

Powys County Council Communications Review

February/March 2018

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Review of Powys County Council Communications

1. Introduction, scope and methodology

This report is written following five days of visits to Powys County Council in February and March 2018, and an exhaustive range of 35 interviews with 79 key figures ranging from elected members to staff at all levels, partners from the voluntary sector and town & community councils, trade unions, journalists, residents and the communication team itself. The review also examined around 600 pages of written evidence, including strategies, performance and evaluation reports, as well as newspapers, websites, videos and social media feeds.

The first three days of review and the final two were separated by a few weeks (extended a little beyond plan due to the snow conditions). This was designed to allow for the first mass of data to be preliminarily assessed, and emerging issues identified to be further explored as necessary on the return visit. This approach allows for evidence to be triangulated.

The review was commissioned to consider 12 Key Lines of Enquiry:

- Media relations
- Campaigns
- Events
- Engagement and consultation
- Digital
- Internal communications
- Welsh Language
- Equalities and hard-to-reach audiences
- Design and branding
- Commercialisation
- Capability, experience, qualifications, skills, knowledge
- Team organisation, structure, finance, operating systems

The findings from the review are presented over the following pages against each of those Key Lines of Enquiry in turn, for each one presenting a short summary drawn from the range of evidence gathered and triangulated. Next, the key issues are listed as particularly picked out based on my knowledge of communication practice across UK local authorities and other parts of the public sector.

After that, a range of specific recommendations are offered against these key issues, including models, toolkits, templates, systems and options for consideration. It is hoped that this will facilitate a helpful discussion within the authority, and enable speedy development of a realistic, affordable and readily-deliverable action plan leading to both immediate and sustainable improvements in how the council communicates across the board.

I would like to offer my wholehearted **thanks** to all those who made themselves available for interviews, provided evidence, and who uniformly engaged in this review process so openly and constructively, and with such welcome. Particular thanks to Melanie Hardwick, Sue Ling and Anya Richards for the faultless logistical arrangements.

2. Executive Summary

Powys is clearly an ambitious authority, focused on improving lives of its local residents. It has a detailed and wide-ranging transformation programme in place that positions it well in delivering these ambitions, in the context of a medium term financial plan that will find £17+ million in savings, some churn in senior staff leadership, and needing to address improvement issues in children's and adult social care highlighted by recent inspections.

In this context, the authority's leadership clearly appreciates the importance of effective and consistent communications with its residents, businesses, partners, and internally with its staff. The Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member responsible for communications, and the Chief Executive all demonstrate clear leadership and commitment to communicating effectively.

There is a legacy of major events across the county, with the authority often having played a leading and key role therein, albeit on an absolute shoestring core events budget. There is an ambition to expand this event programme, due to its positive contribution to wider priority outcomes. The corporate communication team has been key to the success of events to date, and it is leading the work in developing the current business case for expansion.

This review has found a great deal of effective communication performance, systems and campaigns, as well as around major events - and in particular, an experienced, creative, dedicated, well-qualified and well-led corporate

communication team. This is illustrated well by the range of awards won by the authority over recent years.

A good number (over 40) of clear opportunities and options for improvement in communications have also emerged across many of the key lines of enquiry. I'd estimate that either only five of these 40+ are either more fundamental questions for the authority and/or have potential resource implications, and these are drawn out explicitly.

There's a clear opportunity to improve the clarity of corporate priorities and consequential matching of communication resources and focus accordingly, leading to a clearer and consistent narrative for the council

There are a range of systems that could be introduced or refreshed to assist members and officers alike to both access specialist communication services and also where appropriate to self-serve.

The range of channels through which the authority can reach its residents is over-reliant on either old media (with often declining readerships and sometimes through an editorial slant) or social media (which isn't reaching everyone) – and options are offered to address this.

There isn't a settled view across the authority about which aspects of communications are everybody's business, and which are specialist roles expected of and suitably prioritised by the central communications team - the tensions that this generates can (and should) be addressed.

There are modest and straightforward changes that could readily be made to the way that the communications team operates that could enhance the way the council communicates.

There is a clear and obvious work pressure on the corporate communication team caused by the current level of events work let alone before any growth in the campaigns programme is decided. This is a major tension that needs to be resolved.

When the authority has considered which of this report's recommendations to accept, and has made sufficient progress with its action plan (including the majority of ideas which are quick wins), I'd suggest that it would be a good idea to have a low-key internal relaunch of the communication team and the

broader approach to communications across the authority. This is recommended so that changes to the approach can be widely understood, leaving staff and managers generally clearer about the support available, and the communication team feeling more enabled to focus on a new expression of priorities (rather than feeling that new priorities are simply layered on top of business-as-usual/historic levels of demand).

3. How does Powys compare?

There isn't a standard set of benchmarking data against which to compare local authority communication teams' performance, so such judgments are necessarily more subjective.

Where there is more objective qualitative data, such as that showing the authority to be firmly upper-quartile in its social media performance, compared to other Welsh councils, Powys compares very well.

The depth of this review nonetheless allows for a very good sense to be offered of how Powys is doing, particularly when considered against the twelve key lines of enquiry, and the detailed recommendations for change advanced in this report.

Most of these 40-odd recommendations offer potential quick wins, and most would have relatively modest broader implications or require much corporate effort. I'd anticipate that only five of the 40 or so would require either much leadership time or involve a significant financial consideration.

This pattern of findings reflects the clear review conclusion that **Powys overall compares very well against other UK local authorities in its approach to communications**, with most changes advanced perhaps best characterised as continuous improvement opportunities rather than fixing fundamental flaws (even though cumulatively, the modest changes should result in a more substantial and visible improvement).

Put another way, Powys is getting an awful lot right in its communication approach, with some genuine highlights of best practice evident, and little of significance badly wrong.

4. Key Line of Enquiry: Media relations

4.1 Summary

Powys is served by an unusually large number of local newspapers and media outlets - a common characteristic of large county authorities, compared to more concentrated (urban) authorities. As the largest employer in the area, the authority is also the focus of attention and scrutiny. The media landscape continues to change - with the ongoing and long-term decline in readership numbers of the print editions of local papers, balanced to some degree at least by the growth of online news sites, such as the excellent My Welshpool. The BBC remains a hugely important media partner in TV, radio and online, in both English and Welsh, and the newly-appointed BBC-funded local democracy news reporting arrangement just now coming online provides both a fresh challenge and a welcome new opportunity for the authority to gain greater coverage (albeit through existing media).

The authority's media relations specialists have a great deal of professional experience (both within the council and also within the media), and clearly demonstrated skills and comprehensive knowledge. It is worthy of mention, having (separately) interviewed three leading journalists as consumers of their services that the team is very well regarded indeed. A point made, repeatedly, by these journalists was that they deal with more than one authority, and are able therefore to directly compare the professionalism, reliability and helpfulness of the Powys team favourably with others.

Internal colleagues expressed a range of views about the specialist media relations support offered, from high praise through to impatience. My own (albeit relatively limited) observations of the team and its outputs helped reinforce both perspectives - I saw clear signs of both high standards of professionalism in the quality of their work, whilst at the same time observing systems and ways of working that could usefully be sharpened so as to deliver noticeable benefits – changes not always within the gift of the team itself.

4.2 Key issues raised/observed

The council's approach is felt by several to be too reactive, unfocused on key priorities, and ill-served by some corporate systems

The range of channels through which the council communicates with its residents over-relies on old media (with often declining readerships, and sometimes through an editorial slant) and social media (which isn't reaching

everyone); the removal of the printed residents' magazine may have been a false economy (and maybe even ended up costing more).

There are inconsistencies in how smoothly the process operates for sign-off of and subsequent use of releases, lines and quotes with cabinet members.

The authority is perceived as risk averse and conservative in its approach, and therefore missing some opportunities to communicate more effectively.

4.3 Recommendations:

- review the approach to agreeing corporate priorities and how those are reflected in the focus of the corporate communication team through a gold/silver/bronze campaign model - *see Appendix A – possible quick win*
- review forward planning coordination across the authority and how that is mirrored by the corporate communication team - *see discussion paper Appendix B – possible quick win*
- develop a corporate narrative – a way of telling the Powys story that reflects complex organisational strategies and partnership plans but in a compelling language and with plain English that residents, staff and other stakeholders alike are better able to engage with
- consider the channels available to the authority - including considering reintroducing a residents' newsletter; consider ways to boost subscriber numbers (currently under 500) e.g. Granicus - *see discussion paper Appendix C*
- start holding regular (if infrequent, perhaps annually) meetings between leading councillors, officers and the communication team with news outlet editors to improve relations. Such sessions can usefully focus on shared opportunities (e.g. pride of place, events) rather than solely as a forum for raising any perceived unfairness in specific stories– *possible quick win*
- review which communication functions are centralised and which devolved - *see discussion paper Appendix D – possible quick win*
- consider the authority's risk appetite in terms of media relations and campaigning - *see discussion paper Appendix E – possible quick win*

First of five bigger issues/recommendations – shifting communication activity to proactively focus on contributing meaningfully to achieving key priority outcomes

Shifting the focus of the communication team away from a more reactive pattern of activity onto a more planned and focused contribution to helping achieve key corporate and partnership outcomes requires not just work within the communication team, but also at a leadership level. Tried and tested tools and models to assist this, particularly in Appendices A and B. These are systems issues, and do not have any particular resource implications.

Second of five bigger issues/recommendations – considering reintroducing a regular printed residents' magazine

There's a clear gap in the tools that the authority (and the wider public sector partnership) has in communicating directly with residents, without having to go through the editorial lens of news outlets or over-rely on online and social media, that misses large swathes of local people. This is addressed in Appendix C. Although this does have resource implications, there is a distinct possibility that the apparent savings achieved by doing away with the previous residents' magazine will have had the unintended consequence of costing more money overall – i.e. a genuine false economy.

