Heads of Communications Survey 2019/2020

January and February 2020

To view more research from the Local Government Association's Research and Information team please visit: http://www.local.gov.uk/local-government-intelligence

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Foreword

Welcome to our 2019 Heads of Communications survey results.

When we undertook this year's heads of communication survey, we could not have anticipated the scale or the changes to how we work that were about to hit us all. Our priorities, the way we work and the renewed importance of communications as a critical function have changed beyond all recognition.

The research informing these results was conducted before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges we are currently facing are unprecedented, and this crisis will no doubt have a profound impact on our profession. My colleagues and I at the LGA continue to be in awe of the phenomenal work that has been delivered by council communications teams across the country. None of us have ever worked in times like these and the response has been truly incredible. Thank you for all you and your teams are doing.

Each year, when we undertake this survey, it presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the state of our profession along with the challenges and opportunities facing local government communicators. As a look back to the last year, it serves us well as a snapshot of the things that we were focussing on. Clearly things are now very different and are likely to be for some considerable time.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share the information and your thoughts with us and it is in the context of the current working environment that I am delighted to introduce the results of this year's survey.

Most councils have a communications strategy based on corporate priorities. However, there is still work to be done for communications to be seen as a strategic, corporate function. Council's work in recent weeks has gone a long way to addressing some of these issues, to help us be seen as a vital, strategic component of councils' response to the current crisis.

The results tell us that fewer councils have a corporate narrative now than two years ago. As we look ahead, it is going to be more important than ever for us to be able to effectively articulate our ambitions and hopes for our local areas.

Having access to and being able to advise our political and managerial leadership teams is key to our ability to do our jobs as effective strategic communicators. It's therefore positive to see most heads of communications continue to meet with their chief executive (or equivalent) at least once a month.

More than ever, it's important that communications play a measurable part in helping our organisations achieve their goals. This year there has been a modest increase in those who invest in evaluation. Evaluation and insight appeared as the most popular topic for training and professional development and we will make sure to take this on board as we plan for our next series of what are likely to be, virtual events and update our online resources.

Over the last year, we have continued to add to #FutureComms, our online communications resource, developed in partnership with LGcommunications, Solace and the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA). Just over six months ago, we launched our #FutureComms self-assessment tool – a diagnostic tool designed that offers an honest appraisal of the communications work you're delivering at your council. I hope you have had the chance to try this out and that, if so, it's been useful.

Awareness of #FutureComms remains high and I would like to thank everyone who has helped us to shape it by sharing your knowledge and experience, and by offering ideas of how we can improve it. That support has continued during the COVID-19 crisis with many of you sending us innovative and thoughtful examples and case studies. We will continue to refine and develop #FutureComms as we adapt to new ways of working and begin to reflect on what these challenging times have taught us and how they have impacted on our profession. Looking ahead, internal communications and the climate emergency have been identified as major themes and these are areas of work we are keen to develop further.

Diversity and equality remain major challenges for our profession, particularly at a senior level. To be effective public sector communicators, we should reflect the communities we serve. There are many practical steps we can take to ensure that our teams are diverse and capture a range of experiences. As leaders in our profession, we all have a part to play in creating an inclusive workplace. Through initiatives such as Women in PR and the LGcommunications Future Leaders' Programme, as senior leaders ourselves, we need to champion and encourage more diversity in our profession. I would value your thoughts and ideas on how we can further address this important issue.

Finally, my team and I here at the LGA are keen to ensure that we're supporting you as you face the challenges of the next few months and beyond. It's clear that these will exist for some time and we will provide as much support as we can.

We are at our best when work together and harness the incredibly diverse range of skills and expertise of colleagues from across local government and wider public services. Whether it's capturing the best examples of strategic communications for #FutureComms, sharing learnings during a crisis, being part of our pool of communications professionals for our health checks and peer reviews, or joining our crisis communications cohort to support colleagues during times of major incident, there are many ways we can work together for better outcomes.

Local government continues to be a hugely challenging but an incredibly rewarding place to develop a communications career. I am very proud to be a part of it and I hope you are too.

David Holdstock
Director of Communications
Local Government Association

Summary

Background

In January and February 2020 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.

The survey asked about a range of topics including length of service within local government, workforce characteristics, membership of professional organisations, and to whom heads of communications reported. It also explored issues including the types of campaigns that communications teams conducted, the channels they used and the level of awareness that heads of communications had about the support available from the LGA. The survey achieved a response rate of 37 per cent.

Key findings

- More than nine out of 10 (92 per cent) of heads of communications were from a white English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British ethnic background and just over three-fifths (62 per cent) were aged between 35 and 49 years.

- Just less than half of respondent heads of communication (44 per cent) had been working in local government for between five and 14 years and a further 30 per cent had been working in local government for between 15 and 24 years.

- Almost half (44 per cent) were members of LGcommunications, just over three out of 10 (31 per cent) were members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and five per cent were members of the Public Relations Communications Association (PRCA).

- On average, 8.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were working in corporate communications teams in respondent authorities.

- Sixty-three per cent of respondents had staff performing core communications functions in other parts of their council, with the average number of staff involved in this being 5.1 FTE.

- Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondent heads of communications reported to a service head or director and just over a quarter (26 per cent) reported to the chief executive.

- Nearly two-fifths (38 per cent) of heads of communications in respondent councils sit on their council's corporate/senior management team or equivalent.

- Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) reported that they have a budget for communications activity, but that other parts of their organisation also fund specific communications-related projects.

- Nearly six out of 10 (59 per cent) said their non-staffing budgets would remain roughly the same between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years.

- Almost all corporate communications teams in respondent authorities covered media relations (99 per cent), communications strategy (96 per cent), campaigns and marketing (95 per cent), web/digital/social media communications (95 per cent), reputation management (93 per cent), internal communications (93 per cent), and crisis/emergency communications (90 per cent).

- The skills distributions of most communications teams in respondent authorities were characterised by multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms (62 per cent).

- The top three communications priorities for respondents' authorities over the next 12 months were internal change/transformation programmes (48 per cent), council reputation (38 per cent) and environment (32 per cent).

- The most frequently utilised communication channels used by authorities to share news and information with residents were Facebook (100 per cent), Twitter (100 per cent), stories in the local media (98 per cent) and website updates (96 per cent).

- Over half (54 per cent) of authorities currently conduct a residents' or reputational survey to determine their communities' news access and satisfaction with their authority.

- Three-fifths of respondents (60 per cent) have seen #FutureComms, the joint LGA, LGcommunications, Solace and PRCA guide to strategic communication.

- Ninety-three per cent of respondents were aware that the LGA offers communications support to its member councils.

- Nearly nine out of 10 respondents had used any of the communications support offers (88 per cent) were very or fairly satisfied with LGA communications support.

Methodology

The survey was conducted online during January and February 2020 via a link sent to heads of communications, or their equivalent, in councils and fire authorities across England and Wales, for whom the LGA had contact details.

The survey was sent to 358 heads of communications or their equivalents in councils and fire and rescue services in England and Wales and 134 provided a response, giving a response rate of 37 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 respondents. 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 may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Survey Findings

The survey asked respondents about their ethnic background and age group. More than nine out of 10 (92 per cent) were from a white English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British ethnic background. Just over three-fifths (62 per cent) were 35-49 years old while nearly three out of 10 (28 per cent) were in the 50-64 years age group. A full breakdown of these findings is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Ethnic background of respondents	Number	Per cent
White British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish	108	92%
White Irish	1	1%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0%
Any other White background	4	3%
White and Black Caribbean	0	0%
White and Black African	0	0%
White and Asian	1	1%
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background	1	1%
Indian	1	1%
Pakistani	0	0%
Bangladeshi	0	0%
Chinese	0	0%
Any other Asian background	0	0%
Black African	0	0%
Black Caribbean	0	0%
Any other Black/African/Caribbean Background	1	1%
Arab	0	0%
Any other ethnic group	0	0%
Prefer not to say	1	1%

Base = 118 (all respondents)

Table 2: Age group of respondents		
	Number	**Per cent**
Under 25 years	0	0%
25-34 years	10	8%
35-49 years	73	62%
50-64 years	33	28%
65 years or over	0	0%
Prefer not to say	2	2%

Base = 118 (all respondents)

Most respondents had either worked in local government for five to 14 (44 per cent) or 15 to 24 (30 per cent) years, although a small number (16 per cent, 21 respondents) had worked in local government for zero to four years, and twelve respondents (nine per cent) had worked in local government for 25 years or more.

Table 3: Years worked in local government by respondents		
	Number	**Per cent**
0 to 4 years	21	16%
5 to 14 years	56	44%
15 to 24 years	39	30%
25 or more years	12	9%

Base = 128 (all respondents)

Two-thirds (66 per cent) of respondents were a member of one or more professional communications organisations, while 27 per cent did not belong to any. Just under half (44 per cent) of respondents were members of LGcommunications, just over three out of ten (31 per cent) were members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), five per cent were members of Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) while eleven per cent belonged to other professional organisations. Those who reported that they were members of other organisations were asked to specify these. They included the Chartered Institute of Marketing, the Chartered Management Institute, the National Union of Journalists and the Institute of Leadership and Management.

Table 4: Membership of professional organisations		
	Number	**Per cent**
Member of any professional organisation	**84**	**66%**
LGcommunications	56	44%
CIPR	39	31%
PRCA	6	5%
Other	14	11%
None	43	34%

Base = 127 (all respondents). Note: some respondents belonged to more than one organisation.

Respondents were asked how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were working

in their council's corporate communications team performing core functions as at 1 January 2020. 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 9 FTE, ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 35. 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 5: Number of FTE core communications staff at 1 January 2020	
	Number
Minimum	1.0
Maximum	35.0
Mean	8.8

Base = 124 (all respondents)

The type of council with the highest average number of communications staff was shire counties, at 18.4. Shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff, 4.5.

