



NORFOLK POLICE AUTHORITY

Ensuring an Efficient and Effective Police Service

Communications Strategy 2011/12

**Norfolk Police Authority's
Communications Strategy 2011/12**

Introduction

Independent of Norfolk Constabulary, with its membership made up of local people from different walks of life, Norfolk Police Authority provides a community voice on policing. Amongst its responsibilities, it sets the police budget, agrees policing targets, monitors performance, and appoints the Chief Constable and the Chief Officer Team. In order to meet these responsibilities, the Authority engages with Norfolk's communities, local groups, organisations and businesses, and partner agencies, using their views and experiences to inform the decisions its Members make.

Clear and effective communication is vital for the Authority to raise awareness of its role and responsibilities, encourage community and partner input into decision-making, and evidence how that input is making a difference to the policing service received by the people who live in, work in and visit our county.

This Strategy seeks to provide a strategic framework for communication across the Authority which is led by its vision, supports achievement of its Corporate Plan objectives, and is aligned with its key accountable activities.

The Communications Strategy shares some actions with the Authority's Single Equality Scheme, which steers its approach to meeting its equality and diversity responsibilities, and also with the Community Engagement Strategy, which guides the Authority in its engagement with partners and local communities.

Communication Challenges

One of the key communications challenges recognised by police authorities is the low level of public awareness of their existence. Ordinarily activity to increase awareness of brand Norfolk Police Authority would be prominent within its communications strategy however, with police authorities due to be replaced by directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioners for each police force area in May 2012, such promotion would not be prudent use resources.

Until May 2012, the key responsibilities of the Authority remain in place and, whilst raising awareness of NPA's identity may not be top priority, communicating its role and responsibilities continues to be of great importance in supporting the Authority's vision to 'provide the best police service for the county meeting the needs of our communities, within the available budget'.

By raising awareness of police authority business amongst communities, partners and local and national decision-makers, the Authority seeks to increase interest in its work, encouraging more public involvement to inform its decision-making processes and joint-working to improve efficiency and effectiveness. At a time of severe budget cuts, it is also important for the Authority to ensure effective dialogue with communities and partners around any changes to the strategic approach to policing in Norfolk.

Aims, Objectives and Principles

The aim of Norfolk Police Authority's Communications Strategy is to steer the organisation to deliver high standards of communication and engagement, give relevant information and provide a wide range of opportunities to hear people's views (taken from the NPA Corporate Business Plan 2011/12). It is about making the most of existing communications activity, and introducing new opportunities for communicating our key messages.

Beneath the strategic aim sits a set of objectives, the achievement of which this Strategy seeks to encourage:

- Clear and consistent communication of key messages;
- Raised awareness of the Authority's role and responsibilities;
- Promotion of the Authority's work, including decisions and their impact on policing;
- Involved, informed and reassured communities, support for consultation and engagement opportunities and communication of outcomes to internal and external stakeholders;
- Two-way communication processes facilitating effective information exchange;
- Pro-active provision of information relevant to the needs of external partners;
- Closer links with the Constabulary's corporate communications team to align activity.

In order to meet the objectives set out above, the Authority's communications must be:

- Open, honest and accountable;
- In language which is tailored to the audience;
- Accessible to all and cognisant of the need to reach all communities;
- Timely, and pro-active as well as reactive;
- Designed to provide reassurance and build public confidence in policing;
- A two-way process of giving and receiving information;
- In partnership, where appropriate;
- Offering value for money.

Statutory Communications

Norfolk Police Authority's approach to external communication will, to some extent, be guided by its statutory responsibilities. A number of processes will require application of this Strategy, including:

- The requirement for a Local Policing Plan (Police Act 1996);
- Production of a Local Policing Summary distributed to all households and providing information on policing priorities and performance (Serious Organised Crime Act 2005/ Police Act 1996);
- Promoting the Authority's Corporate Business Plan;
- Producing an Annual Report of Authority business (Police Act 1996);
- The Council Tax precept and budget setting process, including production of the Council Tax leaflet (Local Government Finance Act 1992);
- Engagement and consultation events, ensuring a range of routes available to the public for communicating their views with the Authority (Police Act 1996);
- Communicating information on Stop and Search processes and individuals' rights (Home Office guidance);
- Police Authority meetings;
- Partnership working arrangements (Crime and Disorder Act 1998).