5. Key Line of Enquiry: Campaigns

5.1 Summary

The authority has for some time operated an effective approach to its campaigns, whether they be in promoting availability of services, or influencing behavioural change. The council's corporate communication team contains a good deal of campaigning experience, and has long operated the sector best-practice ROSIE/OASIS campaign planning, delivery and evaluation model, as recommended by the Government Communication Service.

There are however issues around capacity and focus in campaign delivery across the authority, in the evidence base available, and in specialist business-focused marketing capacity.

There are clear and well-tried models for addressing these issues which the authority can readily adopt.

5.2 Key issues raised/observed

There is good communication campaign experience within the authority's specialist staff, and a good range of satisfied internal clients (albeit with many of them making further remarks to the effect of 'they do a very good job, considering the pressure they are under to do so much').

A number (albeit still a minority) of interviewees characterised the campaign communication support available as reactive or passive, often with a message put out when requested, rather than feeling like a proactive and joined-up campaign.

Both the interviews and my own observations indicate that the volume of messaging is such that there is often little obvious distinction between what is said as part of a pre-planned campaign, as opposed to simply because someone has requested a release on something or it being triggered by usual run of business, like publication of a cabinet report. This reinforces the observed absence of an overarching narrative - particularly around changing resident expectations about the future role of the authority following MTFP savings requirements - the 'community resilience' storyline.

These descriptions clearly indicate that there is a mismatch between the high scale of demand across the authority for communication campaign support and the limited specialist capacity available. This is exemplified by there being no clearly visible and understood campaign programme, merely an expectation that the communication team will be able to deliver support on demand, leading to unrealistic expectations and with it a lack of client satisfaction with the depth of campaign support.

Each of the five transformational programmes, for example, contains multiple strands and projects (13 in one of the programmes alone), each of which variously requires communication and campaign capacity across a range of resident, business, partner, and internal stakeholder audiences. These (and other) programmes all run alongside the full range of 'business as usual' service demands, many of which require service promotion, change management, and behavioural change 'nudge' marketing. There may yet be more such demand on the horizon, around the area of public health campaigning, pending further integration with the Health Board.

A side effect of this is that the authority pumps out so many messages, often apparently with equal status, as to muddle any overarching narrative, rather than reinforce it.

When the only tools generally available to the communication team are the same for either top priority campaign messages or else routine low-level business-as-usual methods, there is only so much that can be done through creativity and phrasing to distinguish between the two. When the council is investing significant time and resource into its handful of top priorities, it would routinely be good practice to build in sufficient money to enable a significantly higher level of communication output. Where this is sometimes already the case in Powys – for example, investing in marketing spend in support of increasing recycling rates – it is not yet common practice.

Put another way, it is all very well dedicating more communication team time to a handful of top priority campaigns, but this needs to be matched with an appropriate non-staffing spend. To be truly impactful, a gold campaign would typically include spend in the order of £20,000. The private sector keeps a close eye on the profit margin, but wouldn't dream of launching a new product without a marketing budget, because they know that effective marketing is an investment in achieving their desired outcomes, rather than a dispensable luxury. This is a discipline that local authorities would be wise to adopt and adapt to their own service-based priority outcomes.

In addition, without a regular residents' survey, and reliance on the all-Wales survey, the authority lacks a substantial proportion necessary of the objective data to be able to track resident perception - and also campaign impact - particularly at a granular level across the authority area and demographics.

With a clear focus on attracting inward investment into Powys, and facilitating the sustainable growth of quality employment opportunities for local people, there is a shortage internally of expert marketing capacity able to support this. This is not uncommon in local authorities, where such specialism is usually bought-in (albeit coordinated with the in-house specialist communication function, rather than commissioned entirely separately, so as to ensure continuity and consistency).

5.3 Recommendations

- clearly identify and agree corporate priorities and with them, priorities for campaigns and consider adopting an appropriately resourced gold/silver/bronze campaign - *as addressed previously in Appendix A – possible quick win*
 - consider whether there is sufficient merit in supplementing the all-Wales residents' survey with additional regular Powys-wide surveys - *see Appendix F*
 - consider and commission any specialist inward investment specialist marketing support needed in coordination with the corporate communication team
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6. Key Line of Enquiry: Events

6.1 Summary

The council plays a major and supportive role in the campaigns across the county. This not only helps raise the profile of the authority at the huge numbers attending them, it actually helps those events come to the county and operate successfully.

The high quality of the work carried out on events by the corporate communication team is widely valued and acknowledged. This work is also enjoyed by the communication staff involved.

Making such events a success is a team effort across the authority, not least due to its statutory role leading the Safety Advisory Group process. Much of that event work is a major call on the capacity of the corporate communication team, albeit delivered on a shoestring core events budget. The corporate communication team has substantially developed its professional expertise in this area, with a number of its team members having gained professional qualifications in events management etc.

There is a member-led appetite to consider growing the events programme. The corporate communication team is driving the work to explore such an expansion, including commissioning suitable external expertise.

6.2 Key issues raised/observed

A new and expansionist events approach has recently been agreed and an Events Board established, with high level sponsorship. External expertise is due to be commissioned to consider events growth possibilities

There is a common perception that the corporate communication team spends too much time on events at the opportunity cost of other communications work

There is however no clear and obvious spare capacity or greater expertise elsewhere in the authority to site the responsibility

There is no core budgetary provision currently in place to allow for a substantial expansion of events activity - although this will doubtless be addressed by the Events Board, informed by this external expertise commissioned.

6.3 Recommendations

- consider the results of the external advice currently commissioned and any subsequent business case for events growth whilst in the meantime continuing to operate the new Events Board, with its strategic oversight – *possible quick win*
- as part of the consideration of that business case, carefully consider not only whether there is sufficient core budget in place for growth, but also whether there is also sufficient staffing capacity - and whether the responsibility going forwards should best remain in the communication team, as opposed to elsewhere, such as within the tourism or the arts and culture service - discussion paper Appendix G – *possible quick win*

Third of five bigger issues/recommendations: events capacity and managerial location

There are two issues in one here – firstly, does the authority have sufficient external spend resource and internal capacity to be able to deliver its ambitious events agenda; and secondly (regardless of any such growth issues) is events sited in the right place, considering (at its most simplistic level) that communications activity cannot be effectively delivered year round if a significant proportion of specialist capacity is otherwise occupied for weeks on end focusing on events? These issues are addressed in more detail in Appendix G.

7. Key Line of Enquiry: Engagement and consultation

7.1 Summary

The authority's approach to engagement and consultation is based around the principles and standards set out in the National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales, and the systems and work observed (albeit not in great depth) are consistent with this best practice. Individual consultation and engagement work is generally well integrated into the evidence base that informs key decisions.

There are two specialist posts within the communication team specialising in consultation work (albeit alongside other duties). In common with most councils, this specialist capacity delivers the key priority consultation and engagement activities for the council (e.g. budget consultation), with smaller or more routine consultations carried out from within the lead service department, advised and supported by the central team as necessary. For example, routine planning consent consultations are part of routine business as usual for planning officers.

There is also a network of engagement practitioners who work in partner organisations who meet up quarterly to consider and cross reference their work and share opportunities to co-consult, share resources or venues and good practice. A variety of training has also been provided over the past five years to help practitioners sustain and learn new skills. One member of the team chairs this group and they have recently been responsible for engaging residents on behalf of the Powys Public Service Board to produce the first Powys Well-being Plan.

The authority's reliance on the all-Wales residents' survey carried out by the Welsh Government (having ceased commissioning its own regular residents' survey) means that there is less control over specific questions, and a smaller-sample size for individual areas of Powys.

The financial pressures in coming years on the authority from reduced funding, combined with demographic changes and associated enhanced demand together create an opportunity to engage more deeply with local residents and other stakeholders about the future role of the council and a resilient community.

7.2 Key issues raised/observed

Although examples were given of major decisions that were altered as a result of consultation and engagement exercises over recent years (e.g. school reorganisation, budget consultations, bus services changes and Knighton Leisure Centre), it was generally felt that residents tend to feel there is a lack of ability to influence service delivery which can sometimes lead to a relatively low-level of participation or low levels of confidence in anything changing as a result of taking part in a consultation.

There didn't seem to be a coordinated approach to the planning and scheduling of consultation and engagement activity across the council. Although there didn't seem to be any immediate evidence of whether this was leading to incidents of consultation clashes or consequent 'consultation fatigue', equally, there wasn't any evidence that it wasn't.

Services tend to approach the central team often at very short notice, allowing insufficient time for effective preparation or coordination with other consultations. A simple template is used to help services consider all aspects of good engagement including stakeholder mapping and the translation of surveys/engagement materials, and this is appropriate.

Service decisions made post consideration of survey/consultation findings sometimes lead to a delay in getting feedback back out to stakeholders.

There is a particular appetite amongst senior members and officers interviewed to consider a fresh approach to engaging residents and other stakeholders in the development of a shared understanding of and approach to the challenges of reduced funding and increased demand over coming years.

There was a general acceptance amongst interviewees that the authority could be generally sharper at feeding back to consultees about how their views ultimately impacted on the issue at hand.