Table 6: Number of communications staff in FTE by authority type				
	Average (Mean)	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Bases**
Shire county	18.4	6.0	34.0	8
Shire district	4.5	1.0	11.0	56
London borough	15.1	7.0	32.0	12
Metropolitan district	15.6	3.6	35.0	14
Unitary authority	9.8	2.0	23.5	23
Fire authority	6.0	2.0	26.0	11
All	**8.8**	**1.0**	**35.0**	**124**

Base = see 'bases' column

Over three-fifths (63 per cent) of respondents reported that there were staff in other parts of their council performing core communications functions. On average the number of these staff was 5.1 FTE, with a minimum of 0.5 and a maximum of 40. Respondents were asked to specify which other teams these staff are located in using an open text box; among the most common words to be entered into this box were 'customer', 'engagement', 'transformation', 'tourism', 'leisure', 'culture', 'museum', 'corporate' and 'ICT'.

Table 7: Number of FTE staff performing core communications functions in other parts of the organisation at 1 January 2020	Number
Minimum	0.5
Maximum	40.0
Mean	5.1

Base = 61 (respondents whose organisations had core communications functions in other parts of the organisation)

When including staff who were performing core communications functions in other parts of the organisation, the type of council with the highest average number of communications staff was Shire Counties, at 22.3. Again, shire districts had the lowest average number of communications staff, at 6.2.

Table 8: Number of communications staff, including those in other parts of the organisation, in FTE by authority type	Average (Mean)	Minimum	Maximum	Bases
Shire county	22.3	6.0	38.0	8
Shire district	6.2	1.0	15.0	56
London borough	16.0	8.0	32.0	12
Metropolitan district	18.1	9.0	35.0	14
Unitary authority	14.9	3.0	63.5	23
Fire authority	8.3	2.0	28.0	11
All	**11.3**	**1.0**	**63.5**	**124**

Base = see 'bases' column

Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents reported to a service head or director, a quarter (25 per cent) reported to the chief executive or equivalent and nine per cent had another officer as their line manager. Table 9 shows these findings and lists of the service heads and directors, and the other line managers reported to are shown in Table A1 in the

Annex.

Table 9: Heads of Communications' line managers		
	Number	**Per cent**
Chief executive	32	26%
Service head/director	81	65%
Other	11	9%

Base = 124 (all respondents)

Just under two-fifths (38 per cent) of heads of communications sit on their council's corporate/senior management team or equivalent. These findings are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Heads of Communications sitting on councils' corporate/senior management team or equivalent.		
	Number	**Per cent**
Yes	47	38%
No	77	62%

Base = 124 (all respondents)

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) reported that whilst they have a budget for communications activity, other parts of their organisation also fund specific communication projects. A smaller number (23 per cent) reported that all communications spending in their organisation is centralised, whilst 13 per cent reported that all communications activity is funded when commissioned by other parts of their organisation. One respondent selected the "other" option, but this respondent described a situation identical to the second option, with a mixture of centralised and project-based communications funding.

Table 11: Heads of Communications' responsibility for their organisation's communications budget		
	Number	**Per cent**
Yes, all communications spending in my organisation is centralised	28	23%
I have a budget for communications activity but other parts of the organisation also fund specific projects	79	64%
No, communications activity is funded by other parts of the organisation when projects are commissioned	16	13%
Other	1	1%

Base = 124 (all respondents)

Nearly three-fifths of respondents (59 per cent) reported that their authority's non-staffing communications budget will remain roughly the same between 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years. Fifteen percent reported a moderate increase, whilst one respondent reported a large increase. Nearly one-fifth (19 per cent) of respondents reported a moderate decrease to their budget, whilst a further two respondents reported a large decrease.

Table 12: Changes to non-staffing communications budgets between the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years	Number	Per cent
Large increase	1	1%
Moderate increase	19	15%
Remain roughly the same	73	59%
Moderate decrease	23	19%
Large decrease	2	2%
Don't know	5	4%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Just over three-quarters (77 per cent) reported that their organisation had a communications strategy that was aligned to the corporate priorities.

Table 12: Communications strategy aligned to corporate priorities	Number	Per cent
Yes	95	77%
No	28	23%
Don't know	0	0%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Three-fifths (60 per cent) reported that their organisation had a corporate narrative.

Table 13: Whether the organisation has a corporate narrative	Number	Per cent
Yes	74	60%
No	46	37%
Don't know	4	3%

Base = 124 (all respondents)

Almost all corporate communications teams covered media relations (99 per cent), crisis/emergency communications (99 per cent), reputation management (97 per cent), web/digital/social media communications (96 per cent), communications strategy (95 per cent), campaigns and marketing (94 per cent) and internal communications (94 per cent).

A slightly smaller majority delivered services relating to print/design (81 per cent), communications training (68 per cent) and behaviour change (62 per cent),

member briefings (55 per cent) and community engagement (52 per cent).

Thirteen respondents specified other services delivered by their corporate communications team and these included:

- events
- annual awards ceremony
- photography/videography
- corporate public outdoor events
- audio-visual (AV) for events/meetings, webcasting, media buying, advertising (city centre display ads), major city marketing campaigns (e.g. Christmas)
- civic office administrative services for leader and chief executive
- community development.

The full list of services delivered by corporate communications teams is shown in Table 14, below.

