, please use the space below

_____

Finally, we would be grateful if you would take a moment to answer two questions about yourself please.

This section of the survey will collect and process special category data in relation to your ethnicity and age group, which we do under condition (a) of Article 9(2) that the subject has given explicit consent for the processing of their data for such purposes and conditions. Please confirm that you agree to us processing and holding this data: I agree to the LGA processing my special category data as laid out in Article 9(2)(a) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

If you do not give your consent you will not see these questions.

○ Yes, I agree
○ No, I do not agree

What is your ethnic group?
This question is voluntary

- ❍ English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- ❍ Irish
- ❍ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ❍ Roma
- ❍ Any other White background (please specify)

  _____

- ❍ White and Black Caribbean
- ❍ White and Black African
- ❍ White and Asian
- ❍ Any other Mixed or Multiple background (please specify)

  _____

- ❍ Indian
- ❍ Pakistani
- ❍ Bangladeshi
- ❍ Chinese
- ❍ Any other Asian background (please specify)

  _____

- ❍ Caribbean
- ❍ African
- ❍ Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background (please specify)

  _____
- ❍ Arab
- ❍ Any other ethnic group (please specify)

  _____

- ❍ Prefer not to say

Please select your age group
This question is voluntary

- ❍ Under 25 years
- ❍ 25-34 years
- ❍ 35-49 years
- ❍ 50-64 years
- ❍ 65 years or over
- ❍ Prefer not to say

Once you press the 'Submit' button below, you will have completed the survey.