7.3 Recommendations

- consider whether there may be benefits from introducing a (proportionately light-touch) consultation and engagement coordination system – see *appendix H – possible quick win*

- review the general approach to feeding back the results of consultation and engagement exercises to consultees, so as to enhance confidence and participation levels – *possible quick win*

Fourth of five bigger issues/recommendations: options for a one-off fresh approach for engaging the public

There are a range of options which would be worthy of consideration so as to promote the important discussion with the general public as funding continues to shrink substantially in real terms, and also the development of a long-term approach to community resilience – *see appendix I*

Fifth of five bigger issues/recommendations: consideration of supplementing the all-Wales residents' survey with a larger-scale Powys survey

The authority should reconsider whether the all-Wales survey without its own annual residents' survey is sufficient in terms of both the questions it asks and the sample size to meet the authority's ongoing needs. There may well be potential for substantially reducing any extra cost by combining the two surveys (i.e. by agreeing to buy extra questions and an enhanced sample size from the same company already conducting the all-Wales survey). See appendix F.

8. Key Line of Enquiry: Digital

8.1 Summary

The council clearly recognises the still-growing opportunity to communicate with its residents on a two-way basis, whilst equally appreciating that digital communications is not everybody's cup of tea.

The authority's approach to social media is well-managed, modern, and well-evaluated, with the authority demonstrated as a solidly top-quartile performer in Wales, against the standard sectoral metrics.

There is quite a breadth of usage of social media, with a central specialist capacity within the corporate communication team, and a cohort of trained and supported users in other departments.

The corporate team runs a digital support group which is pioneering in its approach. This group includes key administrators of social media accounts within the council and allows the group to share their experiences and build their skill set. The team also provides training on social media to all staff saving the council money in providing the training in-house rather than paying for external trainers. This model in my view reflects the emerging best practice across local authorities.

The council's website is currently being refreshed, built on a new content management system. Lead responsibility for the website sits within customer services, with both IT and corporate communications contributing significantly. With the opportunities for channel shift being so significant to the authority, this managerial assignment of responsibility is in my opinion also reflective of sectoral best practice.

The authority's staff intranet is confusing, with poor navigation, and many of its 3,000 pages containing out of date information. This is already subject of a major piece of work to fix this, alongside meeting the Welsh language requirement for a fully bilingual intranet by September 2018.

8.2 Key issues raised/observed

It was mentioned by a few interviewees, and reinforced by my own observations that the council's use of language and general approach on social media is quite conservative. Although a risk-averse approach is not uncommon in local authorities, it does rather get in the way of making the most of an inherently informal medium.

Social media practice is evolving at a blistering pace – Facebook seem to change their algorithms and account settings almost weekly. Although Powys is already solidly one of Wales' better performers, and some matters of best practice are somewhat subjective, there are probably still a few areas (such as greater use of video) where in my opinion the council could make gains with minimal effort.

Where the approach to addressing the improvements rightly identified as necessary on the website seems appropriate, in comparison there wasn't an immediately clear 'owner' of the intranet.

8.3 Recommendations

- consider taking a slightly more relaxed approach to its tone of voice and general social media approach, more in line with the norms of the medium – *see appendix J – possible quick win*
- move to greater use of video on social media (which can easily gain 8-10 times more engagement than words alone), including potentially a business case for relevant staff moving to either an IOS or Android based work mobile phone (as Windows based smartphones are simply not fit for this purpose) – *also addressed in appendix J – possible quick win*
- decide who 'owns' the intranet going forwards, so that responsibility can be handed to someone when the current intranet refresh is completed (and that resource redeployed elsewhere). The obvious choices would be HR, customer services (so as to align with the website) or the communications team.

9. Key Line of Enquiry: Internal communications

9.1 Summary

Powys clearly recognises the importance of internal communications in ensuring that its workforce is supported in being able to do its job well, all as part of one council team.

The authority uses a blend of traditional mechanisms (including a staff magazine) alongside fresher approaches (such as a chief exec's video blog) and face to face engagement (ranging from toolbox talks for depot based staff to back-to-the-floor style visits from senior staff).

With the vast majority of council staff also residents, there is a general recognition that there are broader advantages that come from staff being well informed generally in their casual interactions with family, friends and neighbours.

9.2 Key issues raised/observed

Unsurprisingly perhaps, a considerable range of views were expressed on the overall state of internal communications by the range of interviewees, with

comments ranging from ‘much improved’ through to ‘not enough of it – and only when things go wrong’.

Particular concern was expressed at how full, honest or emotionally intelligent internal communications had been around a couple of specific issues of senior staffing, with some saying that they heard more or more quickly about what was going on at the top of the council either on the radio, the local papers, from the rumour mill or even from partner organisations than they did officially.

Equally, there was a recognition that sensitive situations cannot always be explained fully without unreasonably compromising the individuals’ reasonable expectations of privacy.

As is quite common within councils, there seems to be an overreliance on electronic communications, particularly considering the numbers of staff members who don’t routinely log-on to a computer as part of their working day. Although this is quite common within councils, it is if anything less of an issue in Powys than elsewhere – not least because Powys remains one of a clear minority of councils to still have a staff newsletter (a situation I’d strongly advise against changing).

Perhaps the most frequently made comment from interviewees was that the authority relies too much on one-way messaging broadcast through various channels, at the expense of managers having regular, direct, emotionally-intelligent, and sometimes difficult conversations with their staff.

9.3 Recommendations

- adopt the basic principles for internal communications of ‘no surprises’ and ‘staff shouldn’t first hear something about work that’s important to them from the radio or local paper’ – *possible quick win*
- maintain the blend of internal communications channels, including the printed staff magazine, and consider extending the video blogs (on a rotated basis) to other senior staff – *possible quick win*
- reinforce the importance to managers of having structured, regular and honest conversations and meetings with their staff, with senior staff and middle managers being challenged to lead by example – *possible quick win*

10. Key Line of Enquiry: Welsh Language

10.1 Summary

The authority is clear about its commitment to the Welsh language, and has invested in expertise (in-house, topped up as necessary by bought-in support from a roster), with what appears to be broadly sufficient capacity.

The Welsh language team is passionate and committed, and their systems for workload management appear sensible (whilst still balanced by a welcome, flexible and pragmatic approach to short notice requests). There was universal praise for their work and their attitude from all interviewee responses.

The most recent audit against the several hundred itemised requirements showed both good progress, general compliance and a great sense of organisation, whilst also highlighting the range of upcoming expectations, such as a fully bilingual intranet required by September 2017. There have nonetheless been 8 investigations and as a result, there is an appreciable sense of maintained focus, and avoidance of complacency.

Welsh language media in Powys is well established, and a couple of the cabinet are fluent in Welsh, as well as seasoned media performers.

10.2 Key issues raised/observed

Perhaps the most memorable remark made in one of the interviews was [words to the effect] ‘compliance with all these technical requirements is great – but it’s not going to get us to 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050’.

It was suggested that older Welsh-as-first-language speakers are likely an under-served audience by the council, as are perhaps also schools.

The approach to Welsh language communication seemed to be almost entirely centralised, notwithstanding the staff skills audit [with an admirable 65% completion] showing that quite a number of staff have level 5 advanced Welsh fluency. The key pressure for the team of translators is the sometimes unrealistic expectations of staff who need to get materials, web copy or other documents translated and expect a quick turnaround without giving any prior notice to the team.

Notwithstanding the hard work of the two fluent Welsh-speaking cabinet members, the opportunities for maximising coverage on S4C and Radio Cymru

are restricted by the almost uniformly applied rule that only cabinet members speak on the media on behalf of the authority.

Growing workload pressure on the current Welsh language capacity is perhaps anticipated as and when exemptions are lifted (such as on routine financial reporting).

10.3 Recommendations

- that senior management keeps specialist Welsh language capacity under review, particularly as more requirements come online, as exemptions are lifted, and pending any further complaints/findings
- that the authority has a qualitative discussion and longer-term think about whether or not the current approach to compliance, essential though it is, is 'enough' when set against the underlying challenge to encourage more Welsh speakers over coming decades
- that the council relaxes its general rule for S4C and Radio Cymru that only cabinet members talk on the radio or TV – albeit with staff coached not to stray into discussing issues of party politics – *possible quick win*
- That there is a routine reminder given to staff and managers that the translation team must be given as much advance notice as is reasonably possible, in line with their agreed turnaround – *possible quick win*

11. Key Line of Enquiry: Equalities and hard-to-reach/hard-to-hear audiences

11.1 Summary

Powys knows its residents well – it has a clear breakdown of its population, matched by a good understanding of how different demographics prefer (or are able) to communicate. Equally importantly, the authority understands that each resident is an individual, and there are (in parts) good customer service systems in place and record keeping on the CRM.

There are some clear examples of how hard to reach/hear audiences are particularly targeted, such as the inclusion of British Sign Language on key web pages to enable residents with hearing impairments or who are profoundly deaf to find out about services. Also, the Browse Aloud project to enable residents with visual impairments to hear information by highlighting segments of text on the website is another example of good practice.

Whenever the authority runs a consultation they first carry out a stakeholder mapping exercise and consider the channels and resources that are available to us re- producing easy-reads, large print, audio versions of documents etc.

With support from Powys People First, the authority has produced some easy read guides around the learning disability strategy consultation as adults with learning difficulties themselves so the guide was understandable to them and written by them for others.

There were some good examples of evaluation of communication with particular hard to reach audiences, although this evaluation seem to be perhaps sporadic.

11.2 Key issues raised/observed

Although the council has a good understanding of its residents' demographics, although this doesn't routinely translate into targeted communications based on an understanding of different audiences' preferences and media take up.

Similarly, although the authority seems good at making reasonable adjustments in its communications on request from individual users, there seems to be an inconsistent pattern of learning. For example, if a resident requested a letter to them translated into Braille, this will not be recorded on the CRM system with future letters automatically being sent to that resident in Braille without them having to re-request each time.