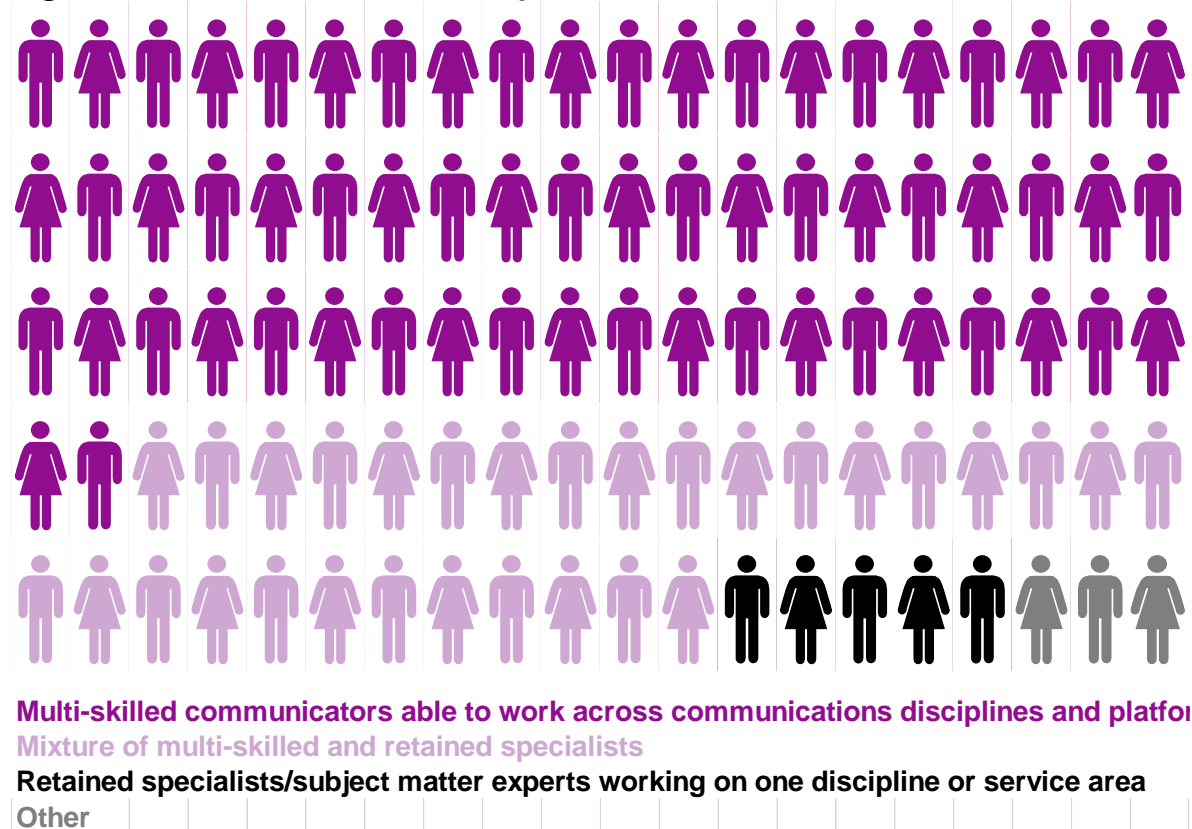| Table 14: Services delivered by corporate communications teams	Number	Per cent
Media relations	123	99%
Crisis/emergency communications	123	99%
Reputation management	120	97%
Web/digital/social media communications	119	96%
Communications strategy	118	95%
Campaigns and marketing	117	94%
Internal communications	116	94%
Print/design	100	81%
Communications training	84	68%
Behaviour change	77	62%
Member briefings	68	55%
Community engagement	64	52%
Consultation	60	48%
Income generation	53	43%
Place marketing	50	40%
Public affairs	49	40%
Commercial marketing	49	40%
Policy	27	22%
Tourism	18	15%
Other	9	7%

Base = 124 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

Just over three-fifths of respondents (62 per cent) described their communications teams as being composed principally of multi-skilled communicators three out of 10 (30 per cent) said they were a mixture of multi-skilled communicators and retained subject specialists. Five per cent described their team as being composed solely of retained subject matter experts and specialists.

Table 15: Skills distribution of respondents' communications teams	Number	Per cent
Retained specialists/subject matter experts working on one discipline or service area	6	5%
Mixture of multi-skilled and retained specialists	37	30%
Multi-skilled communicators able to work across communications disciplines and platforms	77	62%
Other	4	3%

Base = 124 (all respondents)

Figure 1. Skills distribution of respondents' communications teams.

