

NPH Communications Strategy

2017 - 2019



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Strategy

1. Introduction

The communications strategy aims to support the delivery of NPH's corporate strategic objectives by effectively communicating with our stakeholders to promote services, share successes and provide information at the right time in the right way.

As a relatively new organisation, some processes and practices require refinement or in some cases, don't already exist and need to be developed. This strategy and accompanying documents specify how we will make sure that our stakeholders receive timely and relevant information in a way that meets their needs.

Technology, national policy and customer behaviour are changing at a quicker pace than ever before. For this reason, the strategy will be continually monitored and updated in no more than two years.

2. Background

NPH is an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) that is responsible for the management of Northampton Borough Council's housing services. NPH has its own Board of Directors and is a not-for-profit organisation launched by NBC in January 2015, for an initial period of 15 years.

The decision to set up a dedicated housing organisation was driven by the need for service improvement and more meaningful customer involvement. Listening and responding to tenants and leaseholders is at the heart of what we do.

During the implementation of NPH, our tenants, employees and other stakeholders contributed to the development of our vision, mission and values.

Vision

NPH provides homes which enable people to live happy and healthy lives in enriched communities.

Mission

We improve lives by sharing a common purpose.

We improve and maintain the quality of our homes.

We provide services which endeavour to meet the needs and aspirations of all tenants and residents.

We will provide the opportunity for people to influence the immediate and long term futures for themselves and their communities.

Values

Open and Strong

Listen and Respond

Achieving more with others

Aim High and Deliver

These statements set the direction for our strategic objectives, which state who we are, what we want to achieve and how we want to deliver.

Strategic Objectives

- i. Deliver and maintain high quality homes and estates
- ii. Deliver high quality and customer focussed housing services
- iii. Improve empowerment, opportunity and access for all
- iv. Develop and maximise partnerships to build stronger, safer and thriving communities in Northampton
- v. Be an open, inclusive, effectively managed and trusted organisation

3. Purpose

Effective communication is critical to the success of NPH. This strategy sets out where we are now, where we want to be and what we need to do to get there. It also shows how effective communication can:

- help us achieve our strategic objectives;
- engage with a range of stakeholders;
- highlight our successes;

- demonstrate clearly what we do;
- influence behaviour and perceptions.

4. Communication aims

The communications strategy aims to;

- I. ensure that information about our services is accessible to all;
- II. provide a range of communication channels that take into account the diverse needs of our customers;
- III. enhance our digital offering to make services more accessible, better value for money and more environmentally friendly;
- IV. provide regular opportunities for customer feedback, consultation and challenge to ensure that corporate communication is a two way process;
- V. build a bank of case studies that can be used to promote our services in a way that stakeholders can easily relate to;
- VI. communicate successes in a timely way across all available channels;
- VII. promote the NPH brand and awareness of NPH as a dedicated housing provider that operates separately from NBC;
- VIII. respond to media enquiries positively and quickly to minimise reputational damage;
- IX. maximise positive PR opportunities and share with local media, industry press and partners as appropriate;
- X. take an open and honest approach to internal communications, maximising opportunities for engagement and feedback.

5. Approach to communications

We have developed a [communications guide](#) which sets out how we would like to communicate with our customers.

NPH is committed to clear communication. It is important that we move away from bureaucratic language that is difficult to understand. By April 2018 all of our documents, letters and online information will meet NPH communications standards and will therefore be:

- easy to understand;
- friendly in tone;
- professional and accurate;
- appropriate for the target audience; and
- free of jargon.

An action plan has been developed to ensure that all service areas are supported by the communications team to meet the required standards.

In addition, all communications should follow these simple rules:

- accessible;
- transparent;
- impartial;
- consistent (with NPH policies, procedures and codes of practice);
- accurate;
- professional;
- appropriate and of interest.

Communicating successfully is the responsibility of every NPH employee. Poor communication can significantly damage the reputation of the organisation and this can be avoided by taking advice from the communication team.

The communication team should be consulted at an early stage of any communication activity or project, to make sure that the appropriate advice is given and all communications implications are considered.

6. Current position

External communications

We have a range of stakeholders who require different levels of communication. Appendix 1 defines the type, frequency and style of communication appropriate for each stakeholder group.

