

Corporate Plan
Communications Framework
2019 - 2022



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Introduction

We were created in 2007 and are a locally based Housing Association in and around Northamptonshire with a commitment to:

- Develop a diverse range of new homes to meet local needs
- Work with our customers to provide **great** homes and Value for Money services
- Invest in communities where it supports our customers and protects our business

Our mission

We will work successfully with our customers and communities to provide **great** services and high quality living environments.

Our values



Respect

We will treat each other and anyone who deals with us with respect and recognise everyone as an individual.



Trust

We will be open and honest with our colleagues, customers and external partners and we will deliver on the commitments that we make.



One Team

We will be one team, working collaboratively, listening and communicating clearly with our customers, to deliver **great** services.



Empowered

We will be bold, progressive, seek to empower our customers and be confident in the decisions we make.



Efficient and Effective

We will work efficiently and effectively, continuously looking for ways to improve and deliver Value for Money.



Executive summary

Our new Corporate Plan 2019 - 2022 is based on the four key strategies of:

- Transforming our Future
- Growth
- Asset Management
- Finances

This Corporate Plan Communications Framework is one of four frameworks which underpins the strategies.

The importance of listening to customers and giving them a voice is more important now than ever. It is vital to give customers the opportunity to communicate so they can be listened to.

The purpose of this framework is to create a consistent approach to communications throughout the organisation and make communications clear and accessible for all audiences.

We will do this by...

- Engaging our audiences
- Targeting our communications
- Reviewing our methods
- Protecting our reputation
- Transforming our future

This framework will be reviewed annually and measured by using operational performance indicators (OPIs).



Context

This framework sets out our approach to ensuring that consistent communications are delivered throughout the organisation in order to protect our reputation and support internal strategies and projects.

It is one of four corporate frameworks that underpin our four key strategies:

- Transforming our Future
- Growth
- Asset Management
- Finance

The Oxford Dictionary simply describes communication as:

“The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium”.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) define public relations (PR) as:

“The discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinions and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its public”

For us, communications is a combination of those two statements - having two-way conversations with our customers, staff and stakeholders in order to promote our brand and protect our reputation.

Our Corporate Plan, brand guidelines and the objectives and principles within this framework will be embedded within the organisation to make sure everyone is communicating in the same way about the same messages.

Social housing is of huge importance locally and nationally. In England 3.9 million households (17% of the population) live in a home provided by a council, housing association or not-for-profit organisation at a below market rent. There is a rising demand for social housing as even people on relatively high incomes cannot afford to buy or rent a home. Despite this there has been no significant increase in the supply of social homes for over a decade.

We are a financially strong, well-managed and ambitious organisation. Over the life of our Corporate Plan 2019 - 2022 we will continue to become more efficient and ensure that good quality ‘business as usual’ continues to be a priority.

As of March 2018 we owned 4,705 properties which provide homes to local people and their families. Whilst the majority of our properties are in Wellingborough, from 2017 we have expanded our portfolio to include areas of Northampton and East Northamptonshire.

Corporate Plan 2019 - 2022

Our areas of focus for 2019 - 22 are based around four key strategies of:

- Transforming our Future: Implementing our Customer Charter and new ways of delivering services. Embracing digital technology and identifying efficiencies.
- Growth: Increasing the number of homes we own and manage for ourselves and others, expansion and/or improvement of our Customer Charter and increasing our financial capacity through enhanced asset value.
- Asset Management: Providing well maintained, safe and secure homes and high quality living environments that meet the needs of our current and future customers.
- Finance: Ensuring we have secure long term funding in place to achieve our aspirations to deliver 1,000 additional homes over the next 10 years, invest in our existing homes and estates, and that we remain a financially strong business.



Customer Charter

We have a responsibility to our customers and actively work together with them through our Customer Assembly and other panels.

We have also engaged with them through events and consultations. In 2018, nearly 10% of our customers contributed to our Customer Charter which launched in April 2019 and we created our set of customer commitments, based on the Regulatory Standards.