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

The top three communications priorities for respondent's authorities over the next 12 months were internal change/transformation programmes (48 per cent), council reputation (38 per cent) and environment (32 per cent). The priorities are shown in

Table 16 below. Eight respondents specified other priorities for their authorities. These included:

- City Mayor's priorities
- prevention, protection, education
- communications strategy and corporate narrative
- housing
- digital transformation
- corporate enforcement
- major road projects
- communicating the new council plan and priorities
- prevention campaigns
- community cohesion
- campaigning
- participation
- culture change

Table 16: Top communications priorities for respondents' authorities over the next 12 months		
	Number	**Per cent**
Internal change/transformation programmes	60	48%
Council reputation	47	38%
Environment	40	32%
Resident engagement	38	31%
Economic development/regeneration	32	26%
Behaviour change	27	22%
Place branding	23	19%
Partnership working	20	16%
Marketing income-generating services, for example leisure or tourism	16	13%
Public affairs/influencing	12	10%
Crisis communication	11	9%
Budget communications	7	6%
Social care campaigns	5	4%
Achieving income targets	3	2%
Other	17	14%
None	3	2%

Base = 124 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

Nearly three-fifths (58 per cent) of respondents were fairly confident that they will have adequate resources to meet the priorities specified in the previous question. A further four per cent were very confident, adding up to a total of 62 per cent who feel very or fairly confident that they had adequate resources to meet their

organisational priorities. Nearly three out of 10 respondents (28 per cent) were not very confident in having adequate resources to meet their authorities' priorities, and nearly one in 10 (nine per cent) were not at all confident.

Table 17: Confidence in having adequate resources to meet organisational priorities	Number	Per cent
Very or fairly confident	**74**	**62%**
Very confident	5	4%
Fairly confident	69	58%
Not very confident	34	28%
Not at all confident	11	9%
Don't know	1	1%

Base = 120 (respondents who did not indicate that they had no priorities)

Of the 45 respondents who felt not very confident or not at all confident in meeting organisational priorities, 91 per cent (41 respondents) mentioned insufficient people resources as a reason for this lack of confidence. The next most frequently mentioned reason was insufficient budget (60 per cent/27 respondents), followed by unclear priorities/targets (36 per cent/16 respondents) and unrealistic priorities/targets (31 per cent/14 respondents).

Table 18: Reasons for feeling a lack of confidence in having adequate resources to meet organisational priorities	Number	Per cent
Insufficient people resources	41	91%
Insufficient budget	27	60%
Unclear priorities/targets	16	36%
Unrealistic priorities/targets	14	31%
Other	7	16%
Don't know	0	0%

Base =45 (respondents who were not confident or not all confident that they had adequate resources; multiple responses were possible)

Almost three quarters (74 per cent) reported meeting with their authority's chief executive or equivalent more often than weekly or between weekly and monthly to discuss and plan communications strategy and activity. This figure was very slightly lower (73 per cent) with regard to their authority's senior managers, and 63 per cent with regards to their authority's leader or equivalent. Eleven per cent of respondents reported that they do not meet with their chief executive in this way on a regular basis, compared with 17 per cent with regard to their leader and six per cent with regard to their senior managers.

Table 19: Frequency of meeting with colleagues to discuss and plan communications strategy and activity	Chief executive	Leader	Senior managers
More often than monthly	**74%**	**63%**	**73%**
More often than weekly	29%	24%	28%
Between weekly and monthly	45%	39%	45%
Between monthly and quarterly	11%	17%	17%
Between quarterly and yearly	3%	3%	4%
Less often than yearly	2%	1%	0%
Not on a regular basis	11%	17%	6%

Base = 122, 121 and 122 for chief executive, leader and senior managers respectively (all respondents)

Nearly half of respondents (45 per cent) reported regularly working closely with their communication counterparts in partner organisations, such as the police, fire and rescue authorities and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). A further fifth (20 per cent) reported sometimes working closely with these counterparts and just under three out of 10 (28 per cent) said they worked closely with their counterparts when necessary.

Table 20: Whether respondents work closely with their communication counterparts in partner organisations	Number	Per cent
Yes, regularly	55	45%
Yes, sometimes	24	20%
Yes, when necessary	35	28%
Yes, infrequently	6	5%
No	3	2%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Just over seven out of 10 respondents (71 per cent) worked together on joint campaigns, just over three-fifths (62 per cent) worked together through regular meetings, and three-fifths (62 per cent) worked together through mutual aid during crisis. Less common ways of working together include shared resources (11 per

cent), shared staff (four per cent) and joint budgets (two per cent). Twenty-two respondents specified other ways of working together, which included:

- managing incidents and issues
- sharing information and promoting activities
- local resilience forum
- round-robin e-mails.
- multi agency emergency incidents
- reactive communications
- communications around transition to unitary governance
- supporting others' campaigns and messaging
- sharing statements
- working with shared outcomes but not necessarily shared budgets, for example in health joint working
- shared training opportunities
- information sharing
- joint response to media enquiries/coordinated press work
- as and when work streams cross
- events
- representation on countywide strategic and partnership bodies

Table 21: Ways that communications teams work with partner organisations	Number	Per cent
Joint campaigns	87	71%
Regular meetings	76	62%
Mutual aid during crisis	76	62%
Shared resources	14	11%
Shared staff	5	4%
Joint budgets	2	2%
Other	22	18%

Base = 123 (respondents who work closely with partner organisations; multiple responses were possible)

Just over half (53 per cent) of respondents who work closely with partner - organisations anticipate working more closely with these over the next 12 months. Close to half (44 per cent) anticipate their relationships with partner organisations staying the same.

Table 22: What respondents expect to happen to their relationships with partner organisations over the coming twelve months	Number	Per cent
Work more closely together	65	53%
Stay the same	54	44%
Work more separately	1	1%
Other (please specify)	2	2%
Don't know	1	1%

Base = 123 (respondents who work closely with partner organisations)

A quarter (25 per cent) reported that their organisation worked with partners to develop a place brand for their local area.