11.3 Recommendations

- That the communication team carries out a quick exercise to identify the demographics of the different readerships/listnerships etc. for the range of communication channels available to them. That knowledge (perhaps summarised into a simple infographic) should then be routinely used at the start of any communication planning to focus use of channels accordingly.
- That the authority explores a future approach to capturing requests for reasonable adjustments in their communications (e.g. providing information in Braille, large print, or in audio files) on the appropriate Customer Relationship Management system(s), so that in future, such materials are provided to those users automatically, without them having to repeatedly request afresh.

- That the authority adopts a forward plan for evaluating the effectiveness of its communication with particular hard to reach audiences – and that this is done on a deep-dive, qualitative basis, rather than a formulaic tick-box approach. (For example, this may be a once/twice a year approach scheduled over 2-3 years, where a different aspect is considered each time e.g. a review in the summer of communications with people with visual impairment; a second review next winter over accessible communications with people with learning disabilities; a third review next summer over communications with the deaf and hard of hearing etc. etc.)
 - That the council considers an internal awareness campaign for its staff about communication resources available for hard to reach/hear audiences – e.g. which rooms have induction hearing loops, how to borrow and operate the portable hearing loop etc. etc. This approach should also celebrate the investment and effort the authority is already making in this regard, and how it is making a positive impact. Constructing this quick-and-easy awareness campaign might also prompt the identification of any obvious gaps, which would usefully form the core of a development/improvement activity.
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12. Key Line of Enquiry: Design and branding

12.1 Summary

Powys appreciates the importance, and positive impact of good design and branding in communicating effectively. Importantly, the authority manages this without as far as I could tell going over the top in over-designing too much, which for other authorities often tends to lead to a backlash. In going into an authority I typically look for examples of wasteful, ‘vanity’ publishing, and in Powys I happily found relatively few.

The authority’s fairly recent rebranding, focusing on the historic red kite icon is a model of good practice – using in-house resources, rather than an expensive (non-local) design agency, building on a well-loved existing design element, using a design that works well in both (Wales) colours and monochrome. I couldn’t immediately (by way of a google search) find any critical news coverage of the rebranding.

The in-house design capacity (which also manages print buying) is well-regarded by the range of internal clients with whom I spoke, and the flexibility offered for short-notice priorities is appreciated.

12.2 Key issues raised/observed

Having carried out an admittedly fairly small review of designed materials, I found the professional standards to be consistently high, accessible, and in line with the Powys style guide (which itself is a very well-produced document). This was apparent across traditional printed materials (documents, reports, posters, leaflets etc.), marketing collateral (e.g. pop-ups and banners) and online.

I found little evidence of wasteful design and print or 'vanity publishing' (one of the lowest amounts of the dozen authorities of which I have personal experience).

For an authority the size of Powys, with its range of services, and the inevitable extra workload associated with bilinguality, it would surprise me if one graphic designer is sufficient capacity, even when ruthlessly cutting out unnecessary design demands. Consequently, Powys spends £20-25k PA on external designers – not for specialist work, just in recognition of excess essential demand over supply. I would judge this situation to present

Around digital design and animation, some of the team have developed expertise in digital tools like Go Animate, Canva and Prezi. This good practice can be further developed and shared more widely.

The photography budget was removed from the team a few years although the majority of the team are very capable and take photographs at different events and press launches. The team have access to some specialist cameras but also use iPads and their own mobile phones to take photos and tweet or post these on Facebook as appropriate as well as sending them out with press releases to all the local media. This is pretty standard practice across local authorities, although it's not a great use of communication officer time to be asked to take photos at events that end up taking a half a day or so of their time (including travel).

Some of the team have developed expertise in creating short films for use in a range of channels including the vlogs for the staff intranet, website content and social media posts. Training has been commissioned to provide support to

staff who are interested in developing these skills so as to provide a council-wide network of employees who can turn their hand to video production and help the council to promote good news stories.

12.3 Recommendations

- That there is a routine reminder given to staff and managers that design work commissioned must be through the design unit, must be with as much advance notice as is reasonably possible, must be in line with the settled design and branding guides (so as to remain accessible etc.), and should avoid vanity publishing (listening to the challenges made by the design team). In my experience, this works best by the chief executive giving out that message personally to managers' meetings, and mentioning that he will ask the design team to bring him once a year their selection of most wasteful products they've been required to design – *possible quick win*.
- That serious consideration is given to a business case to expand the design team by a graduate position, thus substantially increasing resilience, at roughly nil net cost by reducing external design spend – *possible quick win*.
- That the corporate communication team not be used as photographers when this will take several hours of their time (including travel time) with relevant service departments supported in developing confidence in taking photographs themselves, or else invited to commission a freelance photographer – *possible quick win*.

13. Key Line of Enquiry: Commercialisation

13.1 Summary

Powys, like all councils, is facing several further years of real-terms reduced funding, at the same time as growing demand for services, not least from a population that we're all pleased to see is living longer, healthier lives. This plays out into an MTFP savings requirement of £17 million over coming years – a figure which is only set to grow.

In this context, the authority is, very sensibly, carefully considering the way it works, and leaving no sensible option off the table in an effort to meet these cost pressures with the minimum of negative impact on service users.

This thinking includes a consideration of commercialisation, whether on the one hand that is outsourcing services to deliver more for less, or on the other hand selling specialist surplus capacity or entering into shared service arrangements with partner organisations, so as to be entrepreneurial.

I have applied that thinking during my review to consider whether there are any such opportunities for the range of communication services.

13.2 Key issues raised/observed

A number of interviewees wondered whether there might be a range of commercialisation opportunities for different aspects of the authority's communication services – whether that was externalisation or selling specialist spare capacity. Equally however, on further exploration, various factors were raised as caveats or pre-conditions, which would need to be factored into such considerations – such as not wanting the authority to take work away from existing local small businesses, and not compromising the quality of services provided to the council by any new arrangement.

13.3 Recommendations

- It would be helpful for the authority to have a laid down set of criteria against which to measure various commercialisation opportunities, both as a way of triaging different services to see which might warrant more serious market testing, and also to ultimately inform decisions. – *a discussion document on such criteria is offered as appendix K. – possible quick win*
- It is my opinion that against these criteria, there are few (if any) opportunities within communication disciplines that are worth more fully exploring through to business case development/formal market testing – *see table and notes at appendix L.*

14. Key Line of Enquiry: Capability, experience, qualifications, skills, knowledge

14.1 Summary

I was offered feedback on members of the communication team from most people I interviewed as part of this review, including senior members, staff and managers at all levels, trades union colleagues and also external customers, such as journalists.

This feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many remarks repeated along the lines of ‘there are some real up and coming stars in that team’, ‘there is a wealth and depth of experience in some of the team that is really valuable’, and ‘the people I work with in that team have a great attitude, notwithstanding working under real pressure and to short deadlines’.

I met I believe every member of the communication team during my five days of visits, and discussed their work with them in considerable detail. Their commitment, energy and enthusiasm was infectious, and I observed first-hand the skill mix referenced by others between longer-serving experienced staff members and newer entrants to the profession.

There has clearly been a sustained focus on continuous professional development in the team over many years, and the breadth and depth of professional qualifications across the team is the best I have seen.

It is worthy of note that the team’s manager is particularly well qualified, experienced and knowledgeable, and has a reputation as a thought leader in her field across Wales and the whole of the UK. It is commendable that the authority is part-funding her doctoral studies in public relations and engagement. I would consider her leadership and professional skills to be first class.

14.2 Key issues raised/observed

Although most members of the team are generalists, with generic job descriptions, they’re not all routinely comfortable across the full range of skills, leading in practice to some team members doing substantially more of one function (e.g. media relations) and others more of another (e.g. social media). It is a positive benefit for there to be some ongoing specialisation and playing to strengths; having function specialists in a team is a positive advantage, for the purposes of keeping up with latest developments, as well as handling the small number of most sensitive and important issues at the highest standard. (This is developed in Appendix M.)

However, it did seem to me that the balance wasn’t quite right, and that it’d be slightly more efficient for routine business for each team member to see through more of the issues they’re working on end to end rather than either passing off them off to a colleague for completion (or not make the most of the multiple channels available).

Although this is mainly a way of working/management /workflow assignment issue, there may be some training implications.

Observations were made during the course of the interviews that there is insufficient expertise and/or insufficient capacity within the corporate team with a suitable marketing specialism. This was felt to be a gap by some service managers in the support available to in turn help either proactively market income-generating council activities or to prompt behavioural change through nudge marketing campaigns.

14.3 Recommendations

- Continue and extend refresher training (in-house, led by colleagues) on various aspects of communications (from media relations to social media) – *possible quick win*
- Develop a team matrix approach, to help identify portfolio leads, gold campaign leads, channel owners and functional experts (amongst generic officers) – *see Appendix M. – possible quick win*
- Consider afresh whether the team contains sufficient marketing expertise, particularly in light of the earlier recommendation in section 4 around a more proactive and strategic campaign-driven approach.
- (There are training aspects to the recommendation on making greater use of video advanced in the earlier section 7.)

15. Key Line of Enquiry: Team organisation, structure, finance, operating systems

15.1 Summary

It's clear that Powys has reflected the importance it has placed on resident, stakeholder, partner, business and staff communication by investing in a suitably skilled team. In turn, that team is well organised, structured and supported by appropriate systems.

The majority potential improvements identified in this review and listed in previous sections are issues of operating systems, rather than capability related.

15.2 Key issues raised/observed

An entirely legitimate challenge was raised in the review interviews as to team size/cost, relative to other (comparable) authorities.

The short answer to this is that size and cost of the Powys set-up is comparable, and certainly not excessive. *The long answer, with evidence and explanation, is set out in Appendix N.*

Most specialist communication staff in the authority are centralised within the communication team, with only one such post based in a service department (supporting fostering and adoption marketing). This is extremely common in authorities, and indeed such a specific fostering/adoption marketing post is the most common example of this approach. At only one such post, there is substantially less of this in Powys than in my experience of most other councils.