Internal communications

We are committed to good quality internal communication at NPH. We value our employees and have developed a [People Strategy](#) to support them. The strategy states that NPH has made a commitment to be:

- A good communicator which means that employees feel fully informed of new developments across NPH and understand what it means for them individually. We consult employees about developments and proposals at the earliest opportunity and we work in partnership with recognised trade unions.
- An organisation that uses technology to promote innovation and change and support employees to work in a more efficient and effective way.
- An organisation that values all our workforce which means that everyone who works here is inspired to get the most out of their working experience and is able to make the maximum contribution to our success as an organisation.

The communications team contributes to the delivery of these commitments by using, and encouraging others to use, available channels to maximise engagement opportunities (see appendix 2).

7. Media and public relations

NPH recognises that the media gives local people a voice. We will respond to media enquiries in a timely, transparent and respectful way. All media enquiries should be directed to the communications team and all NPH employees should familiarise themselves with the [media protocol](#).

The local media also offers opportunities to provide information to the general public and promote success stories. The communications team continually look for appropriate articles to share with the local media and actively encourage referrals from all service areas.

8. Social Media

The widespread use of social media has enabled a huge increase in “citizen journalism”. Any member of the general public can share information about an organisation and has the potential to reach a wider audience than ever before.

There are multiple social media platforms and new trends emerge continually. NPH has only launched on Twitter so far although this does not mean that the organisation is not mentioned on other platforms. The communications team monitor NPH mentions on social media using a solution called Hootsuite.

Decisions to open NPH accounts on other social media platforms require EMT approval. Options will be presented taking resources, risks, objectives and desired outcomes into account.

9. Branding

The communications team is custodian of the NPH brand and is committed to its promotion. It is essential that our brand is recognised to build a separate identity and reputation from the Council.

All communications should adhere to the agreed NPH Branding guidelines.

10. Evaluation

The Communications Team Leader is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy using the following methods.

- Surveys
- Media coverage
- Website analytics

- Customer feedback
- Employee satisfaction
- Behaviour change following communication activity

Feedback will be presented to EMT at their request.

Queries relating to the communications strategy should be directed to [Hannah Bensusan, Communications Manager](#).

Appendix 1

External written communication channels	Purpose	Who can update?
Telephone contact centre and face to face one stop shop – delivered by NBC	First point of contact for non-digital customer interactions	NPH works in close partnership with NBC to ensure that consistent standards are met
NPH website www.northamptonpartnershiphomes.org.uk	Detailed information about services Regular news items Downloadable documents Online forms Accessibility function allows translation, magnified text and audio	Communications team only Rely on service areas to advise changes to content
NPH Voice	Regular features Tenant case studies News on NPH services	Produced by the communications team Contributions from all service areas Tenant led articles
Twitter @NPH_news	Networking tool, links with local and national organisations Sector news Less formal channel for	Daily updates by the communications team only Must adhere to the NPH Social Media Protocol

	sharing news	
Service specific leaflets and factsheets	Used to highlight important aspects of a service or process Often used to communicate change or reinforce a message Useful for events or community venues	Should be approved by the communications team
Policies, strategies and guidance	Sets out how and why we do things Sometimes require easy read versions	Branded and proofed by communications team Can be accessed online or printed on demand
Rent statements	Produced annually for every tenant	Presents communication opportunity if white space is utilised Automatically produced by housing system
E-mail	Day to day communication tool	Can be used by any NPH employee Can be published if relevant to a Freedom of Information Act enquiry Should be sent considerately and in accordance with the

		NPH digital protocol
System generated letters	<p>Triggered by specific events related to a tenancy or lease</p> <p>Often contain statutory messages and can be difficult for customers to understand</p>	<p>Housing officers</p> <p>Rent income officers</p> <p>Repairs admin</p> <p>Allocations officers</p>
Officer generated letters	To communicate tenancy related matters	<p>Ad-hoc letters</p> <p>Subject to inconsistency with few controls</p>