Table 23: Whether the organisation has worked with partners to develop a place brand for the local area	Number	Per cent
Yes	31	25%
No	88	72%
Don't know	4	3%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Just under half (45 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	Number	Per cent
Yes	55	45%
No	68	55%
Don't know	0	0%

Base = 123 (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 'waste', 'recycle', 'climate change', 'environment', 'emergency', 'recruit', 'regenerate', 'transformation', 'town', 'place', 'fostering', 'budget', 'housing', 'homeless' and 'firefighter'.

Figure 2. Word cloud of recent or future campaign plan themes

Every respondent (100 per cent) used both Facebook and Twitter to share news and information with residents, and the vast majority of respondents used stories in the local media (98 per cent) and website updates (96 per cent). Four-fifths of respondents (80 per cent) used public consultations. Three-quarters (75 per cent) used e-bulletins/e-marketing. Just over two-thirds (68 per cent) used Instagram and just over two-thirds (67 per cent) also used YouTube. Other communication channels that used were face-to face meetings (61 per cent), and a printed council magazine (56 per cent), while more than a third (37 per cent) used a digital version of the council magazine). Other communications channels mentioned included:

- screens and bulletin boards in council locations
- street advertising
- LinkedIn,
- Tik Tok
- Blogs
- podcasts
- Nextdoor
- events and roadshows
- mass mail outs
- owned outdoor advertising
- targetted online advertising e.g Google Ads
- via councillors, partners and stakeholders

The full list of communications channels used are shown in Table 25, below.

Table 25: Communication channels used by respondents' authorities to share news and information with residents	Number	Per cent
Facebook	123	100%
Twitter	123	100%
Stories in local media	121	98%
Website updates	118	96%
Public consultations	98	80%
E-bulletins/E-marketing	92	75%
Instagram	84	68%
YouTube	82	67%
Face-to-face meetings	75	61%
Council magazine (print)	69	56%
Council magazine (digital)	46	37%
Messaging apps	7	6%
Snapchat	3	2%
Other	17	14%
None	0	0%
Don't know	0	0%

Base = 123 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

A majority of respondents regularly measure and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their campaigns and channels to either a great (18 per cent) or a moderate extent (43 per cent). More than one-third (37 per cent) do this to a small extent.

Table 26: Extent to which respondents regularly measure and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their campaigns and channels	Number	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	**75**	**61**
To a great extent	22	18%
To a moderate extent	53	43%
To a small extent	46	37%
Not at all	1	1%
Don't know	1	1%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Close to nine out of 10 respondents (86 per cent) used quantitative research methods to evaluate the effectiveness of communications activity. Just less than two-thirds (65 per cent) used anecdotal/informal feedback and just under three-fifths (58 per cent) used qualitative research methods.

Table 27: Methods used to evaluate effectiveness /impact of communications channels and/or campaigns	Number	Per cent
Quantitative research methods	104	86%
Anecdotal/informal feedback	79	65%
Qualitative research methods	70	58%
Other	10	8%
Don't know	1	1%

Base = 121 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

More than half (54 per cent) of respondents' organisations said they currently conduct a residents' or reputational survey.

Table 28: Whether respondents currently conduct a residents' or reputational survey	Number	Per cent
Yes	66	54%
No	53	43%
Don't know	4	3%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Of the 66 respondents who conduct a residents' or reputational survey, just over three out of 10 (31 per cent) reported carrying it out every year and a further 37 per cent reported carrying it out every two years.

Table 29: Frequency of residents' surveys	Number	Per cent
Every year	20	31%
Every two years	24	37%
Every three years	5	8%
As required (no regular plan)	8	12%
Other	8	12%
Don't know	0	0%

Base = 65 (respondents who said they currently conducted a residents' or reputational survey)

Of those authorities who conducted a survey, just under three-fifths (57 per cent) use an independent polling company whilst just over two-thirds (35 per cent) carry it out in-house.

Table 30: The organisations who carry out the reputational survey		
	Number	**Per cent**
Independent polling company	37	57%
Own authority	23	35%
Other	5	8%
Don't know	0	0%

Base = 65 (respondents who said they currently conducted a residents' or reputational survey)

Just over half of the respondents (52 per cent) who carry out a survey used an online method of administration. This is followed by postal surveys (40 per cent), face-to-face (31 per cent) and citizen's jury/panel (23 per cent). Of the 19 respondents who said they used another method, most reported using a telephone survey.

