



**Our vision is
"to deliver excellent Housing Services"**

Communications Strategy

Newark and Sherwood Homes Limited



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Revised by Claire McDonald 1/1/2008

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1 Introduction

*"Getting the right message to the right people,
in the right way at the right time"*

Effective communication is not just about transmitting information, it needs to go beyond this to support Newark and Sherwood Homes' (NSH) vision, and business objectives, and transform behaviours. Communications must reflect the needs of the internal and external community to make a real impact, therefore structuring messages and selecting the most appropriate communications channels is vital.

This document is divided into five areas:

1. Understanding why it is important to have a strategy.
2. What is meant by communication in terms of an ALMO organisation.
3. The aims of the Communication Strategy.
4. How NSH currently deals with communication issues.
5. What NSH needs to do to enhance its communications in the future.
6. Summary of Communications Strategy and Communications Management.

2. Understanding why it is important to have a strategy

- The strategy sets out how NSH will develop service delivery to support business objectives and delivery of the Business Plan through effective use of communications.
- Communication is a complex area, with many facets. Without a formalised strategy it is probable that the approach would lack co-ordination and will be less effective.
- Most organisations spend considerable resource on communication. It is, therefore, important that value for money is achieved. This requires proactive decision making on the communications processes and also evaluation of their success.
- Research has proved that effective communication alone has a positive effect on customer satisfaction with services. This will, therefore, have a positive impact on inspection ratings for example and also communication is an important tool in driving forward change, both cultural and procedural. It is, therefore, important to

ensure that the plan is dovetailed into the Improvement Planning process and also linked to corporate Key Performance Indicators.

- Employees are one major part of the Communications Strategy. Research indicates that they can provide 25-40% better feedback if communications to them are strong.
- Communications link closely to other strategies, such as Human Resources, in terms of Investors in People (IiP), training and Customer Insight protocol.
- Involving tenants in the decision-making processes is of increasing importance, also having high value in Inspection processes.
- All staff members and Board Members have a role in the communications. The Strategy is a method of ensuring their role is understood and that they are able to meet their own responsibilities.

3.What is meant by communication in terms of an ALMO organisation

Communication can be divided into methods targeted at internal customers and methods targeted at external customers.

The internal stakeholders are staff, the Board and the Council.

The external stakeholders include tenants, leaseholders, the public, the Tenants & Residents Organisations, the media, contractors and other suppliers, MPs, and Councillors.

There are also external partnering arrangements that should be recognised such as Government, Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Quality Network, related local public sector bodies, Unions, Registered Social Landlords and also voluntary agencies.

Twelve elements to Communication have been identified. These are:-

- *Internal Communication.* This can be through mediums such as a formal meeting process, newsletters, e-mails.
- *Market Research.* This is the process of gathering information. Methods might be questionnaires and surveys, reading trade press or networking with related organisations for example.
- *Publications.* Statutory such as Annual Accounts and other returns to government, and discretionary such as the Tenants' Newsletter "Home from Homes" and other leaflets.

- *Design and Printing.* This concerns having a standard format, and a company style that is appropriate.
- *Events.* Events range from AGMs, sponsored corporate events, competitions, road-shows, walkabouts, Tenant conferences, and Area/District panels.
- *Consultation.* This is about seeking information from individuals with an interest in the outcome or decision. The Stock Option process is a major consultation exercise, and on a smaller scale so are satisfaction surveys.
- *Media Relations.* This is about building up relations with media companies. It concerns the company-to-company relations and also building personal contact with the individuals that make decisions on publication of articles.
- *Public Relations.* This is managing the information released to the media. It can include supplying a range of good news stories as well as being able to respond effectively to counteract any negative images that result, whatever the cause.
- *Branding.* This is about having unique features to differentiate the company from other organisations. It includes the company logo, which is typically used on all official letterheads and other communications, and on other company property such as vans and uniforms.
- *Marketing.* About targeting a specific audience, usually with a target of maintaining or growing the business or raising company profile.
- *Website.* This involves internet and intranet facilities.
- *Front House Operations.* Every member of staff who deals with external organisations is effectively a communications mechanism, passing on views, opinions and other information to tenants, suppliers and other organisations. It is not just the success of a task, but the method by which it is done that passes on perceptions of the company.

4. The aims of the Communication Strategy

"Sharing Information"

The company has a core value in sharing knowledge and information. This is important, not only to ensure that people are working together effectively as a team, but also to gain the following benefits;

4.1 To raise the profile and awareness of the company -

Having a consistent brand, and promoting a clear understanding and awareness of the company and services it provides amongst tenants, stakeholders and the wider environment.

4.2 To create a positive image of the company, both locally and nationally -

Social housing is becoming increasingly more visible in the media, however more often than not the publicity is often negative.

Effective communications can be used to achieve NSH objectives, enhance reputation and change possible misconceptions of who NSH is and what NSH does, both for NSH as an individual ALMO and for the housing sector as a whole.

4.3 To ensure a two-way communication process, with effective feedback -

Creating a structured, two-way communications process within NSH to improve both the internal flow of information to the team and external communications also, celebrating achievements of the company where appropriate and fostering a sense of pride in NSH.