A couple of other specialist communication posts based in the central team are specifically funded by different service budgets – waste and social care. Having spoken to the lead client officers from those service departments, they have varying degrees of concern about whether they are getting their full value for money, or whether or not their dedicated/hypothecated capacity is being spread more widely. This is an unhelpful approach, which causes ongoing tensions and distractions, and appears to run counter to finance colleagues' preferred approach.

My examination of the way things work in Powys showed one system with key reputational importance that works illogically, namely around the (lack of) early involvement of the communication team in reports produced for cabinet. It is absolutely routine best practice, commonly employed in the clear majority of authorities, for communication teams to have access to draft cabinet reports sufficiently early in their drafting and approval process to be able to not only prepare for them entering the public domain, but also to be able to influence them. Although Powys has a standard 'communication implications' section in cabinet reports, in practice, it turns out that this section is often completed by departmental officers without any involvement of the communication team (in stark contrast I presume to the similarly standard financial and legal implications sections of those same reports). Instead, I was told that the communication team will often only see the final reports for the first time when they are published on the website (or very shortly beforehand) – meaning they miss the opportunity to get on the front foot in handling their communication. Happily, this should be extremely easy to fix, without any unintended consequences of unwieldy additional bureaucracy or any delays.

15.3 Recommendations

- Consider either centralising the fostering/adoption marketing officer post into the corporate communication team, or else at least adopting a 'dotted line' managerial relationship, so as to improve the efficacy of the decentralised arrangement, by providing greater ongoing professional development and support to the officer in question. – *possible quick win*
 - Resolve the 'dedicated/hypothecated' communication officer situation. Here, I strongly suggest that the budget for each of these two posts is transferred permanently and in full from the service department, and the resulting resource is considered part of the corporate communication team base budget, to be deployed against corporate priorities, rather than assigned on the basis of which budget it came out of historically. – *possible quick win*
 - Add in the lead communication officer into the cabinet paper loop earlier in the development of reports with the expectation that they can then proactively prepare suitable lines, press releases, quotes etc. so positive or fair media coverage is received around key decisions – *possible quick win*
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16. Schedule of appendices

- A. Reviewing the approach to agreeing corporate priorities and how those are reflected in the focus of the corporate communication team
- B. Reviewing forward planning coordination across the authority and how that is mirrored by the corporate communication team
- C. Channels available to the authority [including considering reintroducing a residents' newsletter; consider ways to boost subscriber numbers (currently under 500) e.g. Granicus]
- D. Communication functions: centralised or devolved
- E. Considering the authority's risk appetite in terms of media relations and campaigning
- F. Sufficiency of survey approach: does the all-Wales residents' survey need to be supplemented with additional regular Powys-residents' surveys?
- G. What's the right future organisational home for major events?
- H. The case for a light-touch consultation and engagement coordination system
- I. Options for a one-off fresh approach for engaging the public in the discussion around and then development of a long-term approach to community resilience, as funding continues to shrink substantially in real terms
- J. Tone of voice and general social media approach and greater use of video on social media
- K. Criteria against which to measure various commercialisation opportunities
- L. Thumbnail evaluation of opportunities within communication disciplines that are worth more fully market testing
- M. Developing a team matrix approach, to help identify portfolio leads, channel owners and functional experts (amongst generic officers)
- N. Communication team size/cost, relative to other (comparable) authorities.

Appendix A - Matching communication resources appropriately to agreed organisational priorities, and developing a gold/silver/bronze campaign approach

There's a common aspiration across local authorities to focus the capacity of their communication teams on making a proactive contribution to key corporate priorities and outcomes, rather than allowing it to be spread too thinly, and ultimately spending the majority of team time reacting to a seemingly endless stream of lower-priority demands.

There's a widely recognised pattern of communication teams slipping into a reactive, bitty working pattern described memorably by the Local Government Association's communication director, David Holdstock, as 'SOS – sending out stuff'.

Even high performing communication teams can benefit from a periodic review every few years of how much of their capacity is dedicated to this higher volume/lower impact form of activity, at the expense of a more tightly focused, in depth and meaningful contribution to genuine corporate priorities.

There isn't an established 'right' proportion of communication effort between priority activity on the one hand and bitty, business-as-usual work on the other, but it'd be a useful rule of thumb to expect that a clear majority of capacity is dedicated onto priorities. In Powys, at present, it is not.

To achieve this refocusing, it's important not only to more systematically manage the supply of communication resource, but also to manage the demand (so that a shift in resource doesn't lead to unintended and negative consequences).

Put more simply, you can't just redirect capacity and turn off the tap to internal customers who have got used to a level of support without managing their expectations and as far as is practical first providing alternative support mechanisms. At least, not without resentment, and unintended consequences that negatively impact the business in a large number of smaller ways.

Many of the other recommendations in this report, and associated appendices are focused on managing that demand issue, such as through templates, toolkits and various supported self-serve methodologies. This appendix

focuses instead on managing the supply-side, through the creation of a gold/silver/bronze campaign approach.

The concept is quite straightforward – take a holistic overview of the amount of specialist resource available, and consciously assign the majority of that resource up front, on a pre-planned basis to a series of campaigns.

This is quite a similar model to the well-established approach to commissioning internal audit work. There, a proportion of capacity is dedicated to core (audit) duties, including reactive work (issues that require investigation that crop up through the year); the remaining capacity is then dedicated on a forward-planned basis to a small number of key priority areas agreed by the authority as the client.

Gold campaigns: 20% of capacity (rising to 30%)

Small in number (3-6), reflecting key corporate objectives

Each large in scale, delivering a thorough, well-evaluated (linked to residents' survey), multi-phase, multi-media campaign. Usually 1-3 years in length.

Capacity can increase here after 6-12 months, and initial campaigns proved concept

Silver campaigns: 15% of capacity (rising to 20%)

Fairly small in number (10-12), reflecting other corporate objectives that didn't

quite make it into the Gold list, but are still key elements in service plans. Each medium in scale, delivering an evaluated, possibly single-phase, prob multi-media

campaign, but substantially smaller than a gold campaign. Usually 1-2 quarters long

Bronze level activity: 20% of capacity

Large in number, small in scale reflecting routine demand from across the council

Each a stand-alone piece of work, often through several channels (with a light-touch repurposing of content); evaluation usually at most limited to output or outtake

measures. Capacity dedicated can reduce as supported self-serve beds in.

Supported self-serve: 20% of capacity (falling to 10%)

This is capacity in the communication team to build networks, develop wider

capacity, draft templates and self-help toolkits, as well as light-touch ongoing

quality assurance. The proportion of capacity in this area can reduce after the first 6-12 month initial push.

Managing channels and reactive work: 25% of capacity (falling to 20%)

Some capacity needs to be preserved to answer press enquiries, monitor and

engage as appropriate with social media, edit email newsletters etc. Capacity

dedicated here can possibly be slightly reduced after 6-12 months once more is being done proactively.

Having implemented this shift previously elsewhere, I do recognise that it requires a 'leap of faith' from the communication team – who are often anxious that they are about to be assigned responsibility for gold and silver campaigns, but whose workload elsewhere isn't just going to disappear.

To make this shift work, it needs the council's leadership, officer and member alike, to recognise that this is the new way of working for the communication team, and that they are from then on not available to attend a 3 hour project team (for a non-gold campaign related project), or to travel to the other side of the county to take photos at a non-gold campaign event. More than that, this new approach needs to be cascaded down through management to all those staff who are used to requesting the communication team to 'send out stuff'.

In agreeing which campaigns will be assigned gold or silver status, the usual approach adopted in other councils using this model is for the senior leadership team to agree the gold programme on an annual basis, and for directorates to then agree the silver campaign programme also annually, but reviewed quarterly (with each directorate on average getting one silver campaign per quarter, all forward-planned at least 3 months ahead).

It is vitally important that Gold campaigns are not defined so broadly that they become umbrellas for all council activity – e.g. 'people', 'place' or 'change'. If this were to happen, then experience elsewhere suggests that rather than lead to a meaningful refocusing of resource onto genuine priorities, instead, every current internal customer would simply start quoting the most convenient gold campaign heading hoping that this would access them an even greater level of service than they had been useful. Gold campaigns can have several elements, but they must still be sufficiently focused, or else this approach simply doesn't work.

Once this campaign rhythm is in place, it facilitates a more productive conversation between the communication team and internal clients. Requests made directly would be offered a bronze level of support, or directed to supported self-serve. Internal clients who needed more than that would be referred up to their own directorate management teams that could consider competing bids, and decide the higher priorities, rather than leaving this to the comms team to have to interpret.

The highest priorities amongst the silver campaign candidates for even more resource could then be taken on to the senior leadership team for consideration into the gold campaign programme (although in reality, these are usually very easily drawn from the existing corporate plan).

This resource allocation approach is light touch, transparent and unbureaucratic. It gives clarity to both the communications team and the rest of the organisation. It gives clear lines of accountability, and promotes a qualitative assessment of a handful of big and important pieces of work (instead of a tick-box approach that gives disproportionate importance to small things). Best of all – it actually works in refocusing communication resource onto actual corporate priorities, and away from ‘sending out stuff’.

Appendix B - Forward Planning & Coordination

A good proportion of council communication teams operate a short-term tactical 'grid' approach to forward planning of work, paired with a longer-term, more strategic campaign planning approach [as outlined previously in appendix A].

An example of a grid is attached - drawn from a simple Excel spreadsheet.