Table 31: Types of residents' or reputational survey		
	Number	**Per cent**
Online	34	52%
Postal	26	40%
Face-to-face	20	31%
Citizens' jury/panel	15	23%
Other	19	29%
Don't know	2	3%

Base = 65 (respondents who said they currently conducted a residents' or reputational survey; multiple responses were possible)

Respondents from councils who did not conduct a residents' or reputational survey were asked to indicate the main reason why they did not carry one out. Just over three out of 10 (31 per cent) said this was because it was too expensive to do so. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) said this was because there was no senior support within the council. Over half (52 per cent) said there was another reason a survey is not conducted, and these reasons included:

- lack of member support
- poor return rate
- public criticism of money spent on such exercises
- staff resourcing/budget reasons
- reliance on ad hoc resident feedback instead
- reliance on a national survey carried out by Home Office
- council reorganisation
- have not conducted a survey in a number of years, but planning to do so soon

- fire rescue service - carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Table 32: Reasons for not conducting a residents' or reputational survey	Number	Per cent
It is too expensive	16	31%
No senior support within the council	12	23%
It would not be a worthwhile exercise	5	10%
Other	27	52%
Don't know	3	6%

Base = 52 (respondents who said they did not currently conduct a residents' or reputational survey; multiple responses were possible)

Three-fifths (60 per cent) of respondents had seen #FutureComms, the joint LGA, LGcommunications, Solace and PRCA guide to strategic communications.

Table 33: Whether respondents have seen the #FutureComms guide to strategic communication	Number	Per cent
Yes	74	60%
No	43	35%
Don't know	6	5%

Base = 123 (all respondents)

Of the 72 respondents who have seen #FutureComms, just over seven out of 10 (71 per cent) found the case studies among the most useful aspects of this resource, whilst just under two-fifths (38 per cent) found thought leadership among its most useful aspects. Twelve respondents selected specific topics, and these included:

- media approaches for modern day
- readiness test
- resources library
- Social Media Guide
- New Reputation Guide
- employee engagement
- behaviour change
- information on developing a corporate narrative
- internal comms
- engaging with communities
- digital
- view from the chief executive
- place branding.

Table 34: Aspects of #FutureComms which respondents found most useful		
	Number	**Per cent**
Case studies	51	71%
Thought leadership	27	38%
Specific topics	12	17%
None	0	0%
Don't know	11	15%

Base = 72 (respondents who had seen #FutureComms; multiple responses were possible)

More than nine out of 10 (93 per cent) respondents were aware that the LGA offers communications support to its member councils.

Table 35: Whether respondents are aware that the LGA offers communications support to its member councils		
	Number	**Per cent**
Yes	112	93%
No	8	7%

Base = 120 (all respondents)

More than three-fifths of respondents (63 per cent) reported having used the LGA website for communication support in the last 12 months, and nearly half (49 per cent) had used the CommsNet bulletin. Just over three out of 10 (31 per cent) had used the #FutureComms resource, a quarter (25 per cent) had attended a workshop or event, and one-fifth (20 per cent) had used CommsHub communication resources. The full list of communications support offers used is shown in Table 36, below.

Table 36: LGA communication support offers used in the last 12 months		
	Number	**Per cent**
LGA website	74	63%
CommsNet bulletin	57	49%
#FutureComms resource	36	31%
Workshop or event	29	25%
CommsHub communication resources	23	20%
Participation in LGA improvement work	11	9%
Strategic support	8	7%
One day health check	7	6%
Recruitment assistance	5	4%
Two or three-day communications review	3	3%
Crisis communications cohort	1	1%
Media training	1	1%
Other (please specify)	10	9%
None in the last 12 months	20	17%

Base = 117 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

Of the respondents who reported using some form of LGA communication support in the last 12 months, nearly nine out of 10 (88 per cent) were very or fairly satisfied with the support provided. Nearly one in 10 (nine per cent) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 37: Satisfaction with LGA communications support		
	Number	**Per cent**
Very or fairly satisfied	**85**	**88%**
Very satisfied	45	46%
Fairly satisfied	40	41%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9	9%
Fairly dissatisfied	0	0%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%
Don't know	3	3%

Base = 97 (respondents who had used any of the communications support offers)

Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with various aspects of the LGA communication support they accessed. More than four-fifths (81 per cent) said they were very or fairly satisfied with the professionalism of the support, and nearly four fifths (78 per cent) said they were satisfied with knowledge/expertise. Three-quarters (75 per cent) said they were very or fairly satisfied with the ease of communication. Around three-fifths of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with the value for money of the support (63 per cent), the speed of response to enquiries (59 per cent) and the quality and detail of feedback (58 per cent). Just over half (53 per cent) said they were very or fairly satisfied with the bespoke nature of the support they received.

Table 38: Satisfaction with aspects of LGA support			
	Very or fairly satisfied (Number)	**Very or fairly satisfied (Per cent)**	**Bases**
Professionalism	68	81%	83
Knowledge/expertise	65	78%	84
Ease of communication	63	75%	84
Value for money	50	63%	78
Speed of response to enquiry	49	59%	83
Quality and detail of feedback	46	58%	79
Bespoke support	41	53%	80
Other	5	31%	16

Base = see 'bases' column (respondents who had used any of the communications support offers)

Respondents were asked about the types of communications support they would find most useful over the next twelve months. Over half of respondents (55 per cent) said workshops, events or seminars would be useful. Half (50 per cent) said case studies and online resources would be useful, and nearly half (48 per cent) said training or professional development would be useful. The full list of communications support that respondents would find useful is shown in Table 39, below.

