

Basic Information

Region (Check Region): North West

Category: 28. In-House PR Team of the Year

Entry Information

Entrant company name: Cumbria County Council

Entry title:

In-house public relations team – Cumbria County Council

Entry

Number of employees within the PR team and annual PR budget:

Employees: 12
Annual Budget: £719k

Business objectives and analysis of team performance against budget over the last two years:

We have developed and delivered against a clear Communications Strategy which sets out our team priorities and objectives. It is designed to support the authority achieve its priorities and outcomes as set out in the Council Plan.

This strategy brings to life the organisation's vision using storytelling techniques to build a compelling narrative to inform, educate, influence, engage and build trust with all varied stakeholders.

This strategy establishes our Internal and External activity – with a clear delivery plan and measures of success/KPI's. Delivered consistently within budget despite the additional pressure of 'crisis' communication activity around Covid, death of HRH Prince Philip and substantial asks to help drive a journey of rapid transformation and organisational improvement.

A brief overview of business / team strategy:

The team provides a comprehensive service including strategic and tactical

communications, marketing, stakeholder engagement, consultation, full media service incl. out of hours emergency support, internal/external communications, public affairs and lobbying advice, support to the Lord Lieutenant and royal household, digital communications and corporate ID/brand management.

We also contribute to and help drive transformational improvement projects.

We use established marketing models like PESO to underpin award-winning campaigns and have embraced the development of strong storytelling techniques to build our core narrative and underpin our communications approach.

Our team continuously strives to do its best, delivering more for less to make a significant, positive impact on people's lives.

Our key aims are to improve:

- Members' communications
- Internal communications and engagement with staff and managers
- External communications and engagement with residents, customers and service users
- The council's overall reputation and reduce reputational risk

Our strategy, developed by the whole team, is delivered via bespoke communication plans for individual projects monitored by the authority's senior leadership team.

A summary of commitment to CPD and professionalism:

We remain 100% committed to our CPD and chosen profession.

We proactively seek feedback on what's working well and what can be improved and test effectiveness of communications with stakeholders via focus groups and surveys.

Share learning and best practice in weekly team meetings.

The whole team is encouraged in CPD, funded from our budget.

In the last two years team members committed to:

1x professional internal communications diploma (CIPR)

1x advanced leadership course

1x staff CIPR accredited practitioner

Whole team social media and filming training by Comms 2.0

Training/webinars on emergency planning training and storytelling

We oversee media training to all key stakeholders. Coach and mentor cabinet members.

We are developing a team competency framework based on government communications competency framework.

A summary of recent outstanding achievements:

- CCC chaired Strategic Media Advisory Cell (SMAC) recognised as national best practice during Covid by the Government.
- Delivered innovative 'Together we can' campaign to help boost community moral and comradery.
- Supplemented Government's Covid safety campaign with more local targeted campaign to reach our communities. Many posts outperformed national content with 5.3k reach.

- Rolled out employee engagement framework and reintroduced annual staff survey. Carried out quarterly pulse surveys to track how employees were coping during Covid to ensure they were getting the right information. Evidenced by high levels of satisfaction, 75%-plus, on communications and exceptional response rates of 41%.
- Delivered high quality campaigns including Apprenticeships 'We can take you further'. Our recruitment campaign for retained firefighters saw our best ever response and for whole time firefighters the highest percentage of female recruits.
- E-newsletter performance among best in country. Granicus Benchmark Report shows top 20% of local government organisations average open rate is 36%. CCC consistently above national average for internal and external communications.
- Improved member/councillor communications with consistent satisfaction rate of 92%.
- Delivered six leadership/management events (reaching 700+ leaders) with average 99% extremely satisfied/satisfied.
- Delivered internal Excellence awards – going fully online allowed more than 1,000 employees to engage.
- Averaged circa 200 media enquiries a month – double the level of two years ago.
- Introduced fortnightly internal Positive PR Report – complementing our daily 60 Second News – round up of media coverage.
- Overseen respectful and successful arrangements for HRH Prince Philip's funeral.
- Seen significant growth across our social media accounts – with 55.2k followers across our platforms and peak posts reaching 148k residents.
- Live social media Q&As with Director of Public Health had an average 500 attendees, with overall reach of 30k, generating 300 comments and questions.
- Brought in new social media platform to better manage accounts and improve customer experience
- Utilised storytelling to best effect with some videos getting 41k plays/likes.
- Introduced innovative peer-to-peer thank you system to help boost morale and share thanks across the whole organisation for outstanding efforts.
- Improved Horizon Scanning grid for potential issues of reputational risk.
- Oversaw culture change programme in Cumbria Care (our care homes) including new recruitment campaign. 4k website views and 484% increase in applications.
- Ongoing development of council's corporate brand. LGA peer inspection citing it as 'one of the best examples of strong brand management'.
- Supported the Government's ask for a 'Local Government Reform in Cumbria' proposal, with Comms leading on and writing the sales proposition and helping oversee the submission process.
- Created innovative opening of new bridge in rural honeypot location which achieved significant local and national media coverage (in part thanks to 200 sheep that were the first to cross!)
- Ran successful virtual public consultations on multi-million pound infrastructure schemes.
- Sensitively handled international media demands re a planning decision on contentious new coal mine.
- Devised and implemented new 'Way of Working' for our workforce – transforming the way we will operate.
- Dedicated weekly schools newsletter during Covid

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

We can take you further

Brief - Our apprenticeship campaign set out to recruit for 60 new opportunities in areas, across multiple sectors.

Objectives - Raise awareness of the variety of apprenticeships on offer and to seek applications. Measures of success included increased web visits and applications.

Strategy - Consulted with existing apprentices about what prompted their decision to apply. Research into media habits of young adults using Ofcom reports which provided considerable insight into the platforms key stakeholder groups were using.

Tactics - Campaign used online and offline channels, and was allocated a £10,000 budget. Adopted a PESO model approach and used complimentary combination of mass and targeted marketing techniques.

Featured existing apprentices as the 'golden thread' throughout the campaign. They shared inspiring stories, career aspirations and acted as advocates for CCC careers.

Outputs - Apprenticeship website visitors increased 108% and web visits by 83%. 67% increase in applications. All 60 positions were recruited and campaign successfully reused in 2020.

Won 2020 LGC Campaign of the year - described as a 'masterclass' which 'changed lives, hearts and minds' - and CIPR NW Campaign Gold in 2019 where judges were impressed with the depth of research and innovative ways to get key messages to the target audience.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):

Provided