Typically a grid would look ahead in detail for 2-3 weeks, and be refreshed on a weekly basis (albeit with an expectation that all communication team members routinely update the grid as they go along, using it as an ongoing work coordination tool, rather than a reporting system that only needs to be completed as a chore ahead of reporting deadlines).

This allows for a proportionately light-touch way of prompting (and monitoring) the approach to focusing communication activity onto higher priority activity.

A grid also allows for easy coordination of message content across channels, maximising visibility of messages with only minimal repurposing. Such a coordination approach also supports greater resilience, allowing work to be easily reassigned in the case of unexpected sickness.

Not all work is predictable, so as unexpected (but still important) work comes along, it can be quickly integrated into the grid, with work reassigned or rescheduled as necessary on a dynamic basis.

A snapshot of the forward planning grid can be made routinely available to senior members and officers, allowing for a 'no surprises' approach. This kind of grid approach also makes it easy to coordinate and schedule activity to avoid message clash or overload.

The grid is usefully populated by drawing from a range of sources, including the cabinet forward plan, agendas for other key committees, directorate service plans, and other corporate forward planning systems. Communication team members are able to add to the forward plan as appropriate based on their own direct links to the service areas with which they liaise [see appendix M on a matrix approach]. The majority of content for

the forward plan can (at least in due course) be drawn from key campaign plans [see appendix A].

Integral to making this kind of tactical forward planning approach work is an expectation across the authority that the comms team is told what is going on ahead of time, rather than at the last minute (or indeed after the fact). By sharing the three-week detailed forward look snapshot extract on a weekly basis with senior members and management, any issues with significant communication or reputation implication not included therein but in the knowledge of senior management can be flagged up, still allowing enough time to prepare.

This explicitly includes the standard expectation that the communication team is 'in the loop' with key cabinet reports at an appropriately early stage or their drafting, and not (as it seems sometimes happens at the moment) only shared either imminently before their publication, or even worse, only once they've been published on the council website along with the public agenda. Such a situation means that the authority misses the chance to sell in a story to journalists or other citizen commentators, and instead has to respond to the (more likely negative) narrative that emerges.

Communications in as complex an environment as a large unitary authority is necessarily dynamic. It is absolutely routine for proactive PR opportunities listed in the tactical grid up to three weeks out to change before delivery date for a whole range of reasons. Such a grid is therefore of more use as a dynamic planning tool rather than a performance report (although obviously it would be concerning if none of the things scheduled on the grid actually ended up happening). Operational experience across authorities shows that the grid is more useful in performance management terms by providing a list of issues from which to dip sample and qualitatively assess how one or two individual opportunities are handled, rather than a scorecard assessed quantitatively.

So as to support the 'no surprises' approach, it is better to have potential communication opportunities or challenges 'pencilled in' to the grid, rather than only recording finalised items. For example, if an inspection result, funding announcement or important trial verdict is even potentially due sometime in the next fortnight, it should be pencilled in immediately, instead of waiting for the exact date to be confirmed.

Appendix C - communication channels available

Populations as large and diverse as the residents of Powys necessarily consume their news and information through a whole range of different media, whether it is old media (TV, radio, or the range of newspapers operating across the county), new media (including a growing number of digital news platforms and hyperlocal sites in Powys, Facebook, Twitter etc.), advertising and marketing opportunities (e.g. bus side advertising), direct contact with the council, and word of mouth in their families and communities.

My observations in this review suggests that there are four key opportunities for increasing and maximising the number of ways that the council can get its message out: greater use of digital direct mail, possible chances for more effective use of the vehicle fleet (and maybe even the council estate) as an advertising platform, more effective use of council staff as a word of mouth conduit, and a residents' magazine.

Advice on further enhancing the authority's good use of social media channels (already firmly in the top quartile of Welsh authorities by available measures) is offered elsewhere - see appendices J and K.

1. Digital direct mail

Powys (in common with most authorities) produces an electronic newsletter, distributed via email. This electronic newsletter however has fewer than 500 people on the mailing list, and uncertain evidence as to how many read or act on the articles contained therein.

It is important in relation to upcoming GDPR requirements that such mailing lists are managed appropriately.

I would strongly suggest that the authority considers an approach such as using Granicus, the most popular public service platform for newsletter promotion.

This 'gov delivery' approach has the considerable advantage of being able to grow recipient lists considerably, by allowing people who have signed up for one Granicus client (e.g. the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, the Met Office, HMRC etc.) to also request local news on any range of services provided by the authority, and by so doing, to sign up for content from Powys.

With 150 public bodies as clients, this approach is in my professional opinion unmatched by any of the other comparable options on the market - though

obviously Powys would want to do its own due diligence and proper market testing.

Other benefits of using such a system would allow for greater technical analysis of reach and impact, and A/B testing of fresh approaches to format and writing style (drawn on a wider base of existing experience) that would allow each such output to be refined and its value in contributing to Powys-specific outcomes to be maximised.

2. Vehicle fleet (and building estate)

Powys doubtless has a considerable vehicle fleet. The equivalent cost of placing adverts on the same number of buses to carry a range of important public service messages would be astronomical, and yet the same impact can be achieved at minimal cost. Experience in Bristol City Council, for example, shows that a high quality advertising decal can be designed, printed and applied for about £150, and with minimal effort or disruption to the authority's existing vehicle maintenance scheduled garage visit (and readily removable, so that no damage is done to the vehicle asset). This ends up providing advertising at approximately 2% the cost of commercial bus side hire. It only requires sufficient coordination between campaigns and existing vehicle maintenance schedules, and design of campaigns so that they carry enduring messages, as the adverts would typically stay visible for 3+ months.

Although I know that Powys already carries waste messages and fostering campaign messaging on some of its vehicles, there may be an opportunity to extend this.

Key to maximising the value of this approach is considering the vehicle fleet as a corporate asset. There is no reason why a libraries book delivery van can't and shouldn't carry recycling messages or why a bin lorry shouldn't carry fostering advertising. Such decisions should be dictated by the corporate campaign programme, not by departmental preciousness.

Likely of secondary value, and complicated potentially by requirements for planning consent, but a similar approach can potentially be taken to advertising opportunities on council buildings. (This is therefore a lesser opportunity.)

3. Council staff as ambassadors

Compared to other geographically smaller authorities, more of Powys staff will also be residents - and therefore be a part of the 'word of mouth' chain through which residents generally hear and shape their views of the authority. It's not the job of staff out of hours to be ambassadors for the authority with their families, friends, neighbours and communities, and it'd be unrealistic to imagine that they could all be persuaded to act in this way. Equally however, the public service ethos that attracts a majority of people into working for councils in the first place shouldn't be underestimated. Supporting staff in having the information handy so that they can participate constructively in word of mouth discussions about the council is a legitimate function of effective internal communications.

If I were to offer just one tip that might help in this regard, it is to supplement existing briefing notes or internal communication messages with shorter and snappy single-fact/single-message campaigns - preferably focused around actual front-line staff member volunteers.

For example: an internal poster campaign/online for a month/quarter of two staff members' faces alongside the message 'Meet Alun, one of 20 new social workers who've joined Powys this year, and Alison, his experienced social worker mentor.' Such a campaign, seen everywhere, helps a really simple message sink in: Powys has successfully recruited 20 social workers, and it values social workers generally.

4. Residents' magazine

Powys is in good company - a majority of councils across the UK have dispensed with their printed residents' magazines, particularly as budget pressures have ramped up.

However, in so doing, councils have generally found that this leaves them over-reliant in reaching out with important communications to residents on either social media (which isn't everyone's cup of tea) and through traditional media (which often has its own editorial slant meaning that messages are often skewed).

More than that, a number of councils have found that the cash saving in abolishing a printed residents' magazine has actually been a false economy. This is because services who previously relied on the magazine to push out an

important message about a service change, a new benefit entitlement etc. now have to find other more individually costly mechanisms.

Similarly, as public services transform the way they work, including across different agencies, the need to support residents is increasing, not shrinking.

This point in particular was made by one of the senior external figures I interviewed as part of this review, who felt that the removal of the residents' magazine was a backward step.

That is why I strongly suggest that Powys takes a quick and dirty look at whether services have either experienced a loss in their ability to communicate effectively, or even faced individual increasing costs as a result.

In addition, I suggest that the council informally explores with public service board partners, whether there might be an appetite for reintroducing a quarterly residents' magazine. Even if the council were to continue as the lead agency in producing a new such magazine, colleagues from the NHS, police, voluntary sector etc. may be prepared to contribute both content and cash, as the economies of scale in producing and distributing a single magazine make this a prime opportunity for a shared approach.

Appendix D - Communications functions: centralised or devolved

Powys is typical of local authorities in regard to having a 'mixed economy' of specialist communication and engagement resource. The majority of these staff are in the corporate communication team, and funded corporately. A smaller proportion of staff (two in Powys) are based in the corporate team, but funded by service departments, and focused on providing enhanced/dedicated level of work for those business areas. A number of other specialist communication and engagement staff are based within and funded by service departments, such as a specialist marketing and recruitment role in adoption and fostering, or tenant/leaseholder engagement posts in housing and young people engagement roles in children's services.

The funding streams behind these posts is sometimes complicated, whether it is from partnership funding, ring-fenced grant, or the HRA.

The growth of this pattern of resourcing in authorities is usually best described as having evolved over several years, rather than having been planned. As a result of this lack of strategic approach, authorities often end up finding that the allocation of tax payer funded resource does not reflect today's or the coming years' corporate priorities.

This imbalance between resource and corporate priorities is substantially exacerbated when authorities then face up to substantial austerity-driven corporate savings requirements. At best, it can mean that the amount of centrally accounted resource gets trimmed back and the service based resource remains, exaggerating the imbalance between resource dedicated and corporate priorities. At worst, it can lead to double-cuts, where both corporate and service based funding is cut simultaneously (but without a corporate overview) ending up in cumulative cuts that has a bigger and more negative impact than intended.