Table 39: Types of communications support that respondents would find most useful over the next 12 months	Number	Per cent
Workshops, events or seminars	65	55%
Case studies/online resources	60	50%
Training or professional development	57	48%
Networking and contact-building with other councils	48	40%
One-day health check of your council's communications	34	29%
Visit from a member of the LGA communications team	31	26%
New #FutureComms chapters	30	25%
Two- or three-day strategic review of your council's communications	22	18%
Crisis communications support	19	16%
Bespoke support via email/telephone	17	14%
Recruitment support	10	8%
Other	1	1%
None of the above	5	4%
Don't know	4	3%

Base = 119 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

Respondents were asked to indicate which areas of training and professional development would be useful for their teams. Just over three-fifths (62 per cent) of respondents said evaluation and insight would be among the most useful areas of training and professional development to receive. Just over half (51 per cent) said behaviour change, and half (50 per cent) said strategic skills. Table 40, below, lists all of the areas of training and professional development that respondents would find most useful for their teams.

Table 40: Areas of training and professional development which would be most useful	Number	Per cent
Evaluation and insight	73	62%
Behaviour change	60	51%
Strategic skills	58	50%
Digital	44	38%
Video	44	38%
Campaign planning	39	33%
Stakeholder engagement	31	26%
Political awareness	27	23%
Leadership skills	27	23%
Crisis communication	25	21%
Personal impact	16	14%
Policy skills	11	9%
Technical skills	11	9%
Other	2	2%
None of the above	1	1%
Don't know	2	2%

Base = 117 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

Nearly nine out of 10 respondents (89 per cent) felt they were very or fairly well supported to carry out their current role.

Table 41: How well supported respondents felt to carry out their current role	Number	Per cent
Very or fairly well	**107**	**89%**
Very well	27	23%
Fairly well	80	67%
Not very well	10	8%
Not at all well	1	1%
Don't know	2	2%

Base = 120 (all respondents)

Respondents were asked what support they thought they would benefit most from in carrying out their role. Just over a third (35 per cent) selected training programmes. Just under a third (32 per cent) selected mentoring. Just under a fifth (19 per cent) selected taking part in an LGA peer review. Twelve respondents selected other, and these included:

- more resource
- networking opportunities
- events

Table 42: Support that respondents would benefit most from in carrying out their role	Number	Per cent
Training programmes	41	35%
Mentoring	37	32%
Taking part in an LGA peer review	22	19%
Other	12	10%
None	11	9%
Don't know	20	17%

Base = 117 (all respondents; multiple responses were possible)

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 over three-fifths (61 per cent) would be willing to do this.

Table 43: Whether respondents would be willing to join the LGA crisis communications cohort	Number	Per cent
Yes	71	61%
No	45	39%

Base = 116 (all respondents)

Annex

Other line managers specified by respondents

Table A1: Heads of communications' line managers
Service heads/directors
Head of Transformation and Communications
Director of Strategy, Policy and Insight
Corporate Assistant Director
Corporate Governance
Assistant Chief Executive
Head of Engagement
Director Service Reform
Director of Strategy and Commissioning
Director of Strategy and Performance
Head of Comms
Lead officer - Office of the Chief Executive
Organisation Team manager (HR)
Assistant Director, Office of the Chief Executive
Currently corporate director, but may change
Head of People & Communications
Assistant Director Business Systems
Chief Officer of Communities
Director of Economy and Planning
Human Resources
Head of Corporate Strategy and Customer Service
Assistant Director People
Head of corporate services
Director
Assistant Chief Executive
Head of Law and Administration
Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement
Head of Corporate Resources
Director of OD
Head of Information, Communications and Technologies
Deputy Chief Executive/Director for Regeneration and Policy (combined post)
Executive Director
Head of Communications, Strategy, Policy
Head of service
Assistant Director, Communications and Customers
Strategic director
Assistant director
Head of Policy and Governance

Service Lead, customer and communications (service head)

Director of Policy and Participation

Assistant Director customer and digital services

Director of Policy, Insight and Communications

Executive Director Digital and Customer Services

Director

Director of Infrastructure, Procurement, Business Improvement, Communications, Waste Services and ICT

Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development & Communications

Head of Service (People, Performance, Projects)

Director of People, Partnerships and Communications

Executive Manager - Finance and Corporate Services

Head of business change

Director of Finance and Resourcing

Assistant Chief Executive

Marketing and Customer Services Manager

Head of Business Development and Improvement

Emergency Planning and Risk Manager

Deputy Director

Assistant Director Strategy, Public Health & Prevention

Director of Commercial and customer services (with direct report to chief exec also)

Chief of Staff

Director

Legal and Democratic Services

Head of Governance and Corporate Services

Head of Customer Experience

Head of Policy and Transformation

Strategic Director

Assistant Chief Executive

Head of legal and democratic services

Commercial Director

Director of Communities

Assistant Chief Executive

Assistant Director- Corporate services

Director with dotted line to CX

Deputy Chief Executive

Deputy Chief Executive

Assistant Director

Customer Experience Manager

Service Manager

Assistant Director - Customers and Commissioning

Assistant Chief Executive

Work direction from chief executive, holiday etc from city solicitor

Chief Operating Officer
Strategic Director
Deputy Chief Constable
Executive Director Corporate Services