4.4 To communicate policies, services and activities -

Developing communication channels which improve access to services for all NSH customers (internal and external stakeholders) and which are tailored to the needs of different tenant groups.

4.5 To enhance an environment and culture of continuous improvement -

Nurturing communications processes to ensure a learning organisation is developed, resulting in an enhanced environment and culture of continuous improvement.

5. How NSH currently deals with Communication issues

Appendix A is an example of the range of communication methods that are used by NSH in order to communicate with both its internal and external stakeholders. Targets for use of the methods listed are provided, where relevant, as is the monitoring mechanism. Many of these are quantitative measures, i.e. whether an event or occurrence has happened, more than whether the communication mechanism was as effective as it could/should

be. However, there are a range of satisfaction surveys that attempt to gather opinion on the effectiveness of services and this includes aspects of communication. Targets have even been set to achieve a level of complaints as receiving complaints is a positive indication that tenants believe the company will respond positively.

6. Requirements to enhance NSH Communications Effectiveness

Appendix B lists the factors that need to be considered in the creation of Corporate tasks to monitor the Communication Strategy. Clearly communications crosses all Directorates and potentially there will be aspects of communications monitoring that will appear in a number of Directorate plans. Some of these will be at the Corporate level and others at the team level within Directorates.

7. Summary of Communications Strategy and Communications Management

Sharing information (communication) is at the core of NSH business planning. The Company must ensure that it effectively manages its communications processes at the highest level and ensure that communications are aligned with the vision, business plan and objectives. Communications must actively promote NSH’s commitment to Diversity and Equal Opportunities.

It is a highly complex process, as indicated by the methods illustrated in Appendix A. Additionally, there are a range of control documents that also need consideration. Examples are the Corporate Strapline Procedure, the publication scheme and the emergency planning protocol.

Communications Management, therefore, requires that a process be set up to ensure targets are set where appropriate in advance of the period to be measured. The Communications Strategy will be reviewed annually for the effectiveness of the Strategy in providing direction as part of the effectiveness Improvement Planning Process within the Company’s Annual Business Cycle.

Communications Strategy

How NSH currently delivers its communications to stakeholders.

Internal Stakeholders

Elements	NSH Method	Target	Quantitative Monitoring mechanism
Internal Communications	Formalised meeting structure with staff, Management meetings	20/year Scheduled	Monthly KPI's Review of Timetable
	Internal Training	Annual Consideration	Annual Training Plan
	Board and Committee meetings with Board	8 weekly cycle	Review of Timetable
Publications + other literature	Home Comforts, Newsflashes Policies & procedures Noticeboards, flyers, posters, promos	Issued every 3 months 20/30 per year	Review of Issue date Check that emails issued are opened
Events	Staff Recognition Scheme Staff Briefings	6 monthly	Review of Timetable
Consultation	Staff Surveys, Suggestion Schemes Special Issue Groups	Annually	Review of Issue Date Partnership meetings

External Stakeholders

Method	NSH Mechanism	Target	Monitoring mechanism
Market Research	APSE data Housemark data NFA data CiH conference & Research, Housing needs Survey (Council, tri-annual) Status Survey Feedback surveys Satisfaction Surveys	Annual Submission Quarterly Submission N/a Annual Attendance N/a Case by case target Quarterly	Comments and Complaints, satisfaction levels Quarterly review
Publications	Annual Reports External KPI's Non statutory publications include leaflets and posters, tenants handbook, Home from Homes Feedback to Government's consultations	Annually Annually As required 3/year Case by case	
Events	TRA Conferences AGM	Annually Annually	

Method	NSH Mechanism	Target	Monitoring mechanism
	Board Meetings Walk-about Road-shows	Every 8 weeks Approx 25/annum during spring/summer As required	
Consultation	TRA and tenants through Area and District panels Tenant consultation register Easy Reading Panel	3 per year 75 plus membership	
Media Relations	Meeting media representative Inviting media to events		
Public Relations	Press releases Radio presentations		
Branding	Logo on letterheads, vehicles and uniforms		
Marketing	Advertising Opportunities Corporate leaflets		
Website			Periodic check

Appendix B

Requirements to enhance NSH Communications Effectiveness

- Clear understanding is required with regards to the messages NSH would like to communicate to different target audiences, resulting in effective action plans being developed and implemented
- For all communication initiatives, plan, monitor, evaluate, and make sure project objectives match with corporate objectives
- Ensure feedback to inform successive communications
- Ensure monitoring mechanisms are in place and targets set to evaluate effectiveness
- Review of suitability of possible new Communications methods should be ongoing e.g:
 - Staff Intranet
 - Employee "Communications Toolkit"
 - Proactive Media Programme
 - Lobbying and public affairs activity
 - Internal Communications Champions
 - CD/DVD communications – new tenants/new employees
- Annual assessment of effectiveness and impact of current communications, in terms of identifying the target and to assess whether the message is effectively delivered
- Assess effectiveness for proactive actions, e.g. as a result of a positive event, effective reaction and ability to deal with a crisis, and planning for campaigns
- Appropriate training in communications for all staff
- Clear evidence that Work Plans fit into Corporate Communication objectives
- Audit of internal/external communications

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