There isn't a simple or inherently 'correct' approach to this challenge. Full centralisation of resource (including the budget provision) is simple, and can easily facilitate the dedication of resource to corporate priority, but it has an impact felt as punitive by those services that had invested most in topping up specialist communication resource (and leave them feeling like they've faced double cuts).

This approach also has potential complications, depending on any ring fencing around the resources currently/historically dedicated. It's also over simplistic to imagine that physically and financially centralising such specialist roles based in service departments wouldn't have unintended consequences, as those posts have often evolved into hybrid specialists/generalists, where they spend part of their time on specialist communication and engagement functions, and the rest of their time on other relevant duties, which simply wouldn't fit if all carried over into a corporate team.

The opposite approach, full devolution of resource to service departments is even more problematic, in that it tends to lead to a further dissonance between resource dedicated and corporate priorities.

My advice to Powys is to ensure, regardless of which structural solution it adopts, that it considers whether the resulting amount of resource (wherever it is based) dedicated to communication and engagement is deployed in a way that meets corporate priorities.

Having said that, my own instinct would be to centralise the two posts already based in the corporate communication team, and to ensure at least a dotted-line relationship between the staff based in children's services and housing so that the senior communication professional can adopt a 'head of profession' role for them, if not full line management.

Appendix E - risk appetite in communications

Councils are inherently [small-c] conservative in their approach to communications. They are statutory bodies, carrying out serious duties, including enforcement activities that its clients don't always enjoy, and sending out big bills that its residents aren't always happy to pay. It is therefore both natural and appropriate that councils adopt a low-key approach to their communication activities - they are not free to adopt a rebellious or frivolous corporate personality, in the way that a clothing company or a soft drinks manufacturer can.

There is an unintended consequence of this otherwise entirely natural approach - that opportunities to communicate effectively by using humour are necessarily limited. Some councils have taken a conscious decision to take a few more risks in the way they communicate, so as to spread their messages further and more impactfully.

A number of councils recently opened public competitions to name their gritting vehicles, such as this Doncaster example: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/17/david-plowie-or-basil-salty-doncaster-asks-public-to-name-gritters>

This approach cost virtually nothing (other than a little time of existing staff) but ended up raising the profile of how much resource that authority dedicates to gritting (a common cause of complaint amongst their residents).

My review explored the degree to which the communication team in Powys would feel able to take a more informal, untraditional, slightly riskier approach, and found that they would feel generally unsupported corporately. Correct or incorrect, this self-denying ordinance is a reality, that has led to a lowest-risk, most-conventional approach being taken as the default.

There is a simple and low-risk approach that Powys could consider taking in this regard - simply challenging and inviting the corporate communication team to propose slightly edgier campaign ideas. This approach doesn't write a blank-cheque, but it would at least see more such ideas escalated for consideration and potential approval. After trying this for a while, a settled view would emerge, meaning that most opportunities advanced would be likely to be acceptable.

Appendix F - Residents' Survey

It is a central premise of good governance that decisions should be evidence-based. A central element of such an evidence for a local authority is what its residents think, feel, understand and prefer. Powys clearly has a range of such evidence, and carries out a thorough and appropriate approach to consultation.

However, there is an obvious absence of a major, high volume residents' survey, carried out consistently year by year, allowing for a longitudinal tracking, as well as more in-year tactical measurements.

Although this evidence is provided in part by evidence provided by the annual all-Wales survey commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, this is a relatively low-volume survey in Powys resident numbers, meaning that little granularity can be derived for different parts of the county. It also provides quite a generic evidence base, without opportunity for Powys to add in specific questions on other key local issues.

This follows an entirely understandable decision to discontinue the previous annual Powys residents' survey for cost purposes.

There is however potentially a third-way - a way of gaining most of the advantages of the former stand-alone survey, but at a fraction of the cost - namely exploring buying extra questions (and potentially extending Powys sample size). I would suggest that Powys liaises with the Welsh Assembly Government and their retained market research agency to explore whether this could be achieved by taking advantage of their existing economies of scale.

Appendix G - the right future organisational home for events

Not every council shares Powys' appetite for major events, whether those are council stimulated/supported, independently-organised with the council a participant, or else council-run. That appetite in Powys, in line with its aspiration to be an 'events county', is a sensible and legitimate approach to support its broader economic strategy.

For those authorities that do have a comparable campaign appetite, most resource this from either within their tourism, arts and culture, or economic development section - though some, like Powys, base it within their communications teams.

The amount of resource this takes seems from my review to be proportionate and well-applied in Powys, although there is no obvious spare capacity in either staffing or budget provision, so the aspiration for growth will require additional resources allocated.

There is both considerable skill, knowledge and enthusiasm within the communication team applied to events - not just core communication functions, but actual event organisation and coordination.

Such a scale and nature of workload associated with events is inevitably concentrated into peaks and troughs, where the workload pattern in communications is more consistent year-round.

This inevitable tension is already an operational issue, as communications work takes a backseat for a good number of the communication team during peak event activity. This tension will only grow as event activity potentially grows, where core communication resource is simultaneously under pressure due to savings requirements.

Now would seem an opportune time for the authority to determine where overall responsibility for events should sit in the organisation and appropriate resource be allocated to match the council's ambition set out in Vision 2025.

Appendix H - Coordination of consultation and engagement activity

The authority already has leads a consultation and engagement officer network in place across public and voluntary sectors, meeting quarterly, sharing best practice and delivering training.

Internally within the organisation however, consultation and engagement activity is not delivered through the year on a coordinated basis. The central team clearly does its best to coordinate its own activity, but departments either carry out their own work, or at sometimes approach the central team for support with very little notice.

This leads to the obvious risk of a lack of coordination of activity, and a potential for consultation clash or fatigue.

With this said, I didn't in this review find any obvious or significant evidence of this being a big problem - meaning that this is an obvious risk rather than a live and damaging issue.

I'd propose therefore only a proportionate response to this situation, that is suitably light touch and unbureaucratic.

Specifically, I'd suggest that the authority considers a forward-planning schedule of consultation and engagement activity, to which both the central team and all service departments should be required to enter their plans ahead of time. There is probably an already existing governance structure that could take on the oversight function for this schedule, with just 5-10 minutes consideration on a quarterly basis - both looking forwards at the next quarter, to de-conflict any upcoming scheduled work as necessary, and to look back at the last quarter to check on compliance with the coordination (i.e. which services were ignoring the forward planning requirement).

This need be no more than an Excel spreadsheet maintained by the central team, which might take a service 60 seconds per forthcoming consultation to complete. Such a simple and light-touch system in place in other authorities has quickly shown its worth as clashing consultations are flagged up months ahead of time, making it relatively easy to shift one forwards or the other back. Such systems also lead to efficiencies and economies of scale as similar

consultation and engagement activities can sometimes be amalgamated where there is sufficient similarity in subject matter and/or target audience.

This kind of coordination can also help prompt services to make sure that they have 'closed the loop' by feeding back to consultees on the outcome of the consultation - a basic element of good practice which the authority has already signed up to, but compliance with which seems a little patchy.

Appendix I - Options for a one-off fresh approach to engaging the public in discussing and developing a long-term approach to community resilience

The authority's scale of ambition to support residents and businesses in enjoying future security, sustainability and prosperity is obvious and laudable, notwithstanding the context of considerable savings requirements over coming years that will materially shift the nature of how the council works, and how much it can do. Although the council will by 2025 still be a major service provider, the balance will have shifted considerably with far more enabling work undertaken in comparison to the historic model.

I gained a sense whilst carrying out the review that the authority might appreciate a little information about models or tools in place elsewhere in the UK that have helped other councils in developing meaningful and widespread conversations with their local communities as they develop a shared approach to similar future challenges. Below is an example that I think might be most relevant to the authority, although I should stress that my review didn't examine for or find any huge deficit in this regard in Powys.

There are a number of online resources commercially available that may be of interest. Powys has of course already previously used the Delib budget simulator, which is arguably the leading such tool on the market.

Case study: Dorset County Council market day roadshows

Over the course of a summer a couple of years back, Dorset County Council staged a market day roadshow all across their largely rural county. A pitch was booked in every single market town (or bigger village) through the county for a market day. To cover the whole county during the summer months, this often required two or three pitches per week. Each one involved a small open-sided marquee providing rain cover for an L-shape of display boards. In Dorset's case, the approach was focused around longer-term budget savings, and broke down the authority's discretionary revenue spend down into (roughly) equivalent sized units, each represented by a large green button. Each resident taking part was given a handful of 20 green buttons, and invited to 'spend' those 20 buttons in a large transparent piggy bank against each service area, and was forced in the process to make choices about relative priorities, including being forced to disinvest, as the status quo of service provision added up to 23 green buttons worth.

This was a deeply unscientific exercise, the value of which was gained through the discussions with residents about the future, sharing an understanding of budget constraints coming up over forthcoming years, and by helping residents understand first-hand that something had to give.

Each such market stall was staffed by four council staff, drawn from a pool nominated by the full range of services on a pro-rata basis. Each one was also attended by at least one director or head of service, and also on most occasions by a cabinet member. Attendance by the local ward members also ran at over 90%. This provided (with only a little briefing and preparation) a welcoming face reaching out to residents encouraging them to come and engage. Some residents just quickly filled in a postcard answering three questions about their priorities (which were collated later into word clouds showing common themes), where a good proportion spent an average of 12-15 minutes engaging thoughtfully in the more elaborate buttons & piggy bank process, carefully reading the information boards, and many asking more questions of and sharing thoughts with the staff and members present.