The following statements are taken from our 'managing our relationships' commitments that support the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Regulatory Standard and explain that we will:

- *“Treat you fairly and with respect.”*
- *“Provide choice and access to services that meet your needs and are easy to use.”*
- *“Seek your views in a variety of ways.”*
- *“Respond quickly and fairly when you give us feedback or raise a concern.”*
- *“Strengthen our relationship by working together to set priorities and provide **great** services.”*
- *“Make it easy for you to contact us and listen to your views.”*

Transforming our Future Strategy

The Transforming our Future Strategy is a transformational project to produce an agile workforce that has a more flexible approach to how, when and where work gets done, as well as utilising technology to provide services at best value, whilst still ensuring services are personalised and tailored to suit our customer's needs.

Ultimately, this means that the way we communicate with our customers, and how they engage and transact with us, is changing both internally and externally.

This framework supports the ambitions and priorities of this strategy, with a main focus of digital communications but also caters for those with limited online accessibility or skills.



Key achievements over the past four years

Since 2015, the way we communicate our staff, customers and stakeholders has changed substantially, and most of this is related to moving previous communication methods to online platforms.

Other achievements are linked to tighter processes and protocols internally (these can be found on the intranet or requested via the Communications Team).

Over the last four years, we have:

- Worked with our staff and customers to develop an improved website which is better in appearance, easier to navigate and includes more relevant information for all audiences.
- Moved previously printed publications, such as Annual Reports, Corporate Plans and customer newsletters, to online formats, whilst also providing printed copies on request.

- Implemented a new intranet, The Hive, and embedded it as the main method of internal communications.
- Introduced brand guidelines to ensure a consistent approach to communications and embedded them within the organisation.
- Worked with customers to develop a customer portal to encourage them to transact and engage with us digitally.
- Increased presence on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, by implementing a detailed social media content plan and a social media protocol.
- Implemented an 18-month communications plan allowing a more structured and proactive approach to communications.
- Introduced a media and escalation protocol which includes an internal process for escalation to ensure we manage our reputation effectively.
- Introduced new values and implemented them within the organisation by rewarding members of staff who are seen to be living those values in our new staff awards scheme, Raising The Roof.
- Recruited customers onto our Communications Panel in order for them to feedback their ideas and views on current publications and communication methods.
- Planned, prepared and managed internal and external corporate events.



Purpose & objectives

The purpose of this framework is to create a consistent approach to communications throughout the organisation and make communication clear and accessible for all audiences.

We will do this by...

- 1 Engaging our audiences**
- 2 Targeting our communications**
- 3 Reviewing our methods**
- 4 Protecting our reputation**
- 5 Transforming our future**

It's important to remember that the effectiveness of our communications, and therefore our brand and reputation, does not sit solely with the Communications Team. It is the responsibility of everyone who works for, and on behalf of, the organisation.

Engaging our audiences

Providing and promoting ways for customers, staff and stakeholders to easily engage and transact with us is key to ensuring the success of this framework. Allowing these audiences to engage with us encourages them to share their voice and opinions.

Targeting our communications

We will target how we communicate to particular groups by seeing how they engage with us, allowing us to tailor our communications to the customers' needs and behaviours. We will be smart in the ways that we communicate and will not be narrow minded in the methods that we choose to use.

Reviewing our methods

In today's world of ever-changing technology, it is important to keep reviewing the methods of our communications. It's vital that all new methods are introduced to support both our customers needs and our ambitions, and not to introduce just because of popularity – they all need to have a purpose.

Protecting our reputation

We already have internal processes in place to manage our reputation. In order to enhance our brand, the brand guidelines must be followed in all communications from our organisation. It is the responsibility of everyone working on behalf of the organisation to manage our reputation and brand.

Transforming our Future

Our Transforming our Future Strategy is a key aspect of where we are aiming to be in years to come. Whether it is introducing new ways of digital communication, or encouraging an embrace of change throughout the organisation, the importance of adapting the way we communicate to support this strategy is vital to business success.



Principles

The following principles should apply to all communications coming from anyone working for, or on behalf of, our organisation.

In order to produce communications suitable for all audiences, the principles in the table must be used.

