



Category: Outstanding In-House Public Relations Team

Company: Newcastle City Council

Number of staff employed - including executive / support staff - and annual public relations budget, showing areas directly under the control of the in-house team:

Staff:

A team of seven – 17 fewer than in 2015. The smallest communication team in the Core Cities. Managed by a Principal Policy Adviser, reporting directly to the Assistant Chief Executive.

Budget:

600k (£500k staff + £100k services)

Under our control:

Media relations; media training; issues management; crisis communications; social media; marketing; social marketing; public relations campaigns; internal communications; publications; design and print; web design; digital communication; writing speeches, articles, letters. Strategic and crisis communications and out of hours media to Your Homes Newcastle and council.

Business objectives and analysis of team performance against budget over the past three years:

Council serves a population of 292,000 and over 9,000 businesses and spends about £1 billion on services and capital projects.

Four priorities:

- A working city: creating good quality jobs and helping people develop skills to do them
- Decent neighbourhoods: working with communities to look after each other and the environment
- Tackling inequalities: tackling discrimination and inequalities which prevent people from fulfilling their potential

- A fit for purpose council: a council which leads our city by enabling and empowering others

The team is responsible for the way the council communicates. Our goal is to inspire people to love and trust their council. Using different channels and techniques, the communication strategies support:

- Behavioural change campaigns to reduce waste and increase recycling, encourage more sustainable forms of transport, help the city become fit and healthy.
- Re-Newcastle programme of capital investment in regeneration, transport and broadband is building the infrastructure needed to attract new jobs and businesses.
- Building new affordable homes for a growing city with clean neighbourhoods.
- Supporting and protecting our vulnerable residents, helping people help themselves and intervening early to stop situations escalating.
- Dealing with crises to ensure the council's reputation remains intact
- Maintain our efficiency programme to deal with austerity, including moving services to digital by choice.

Performance figures are rigorously monitored against campaign objectives. We use a mix of social media insights, evaluation, and google analytics.

We've used digital communication to deliver important and strategic communication objectives. Our social media has been described as best practise by Comms2Point0 - industry peers. We've helped deliver a shift to digital by choice, contributing to a 17% increase in 2016 in online transactions.

Despite huge funding cuts over eight years, residents continue to be satisfied with where they live. A large proportion of them now find out about council services and information via social media.

A brief overview of business / team strategy:

Business strategy:

We want to make Newcastle the best place in the UK to be born, to live, to work and to study.

Team strategy:

To promote and protect the reputation of the council. Support the delivery of its services and its many communities.

A strong team spirit.

A summary of commitment to CPD and professionalism:

In 2015 following a merger between Policy and Communications the council enrolled the new team into the CIPR to assist with professional development. In two years most had achieved Accredited Practitioner status by completing their CPD. Training courses included social media, crisis communications, stakeholder engagement and creative writing.

In 2017 responsibility for funding CIPR membership moved to the employee. Although only four remain CIPR members, the team is committed to professional development. Some speak in universities and at conferences on social media and digital communication while others assist with media training. Last year the team received training on how to communicate in a crisis by the Emergency Planning College.

A summary of recent outstanding achievements:

Since our first PRide Awards in 2016, we've submitted our work on 10 occasions, winning five golds and three silvers – an 80% success rate. In 2016 we also won a national Excellence Award for social media.

2016:

- Community relations Gold
- Best integrated campaign Gold
- Best use of social media Gold
- Best low budget campaign Silver
- Internal communication Silver

2017:

- Community relations Gold
- Best use of digital Gold
- Public Sector Campaign Silver

General Election 2017 – the first council in the country to declare. Managed more than 50 media on the night and headed the results service. In May we had all-out elections – another team effort.

Operation Sanctuary – publication of a long-awaited report into the sexual exploitation of women and girls in Newcastle which put the city in the national spotlight for the second time in six months. A significant piece of reputation management on behalf of the city.

Beast from the East – kept the city moving with real time information during severe weather. Over 30 videos and updates on refuse collections, travel information, help for rough sleepers, snow clearance and home visits.

Newcastle Can – worked for 18 months with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall on a three-part documentary series on obesity screened on BBC1 in April. We also delivered the Newcastle Can campaign that resulted in 100,000lbs of weight being lost by the city's residents.

Social media – since January 2016, we've achieved a 433 per cent increase in Facebook followers - the second highest rise for a Core City. Reach for our social media posts on Facebook has gone from 600K in 2015 to more than 11m in 2016 and 2017. Our Facebook following has gone from being the second lowest for a local authority in the North East and Cumbria, to the second highest – 5,638 in Jan 2016 to 31,215 in June 2018.

Media – on average we deal with 40 media enquiries a week - probably more than any other council in the region. We run a 24/7 out-of-hours service and have helped train 11 senior officers in media interview skills this year.

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

Small Change or Real Change?

Aimed at tackling a 700 per cent rise in beggars in Newcastle over the last three years by highlighting ways in which people could help them other than giving cash. Based on research that showed many people who beg are supporting serious drug addictions and need professional help.

Campaign delivered in partnership with Changing Lives and Northumbria Police with the help of a recovering drug addict who had begged for eight years. He confirmed many beggars have drug addictions. We used his story and posters backed by a strong social media campaign and attracted significant media interest. Of those questioned 62 per cent said they backed the campaign and 65 per cent said they were less likely to give cash to beggars based on what the campaign had revealed. It cost less than £200.

We attempted to tackle a complex issue in a sensitive and non-judgemental way. It was grounded in research, delivered by a credible messenger and avoided a lot of criticism such campaigns attract. We believe it started a conversation in our city about a national issue while offering hope to people in despair.