Audiences and Stakeholders

For whom has this Strategy been produced?

This Strategy is intended to inform and guide Norfolk Police Authority in its communication with communities and partners.

Who is responsible for this Strategy?

The Chief Executive's staff team is responsible for implementing and driving the Strategy, ensuring that its principles are applied and objectives met. The team also has responsibility for identifying key issues to feed into communication planning, and opportunities for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority's communications approach.

The Members of the Authority have a key role in communicating with different audiences. Members are sources of information about the role and responsibilities of the Authority, and key developments in the policing service. They also actively engage in the communication process by facilitating two-way processes of information exchange. Through engaging with local people, Members are able to collect community views to communicate with the wider Authority and partners to inform decisions and processes. They also feed the views of the Authority, along with information on key policing issues, into partnership structures.

The Authority's Performance and Engagement Committee holds the responsibility for monitoring the development of the Strategy, as well as progress made against the activities highlighted within the accompanying action plan.

Who are the Authority's 'audience' in relation to communications?

The people with whom the Authority communicates regularly can be broadly categorised under six headings:

- Communities: Norfolk's population as a whole, diverse groups.
- Consultees: The 'interested' public, volunteers.
- Community representatives: Community and voluntary groups, local and specialist support organisations, parish councils.
- Constabulary officers and staff
- Opinion-formers: Partner organisations, local media.
- Influencers: Local political groups, MPs, APA, ACPO, HMIC, Central Government.

The Authority recognises that different audience groups will have varying needs, and in order for its communications to be effective, they must be produced with specific target audiences in mind. Success will not result from a 'one size fits all' approach.

Audiences - Key Considerations

Communities

There is emphasis at a national and local level on the need for increased police authority contact with the public, including targeted communication with diverse and new and emerging communities, and those parts of the community who find it more challenging to access or influence policing services.

It is acknowledged that communities have a low level of interest in police authority business, and minimal understanding of how that business affects them. This means that, in communicating with the public, it is important to concentrate on information which is relevant to that audience, ie. that which has a direct impact on them. In terms of the Authority's business, this may include the setting of the Council Tax precept to fund the policing services they receive, or strategic priorities set to meet community concerns such as reducing levels of anti-social behaviour.

The diversity of communities must be acknowledged and, with that, the range of needs they have in accessing information. Websites and e-mail are useful tools for providing information and eliciting feedback, but reliance on e-communications can exclude sections of the community unable or unwilling to use the internet. Similarly, limiting provision of information to printed materials can create exclusion for those who have difficulty reading or understanding text. The Authority is committed to ensuring that its information and services are accessible to all, and this commitment is supported by its Equality Strategy. In communicating with communities, use of a range of methods must be considered, along with the opportunity given for individuals or groups to request information in alternative formats.

Consultees

There are a number of individuals who work alongside the Authority, sharing their advice, knowledge and experiences to influence decision-making. The themes of communication with this group are often recurring, such as impacts of decisions and processes on the wider community, and this makes consistency of messages vital. Communicating with consultees to elicit views and feedback can provide a barometer of public views, but the limitations of such an audience must be recognised so that they are not considered as representing the public as a whole. These views can be used to steer activity to engage with particular audiences on specific issues – such activity is guided by the Authority's Community Engagement Strategy.

Community representatives

Whether self-appointed community interest groups or influential local organisations, there are a great number of community representatives in Norfolk. Regular and relevant communication with these representatives can help increase their knowledge and awareness of the Authority's work and opportunities to get involved. By ensuring they are well-informed, wider dissemination of relevant information to wider communities by these representatives on behalf of the Authority can be encouraged. Community representatives are also ideally positioned with their experience and knowledge of communities to support two-way communication with communities to encourage public involvement in decision-making processes, ensuring their needs are considered in the Authority's work.