Principle	What we will do
Clear	Use clear, plain language at all times, that are planned carefully to meet the needs of specific audiences.
Accurate	Use information which is accurate, up to date and relevant to the purpose.
Timely	Communicate at the right time and respond quickly to questions.
Accessible	Recognise and respect the varied communication needs of people and match specific methods to their needs.
Corporate	Use messages which are up to date and reflect our purpose and aims. Produce all communications using our branding guidelines.
Open & honest	Explain our actions and decisions, and the reasons for those. Accept challenges and challenge others as an important part of mutual learning and sharing.
Accountable	Ensure information is clearly labelled and dated.
Two-way	Provide contact details for people asking for additional information, or to feedback and encourage dialogue.



Outcomes

By achieving the objectives in this framework, we will build a strong brand that has engaging conversations with the right people in the right way, whilst supporting our transformation ambitions.

- Customers will be consulted on and included in projects and/or decisions that will have a direct impact on them.
- We raise our profile, both with customers in the areas that we work in (or will be working in in the future), and in the wider housing sector as a result of a strong brand and **great** reputation.
- All communications from all areas of the organisation will follow the principles, protocols and guidelines set; contributing towards building a strong brand.
- A variety of communication methods will be used in different ways, to different people based on our research and findings, in order to produce strong campaigns and receive the best possible results.

- Methods of communication, especially those that are digital, will stay up-to-date and modern, ensuring a smooth and enjoyable communication process.
- Reducing, introducing and enhancing communication methods, in order to support our Transforming our Future Strategy. An example of this is in the table below.

Communication methods to reduce, where appropriate (still offering these methods to those without digital access)	Communication methods to introduce	Communication methods to enhance
Letters and other paper-based communication	Live web chat facility on our website	Private chat functions through social media channels, such as Facebook messenger and Twitter
Phone calls to/from Customer Services	Other forms of social media which are appropriate to our audience and business needs	Face-to-face communication via home visits and being more visible within our communities
Face-to-face contact via a reception centre	Video chat from our staff to customers in order to create a quick way of having in-depth conversations	Text alerts/messages



Measuring success

In order to measure success in the delivery of this framework, we will be using existing operational performance indicators (OPIs) which are reported every quarter, and reviewed annually.

We will also use tools such as Google Analytics, Google Alerts and media clippings in order to measure our reputation and the effectiveness of our campaigns.

Targets will be set as part of the annual Corporate Planning cycle and will be aligned to priorities, strategies and risks.

Measure	Link to
Customer satisfaction with communications	Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) metric
Staff satisfaction with communications	Employee Engagement Survey
Social media engagement	Communications OPI
Web page views and links from social media	Communications OPI
Intranet page views	Communications OPI
Reputation with stakeholders	Stakeholder perception surveys
Reputation with customers and potential customers	Press attention (positive or negative)
Customers involved in communication projects	Communications Panel
Raising our rofile in areas of growth	Marketing campaigns (including paid-for social media campaigns)
Raising our profile with prospective staff	Marketing campaigns (including paid-for social media campaigns)



Monitoring the framework

References

In order to ensure our objectives are met, we will review this framework on an annual basis and report the outcomes of the review to the Executive Management Team.

Communications OPIs are reported at Performance Clinics on a quarterly basis and are reviewed and agreed annually.

The Communications Panel, which is made up of both staff and customers, will also review this framework on an annual basis and discuss ways to further improve and meet our objectives.

Corporate Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All communications from us should support the strategies in the Corporate Plan and promote the use of our mission statement, values and who we are and what we do.
Growth Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transforming our Future - raising profile in areas of growth.
Transforming our Future Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transforming our Future - introducing new ways of digital communication, or encouraging an embrace of change within the organisation.
Asset Management Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transforming our Future
Finance Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect our reputation
Privacy and equality implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target our communications – behavioural insight analysis will allow us to tailor our communications to the customers’ needs and behaviours. Although we are moving to a more digital way of communications and transacting, it is important that all communication is accessible for all needs and abilities.
Customer consultation and implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Communications Panel and the Digital Panel were consulted on the objectives and principles of this framework in August 2018.





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