Appendix 2

Internal communication channels	
Intranet	<p>Accessible to all employees</p> <p>Daily updates</p> <p>Used for corporate and social messages</p> <p>Used to promote fundraising activities</p> <p>Social media feel, users can comment and get involved with news items</p> <p>Successes and positive outcomes can be shared with the whole organisation</p> <p>Files and documents can be uploaded</p> <p>User profiles for all staff members</p> <p>Fun posts encouraged</p>
Employee briefings	<p>Entire workforce in one place to receive corporate messages</p> <p>Two way process – colleagues are asked for feedback, opinions and ideas</p> <p>Platform for launching new initiatives and getting buy-in from a wide audience</p>
All staff e-mails	<p>Can be sent by executive secretaries and communications team</p> <p>For urgent messages only</p> <p>Must be relevant to all staff</p>
Posters and notice boards	<p>Communications team should have oversight</p> <p>NPH templates are available to maintain brand</p> <p>Appropriate content – remember external</p>

	<p>visitors to the building</p> <p>Current - should be removed when event has passed</p>
E-mail	<p>Can be used by any NPH employee</p> <p>Can be published if relevant to a Freedom of Information Act enquiry</p> <p>Should be sent considerately and in accordance with the NPH Digital Protocol</p>
Team meetings	<p>Should be regular</p> <p>Opportunity to share corporate and service specific messages</p> <p>Can be used to meet basic training needs</p> <p>Can be used to encourage communication between service areas</p>

Appendix 3 - Constraints

- i. **NPH is wholly owned by Northampton Borough Council and bound by the terms in the management agreement.**

NPH Communications will reference NBC as the landlord and when necessary, agree consistent messaging with the NBC communications team.

- ii. **National housing policy directly affects NPH politically and economically. Significant concerns at present are Universal Credit, proposed sale of high value stock and the 1% rent reduction.**

NPH commits to keeping its stakeholders updated on how policy developments affect services and carry out meaningful consultation to inform decision making processes.

- iii. **We use the NBC ICT infrastructure managed by LGSS therefore our digital ambitions need to be managed within this framework. This means that NPH's development priorities compete with those of LGSS's other clients.**

Digital developments will be progressed in consultation with the NPH Head of Corporate Services to make sure that this strategy supports the NPH ICT strategy. There are dependencies between the strategies, particularly in the areas of self-service and new ways of working.

- iv. **Being a new organisation, we have a data gap relating to our customers' communication channel preferences.**

The communications team have taken steps to address this by asking website users to indicate their preference as well as including a survey in the Winter 2016 edition of NPH Voice.

A collaborative action plan will be produced by Corporate and Customer Services teams to collect more detailed customer data in line with equality and diversity requirements.

The communications team will analyse the updated customer data to identify opportunities for targeted communications.

Some of our customer groups are more difficult to reach than others. The communications team is building a network of community groups and third sector organisations. We are working with partners to raise awareness of NPH services and to make sure that our communications are accessible to all.

v. **Recent media trends have fuelled negative stereotypes of social housing tenants and benefit claimants.**

We aim to challenge these perceptions by producing communications that highlight the positive impact social housing has on society.

We run regular “Proud Tenant” features in our tenant newsletter and support the National Federation of ALMOs with their campaign and lobbying work in this area.

vi. **We have a diverse workforce with different communications needs and expectations. Many of our employees are not office based and there is a risk that corporate messages may be missed.**

Steps have been taken to mitigate this risk. All employees, even those working remotely, have access to the intranet on mobile devices.

Quarterly employee briefings include all employees, to make sure that key corporate messages are received consistently.

Appendix 4 – Operational plan and consultation

Communication plan

This is a dynamic document and will be regularly monitored by the Communications Team Leader. Monthly meetings take place with service leads to check progress against the plan and add new items.

Consultation

The communications team works closely with the customer engagement team to maximise opportunities for customer feedback and consultation to help inform the plan.

A communications service improvement panel meets regularly to discuss and make recommendations about:

- access to services;
- customer publication content;
- language used in customer communications;
- website content;
- clarity of communications; and
- channel shift.

The service improvement panel can also be accessed by e-mail to encourage participation from customers who may be unavailable to attend meetings.

In addition, we seek feedback from the wider customer population using printed and online surveys.