Constabulary officers and staff

By providing Constabulary officers and staff with clear, timely information, keeping them involved in the Authority's discussions, informed of its decisions, and up-to-date on local and national developments, it can be ensured that this knowledge and understanding contribute to effective performance of Constabulary roles. With a limited interest in police authority business, accessibility of messages will be improved through the utilisation of Norfolk Constabulary's established internal communication methods.

Opinion-formers and Influencers

A number of organisations communicate messages on behalf of the Authority or provide a contact point from which communities can gather information on public services. Wider perceptions of the Authority can be greatly influenced by these agencies and the media, and negative messages could be communicated if opinion-formers are not engaged with appropriately. In addition, it must be considered that policy decisions made by partner agencies have the potential to impact on the work of the Authority, and vice versa, so effective two-way communications are important in ensuring such impacts are identified and considered.

When making decisions about policing, whether related to policing direction, priorities and targets, or the setting of the budget and council tax precept, effective communication and

engagement with audiences with high levels of influence is of great importance. Often having more sway than opinion-formers, the understanding and passage of decisions will be aided by those in an influential position having a sound understanding of the context within which those decisions are taken.

Having high interest in the work of police authorities and constabularies, and significant levels of influence on local and national policing developments as well as the views and perceptions of other audience groups, a stakeholder analysis highlights Opinion-Formers and Influencers as priority audiences for timely, accurate and appropriately detailed communications. Not being typical 'public' audiences, the content of communications with these audiences can be higher in complexity, allowing enough detail to be included to fulfil the specific needs of this group, whilst also being appropriate for interpretation and wider dissemination by these groups to other audiences.

Key Messages

Norfolk Police Authority: Ensuring an efficient and effective police service

The Authority's strap-line is 'Ensuring an efficient and effective police service' and is the NPA's key message, explaining the role of the organisation. The strap-line is most commonly accompanied by the NPA logo to represent the Authority brand in all written communications, as well as on the website. Additional key messages associated with the Authority's strap-line include:

- NPA is an independent body made up of local people who oversee the work of their local Constabulary.
- NPA agrees the police budget for the year.
- NPA appoints the Chief Constable and Chief Officer team.
- NPA sets the plan for policing in the county.
- NPA oversees the handling of complaints against the police
- NPA consults with communities, providing a transparent link between the police and the public.
- NPA reports back to communities on policing developments and recent achievements.
- The Government proposes to replace police authorities in May 2012 with a directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner for each police force area.

Individual key messages may be used to support communication relating to distinct aspects of the Authority's role and specific responsibilities. These include:

Norfolk Police Authority: Investing in your Police

- NPA agrees the police budget for the year.
- The police budget is made up of Government grant and funds raised through local Council Tax.
- NPA decides how much local people pay for policing through their Council Tax.

- NPA holds an annual budget consultation meeting to enable the public to have a say on police spending.
- Policing is not immune to Government funding cuts, and NPA must respond to demands for savings within its budgets.
- As a result of Government funding cuts, Norfolk's policing service is facing reductions amounting to 20% over four years. NPA oversees budget reduction activity, monitoring the impact of service delivery changes on communities.

Norfolk Police Authority: Policing your Police

- NPA works independently, on behalf of local people, to hold the Chief Constable to account for policing in the county.
- NPA writes the policing plan, setting the Constabulary objectives for the year.
- NPA monitors the performance of the Constabulary to ensure the service being delivered is one which meets the needs of all communities.
- The Government has set out proposals to replace police authorities with a single Police and Crime Commissioner, elected by local people to hold the police to account. Specific details are still to be agreed by the Government, and until such a time as plans for the transition from police authorities to Commissioners are known, work continues as usual for Authority Members.