The considerable majority of the over 5,000 participants in this exercise were not 'usual suspects' - they were predominantly people who in the quick survey postcard revealed that they had never attended a council consultation event or taken part in a council consultation before.

A very large proportion of these thousands of participants also signed up to join the council's newsletter mailing list, meaning that the engagement was the start of an ongoing relationship, rather than just a one-off.

Appendix J - social media approach & greater use of video

Powys' approach to social media is already amongst the top quartile of performers amongst Welsh authorities, by the metrics available. If there were one relatively-modest change I could propose to make a substantial step change in the degree of engagement, I'd suggest that it is through a greater use of video. If each communication team member were given a relatively modern smart phone as standard issue (e.g. iPhone 7 or later), they should with little training be able to start routinely posting video clips to their existing social media feed.

There is a well-recognised `multiplier effect, where a social media post with a decent image (photo or infographic) would typically gain around 4 times as much engagement/shares/likes/responses as a post with words only - but a post with a decent video should get twice as much again.

Such video content does not need to have great production values, or require much editing - 10-30 seconds, produced on a decent smartphone is sufficient.

Newcastle City Council's Facebook page is a model of such good practice: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/NewcastleCityCouncil/>

To allow for speedy and user-friendly on-the-go editing, I'd strongly recommend either an iPhone or an Android device - Windows-based smartphones or BlackBerry devices just don't hack it. The best (and best value) training I've come across in this regard is offered by Comms 2 point 0 <http://comms2point0.co.uk/events-1/2017/6/5/essential-video-skills-for-comms-p9n79-6tfl2> (who would gladly come and train the whole team onsite).

Appendix K - Commercialisation Consideration Criteria

It is right that the authority is provider neutral in regards to services, focusing instead on value for money and positive contribution towards achieving improved outcomes. Similarly, the council is right to be keen to maximise income, so long as unintended consequences are avoided or at least minimised.

All council services can potentially benefit from such commercialisation opportunities, and the range of communication services are no exception. Formally testing against the market can be quite a time consuming and resource-intensive exercise (and can have other negative implications, even if the market testing ultimately results in no commercialisation opportunity being realised - such as a dip in in-house morale, or stirring up issues with competitors or potential suppliers).

I would therefore strongly suggest employing a quick paper-based test against the following questions for each communication service to indicate whether a more formal market testing exercise or business case should be developed. This gateway test, against objective, relevant criteria can indicate whether there is a clear opportunity worth proceeding with or not (and if not, whether there are any proportionate smaller measures that could be undertaken to lead to a green light in future).

Commercialisation: income generating opportunities

- Q1. Is there an established market demand for this particular service locally? *Yes/could be readily stimulated/no*
- Q2. If this is a service that could readily be delivered remotely, is there an established market further afield? *Yes/could be readily accessed without significant investment/no*
- Q3. Is this a service that is market-leading in quality of service terms? *Yes/could easily be made so/no*
- Q4. Does the council have spare capacity in this service? *Yes/could be readily identified/no*
- Q5. Could the council operate in this marketplace without negative impact on serving internal clients? *Yes/systems could readily be introduced to ensure so/no*
- Q6. Is the unit cost of this service as operated within the council below the established market rate? *Yes/could readily be made so/no*

- Q7. Would a successful commercial operation by the council in this marketplace likely be at the expense of local businesses, particularly independent small local businesses? *No/changes could readily be made to avoid this/yes*

If the answers to this checklist are all/predominantly green, then this is an opportunity that should certainly be considered more formally.

If the answers are largely green, but with some ambers, then it is worth pursuing the changes prompted by the amber assessments and then retesting in due course.

If the answers include one or two reds, then this is probably not ready for progressing at this time.

If the answers are all/predominantly red, then this is simply not a practical option worthy of consideration at all, unless circumstances change radically.

Commercialisation: possible externalisation opportunities

- Q8. Is there an established market locally of alternative suppliers? *Yes/don't know/could be stimulated/no*
- Q9. Is there an established non-local market of alternative suppliers, and is this a service that could work with a remote supplier? *Yes/don't know/could be stimulated/no*
- Q10. Is this a particularly sensitive service, where any externalisation would need special controls or considerations that might limit market supply or inadvertently push up costs/reduce productivity? *No/systems changes could readily be introduced to address this/yes*
- Q11. How is the current in-house supply in terms of quality compared to the market? *Worse/don't know/on an upward trajectory/better*
- Q12. How does the current in-house supply compare to the market in terms of unit cost? *Worse/don't know/on a downward trajectory/better*
- Q13. Is this a service which requires an unusual degree of flexibility, and if so, does the in-house service offer an enhanced degree of flexibility compared to the market? *No/yes, but could potentially be managed in a commercial contract/yes*
- Q14. Are there economies of scale or efficiencies between adjacent services which if not performed together, would be lost? *No/could be fixed/yes*

If the answers to this checklist are all/predominantly green, then this service is a good candidate for market testing sooner rather than later.

If the answers are predominantly green but with some ambers, then action should be considered against those amber areas before re-testing.

If the answers include one or two reds, then this is probably not worthy of market testing at this time.

If the answers are all/predominantly red, then this is simply not a sensible option worthy of market testing at all, unless circumstances change radically.

Appendix L - Thumbnail evaluation of communication opportunities against these commercialisation criteria

Income generation opportunities – thumbnail assessment

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Conclusion
Strategic communication advice	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Red
Media relations	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Social media	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Campaigns	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Internal communications	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Consultation and engagement	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Red
Design and branding	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red
Welsh language support	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Events	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red

Of these therefore, it's only perhaps the Welsh Language service which, in my opinion, that is even worth discussing whether there are any particular income generation opportunities, particularly considering absence of spare capacity and the cost model.

Externalisation opportunities – thumbnail assessment

	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Conclusion
Strategic communication advice	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red
Media relations	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red
Social media	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Campaigns	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Internal communications	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Consultation and engagement	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Design and branding	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow
Welsh language support	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Events	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

There are no clear candidates for obvious and early market testing – particularly considering how much the communication team multi-tasks (so taking out one or two functions would reduce the criticality of mass of those that remained). There may be some merit in looking at whether events support could be independently commissioned, rather than delivered in-house (though not forgetting that internal coordination cannot be outsourced). Similarly, it may be worth considering selling Welsh language support – but considering the lack of spare capacity, this would in all likelihood only mean operating as a middle-man between clients and the roster of freelancers that the service already relies on.

Appendix M - team matrix approach

An organisation the size of a national government or a major multinational company may have communication needs of such scale that it makes sense to organise their considerable staff teams by organisational specialism - e.g. marketing, media relations, social media etc. etc. This scale of operation allows for genuine expertise to be developed, with sufficient resilience in each individual sub-team.

For organisations the size of a county council, with the amount of communication resource available, this is not realistic. Instead, a matrix approach is more common, and this is largely what Powys has in place. This does still allow for some difference in roles - communication generalists, consultation and engagement officers, and (a single) designer.

It seemed however from my review visit observations, that there is some tendency in practice for some team members in practice to stick perhaps more rigidly to individual professional specialisms than is sustainable within a team of this size. Although it makes eminently good sense for individuals within teams to play to their professional strengths, informed by their career backgrounds, I observed that the degree of tendency to specialise within Powys might have gone so far as to generated the unintended downsides of some subjects not being handled end-to-end by one individual, thus creating some (at least minor) system inefficiencies or possible gaps in output.

I'd suggest that the matrix approach is refreshed, alongside any quick refresher training that may be necessary to allow individuals within the team to operate more comfortably across the communication piece - even if different individuals' particular specialisms are still made best use of.

This approach would be assigning each team member one (or sometimes two, sometimes nil) leads against each of the following topics. Some portfolios, channels or functional subject leads require more work than others, so this can be balanced out accordingly.

- Functional subject expert - media relations (or possible individual newspaper/broadcasters/online), social media (or poss individual social media channels), internal communications, consultation and engagement

- Service portfolio liaison lead - by directorates or sometimes individual service areas
- Channel owner - electronic newsletter, website banner ads, etc.
- Audience expert - older people, younger people, Welsh speakers etc.

The person assigned to lead on each area would then have the responsibility to be the guru for that area, keeping up their learning and development, and sharing it more widely amongst the team through in-house development sessions. They would also be the go-to person to either personally handle or advise on particularly sensitive or complex issues in that area.

Adopting this kind of matrix approach is a useful tool when considering career development opportunities, with at least right-touch reshuffles of responsibilities from time to time. When considering replacing casual vacancies, adopting this approach can also inform the skill mix sought from applicants.

Appendix N - communication team size/cost, relative to other comparable authorities

I didn't get the opportunity to review team budgets (staffing/non-staffing) during this review exercise, so offer limited commentary on it from a cost perspective.

In terms of team size however, I can offer a perspective comparing and contrasting team size to other large rural county areas with similar size populations, as well as local authorities generally.

Comparing authorities merely by spend or headcount is however a very inexact science, as there is no standard model of what gets included or excluded in such comparisons. Most local authorities that have a comparable events output to Powys don't operate that function within the communication team, for example - so a headcount comparison would miss this complexity.

Different authorities count different web functions either within their communication teams or elsewhere (in customer service functions or IT departments), again making comparisons difficult. Some authorities operate their consultation and engagement activities within their communication teams, others outside.

The main benchmarking data tool available is that carried out by the (English) Local Government Association, and their most recent survey results are available here, published December 2017:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Heads%20of%20Communications%20Survey%20Report%202017%20-%20Final.pdf>

This survey showed that the mean communication team size for a shire authority is 21 FTEs, which reinforces my own sense and experience that the team in Powys is certainly not over-staffed, either relative to other similar authorities, or indeed to the scale of ambition and expectation for delivery.