Norfolk Police Authority: A Community Voice on your Police

- NPA is made up of locally-elected councillors and appointed independent members of the public – local people working on behalf of local people to ensure policing decisions taken meet the needs of the community.
- NPA consults extensively with locally-elected representatives, communities and business before setting the budget and policing priorities for the county.
- There are a number of ways in which the public can get involved with Norfolk Police Authority, including joining one of its advisory panels, or becoming a Custody Visitor.

Communications Mechanisms

The Authority currently uses a range of different tools to communicate with its audiences, including:

- Planning documents, such as annual publication of a Local Policing Plan and Corporate Business Plan;
- Annual progress updates, including the Authority's Annual Report and the Local Policing Summary;
- Agenda, reports and minutes of Authority meetings;
- Updates on recent developments in the form of articles in the Norfolk Association of Local Council's newsletter Norfolk Link, and the Parliamentary Brief;
- Press releases, publications produced for promotional or recruitment purposes;
- The Authority's website;

- Face-to-face contact in the form of consultation exercises, focus groups, regular meetings and targeted engagement.

The following action plan sets out how the Authority proposes to improve the way these tools are used or introduce new methods to communicate more effectively with specific audiences.

Norfolk Police Authority Communications Strategy Action Plan 2011/12

Action	Desired Outcome	Owner	Timescale	Links to:
1. Utilise the lessons learnt from the planning of the 2010 public budget consultation to further increase accessibility and opportunities for community input into police spending discussions (including exploring how the NPA website can contribute)	Policing decisions and strategies which reflect the views and needs of all our communities	NPA Chief Executive/ NPA Chairman	December 2011	Community Engagement Strategy (Action 21) Equality Strategy (Action 7)
2. Include appropriate key messages around the Spending Challenge and introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners within 2011 Local Policing Summary (<i>Your Norfolk</i> October 2011)	Wider public awareness of key policing developments	NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee	November 2011	
3. Continue to develop the accessibility and usability of the NPA website, extending potential for two-way information exchange between the Authority and website visitors and ensuring information about the Spending Challenge and transition to PCC is available to all	A website which meets the access needs of all users, ensuring NPA information is available to all	NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee	April 2012	Equality Strategy (Action 10)

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4. Consider the potential website needs of the PCC	Wider public awareness of key policing developments	NPA Chief Executive	April 2012	Equality Strategy (Action 11)
5. Strengthen the membership of the Virtual Community, using the NPA website to open discussion of key policing issues to a wider audience	A channel for two-way communication on key policing issues, with consultee input feeding into NPA decision-making	NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee	March 2012	
6. Agree an action plan in consultation with Norfolk Constabulary's Communications Department for awareness raising activity ahead of the May 2012 PCC elections	Wider public awareness of key policing developments	NPA Chief Executive	March 2012	
7. Increase circulation of quarterly engagement e-newsletter <i>Involving You</i> to diverse community groups	Higher public awareness of key policing decisions and developments, and how their input contributes to the policing services they receive	NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee	September 2011	Equality Strategy (Action 4) Community Engagement Strategy (Action 25)
8. Explore further ways of working with community groups, sharing their communication platforms to disseminate NPA's key messages	Higher public awareness of key policing decisions and developments, and how communities can have a say in the policing of their county	NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee	September 2011	Equality Strategy (Action 12)

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<p>9. Ensure engagement and consultation events are appropriately supported through the availability of display and information materials to raise awareness of hate crime reporting routes, complaints procedures and stop/search rights</p>	<p>Pro-active provision of information relevant to the audience</p>	<p>NPA Deputy Chief Executive/ Chair of Performance & Engagement Committee</p>	<p>April 2012¹</p>	<p>Equality Strategy (Action 5)</p>
<p>10. Produce a NPA legacy document evidencing key achievements since 1995</p>	<p>Recognition of achievement, and a position from which to move forward post-transition to PCC</p>	<p>NPA Chief Executive/ NPA Chairman</p>	<p>March 2012</p>	

¹ Where timescale states April 2012, action is ongoing throughout lifespan of the Strategy/Action Plan.

