

HOW TO WRITE A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

March 2022

Introduction

This document is aimed at local public sector colleagues across Scotland who help the public understand the Scottish government's Vision for Justice in Scotland (published in February 2022). Specifically, the network of Community Justice Coordinators and Community Justice Partnerships who deliver community engagement and communications activity across each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas.

The role of local communications is vital. It informs people about public services, explains policies and legislation, raises awareness about key issues, counters misinformation and disinformation, and promote the Scottish Government's vision is for a just, safe and resilient Scotland.

At the heart of this work is strategic communication. Without it, activity can become chaotic, deliver only short-term outputs and lead to duplication. Communicating strategically brings coherence. It looks beyond the day-to-day and seeks to influence target audiences to create long-term change.

What Is a Communications Strategy?

A communications strategy is a document that outlines communications insight (the evidence base), communication goals, the audience at which the goals are aimed at, the channels of communication and how to measure successes and impact.

A good communications strategy should outline:

1. The key insights: facts, stats and the headline context
2. The main communications aims
3. The high-level activity that will help achieve these aims
4. How success, impacts and areas of improvement will be measured

Definitions

Strategic communication - the Government Communication Service (GCS) definition:

"Influencing audiences for public good by marshalling the necessary resources to achieve agreed goals.

This is achieved through organisational unity; the co-ordinated use of all the communication tools available, underpinned by research and given coherence in a story and communication products.

This is set out in a single plan, working to milestones and properly evaluated."

Strategy - a definition of strategy from the Royal College of Defence Studies:

"A course of action that integrates ends, ways and means to meet policy objectives"

Let's breakdown the contents of a communications strategy a little more. What are the top four points to cover?:

1. The key insights - gathering an evidence base (facts, stats and context)
2. The main communications aims
3. Implementation - the high-level activity that will help achieve these aims
4. How success, impacts and areas of improvement will be measured

The key insights – gathering an evidence base

What does local, or national, data highlight as the primary communications 'problem(s)'? For example:

- 70% of the Scottish public surveyed do not know what community justice is.
- When asked what community justice is, 50% (of those who claimed to know what community justice is) said it is: 'community service/unpaid work'.
- 68% of all respondents claimed not to be aware of community justice (services and projects) in their local community.

Existing data, to support the development of your strategy, is available here: the Community Justice Scotland [communications toolbox](#) webpage, the Scottish Government's [crime and justice statistics](#) and other public agency websites such as the [Scottish Prison Service](#), [Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#), [Audit Scotland](#), [Howard League Scotland](#) etc.

Who is your target audience? Is it the public or stakeholders - is there any evidence to help you breakdown the audience any further (by age, location, political persuasion, profession etc.) What do you know about them? Consider questions such as: what media do your target audience consume (online, print press, broadcast, social media, posters/leaflets, radio) and what do they value most (fairness, safety, community aesthetics, staying connected, local services etc.) Try to gather as much data and information as possible, and use this knowledge to inform your communication objectives, craft messages and evaluate outcomes.

This could involve:

- Understanding your audience - their attitudes and beliefs, awareness and knowledge, motivations and barriers to behaviour change, and their media consumption.
- Keeping up-to-date with new media developments and trends.
- Analysing stakeholder feedback.
- Commissioning quantitative and qualitative research to inform communication plans, where budget allows.
- Sharing learning from previous communication activity to shape future activity.

The main communication aims

With your evidence base in mind, it's time to set a direction and write down your communication aims. Think about what is realistic in terms of resource, budget and timings. For example, is your strategy an annual communications plan? Or, does it vie across 3-5 years?

Your aims should set out key communications for the span of the strategy briefly detailing campaigns and projects. Across a delivery period of three years, 3 to 4 broad aims should be sufficient. For example, an aim could be: *Improved understanding in community justice amongst the 18+ general public in Aberdeen.* See example 1 on page 6.

Implementation – communications activity to help achieve your aims

Now you have your communication aims drafted, how are you going to achieve them? What activity will you undertake? This section doesn't need to be a big, long to do list. It should succinctly outline key communications activity. See example 1 on page 6. For example:

Aim: Improved understanding in community justice amongst the 18+ general public in Aberdeen.

Primary audience(s): +18 general public in Aberdeen

To achieve this we will: Use Scottish specific insight to build a collaboratively-produced public campaign, to increase general knowledge about community justice across the Aberdeen local authority area. Including the following activities (not exhaustive), subject to budget allocation:

- *Develop key message(s)*
- *Multi-media content creation to promote key messages*
- *Social media and digital activity*
- *Secure partnership(s) with local partners to support promotion*
- *National and regional media engagement*



Measuring success and impact

It is important to evaluate communications activity and ensure demonstrable outcomes, where possible. See example 2, page 7.

There are lots of free (and paid-for) tools available to help you measure impact including: Google Analytics, Press Reader, Twitter/Facebook/Instagram/LinkedIn Analytics, Track My Hashtag, Survey Monkey etc. There are also straightforward techniques to help you monitor performance. For example, setting up a spread sheet to track stakeholder engagement (regularly recording: what, when, why and how).

Evaluating communications can involve:

- Monitoring communication activities, when live, by collecting, analysing and evaluating output and outcome measures (see tools to help you, above).
- Commissioning new quantitative or qualitative research post-project/campaign to measure awareness or attitudes towards community justice, benching it against previous research to demonstrate progression.
- Aligning communication evaluation to other 'corporate strategies' such as local development plans or local outcomes improvement plans (where appropriate) to identify the contribution communication has made to the overall mix of interventions.
- Circulating evaluation highlight reports to senior management and including updates in national reporting templates such as the Community Justice Outcome Activity returns.
- Sharing lessons learnt to inform and improve future communication plans.

Tools and resources

Got questions? Confused? Want to sense check something? Please always get in touch with the Community Justice Scotland Communications Team. We are here to help you: [Rebecca](#), [Maria](#), and [Tash](#).

We are a small team who action most of our communications activities in-house. This means we have expertise to help support you with:

- **Social marketing campaigns** - to lever behaviour change, shift attitudes and promote public awareness of the benefits of using community disposals
- **Brand** - creating and maintaining a brand, developing brand guidelines
- **Social media** - across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn platforms
- **Digital** - website and microsite development and maintenance
- **Comms insight and research** - creating a robust evidence base to underpin communications activity
- **Press, media and PR** - across news (print and online), TV, radio and digital
- **Stakeholder communications**

Other resources:

- The [GCS Academy](#) is an online resource listing training opportunities, events and resources by communication discipline.
- The [Public Sector Comms Headspace](#) Facebook group is a private space to ask questions and/or partake in debate and discussion with likeminded public sector communication professionals across the UK.
- The Community Justice Scotland [communications toolbox](#) provides guidance on press, social media and strategic communications as well as insight fact sheets and links to assets/resources that can be used within local communications (such as images, animations and films).
- Guidance on Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations standards can be found [here](#).
- [This blog](#) provides a *How to Write a Strategic Communications Plan Template*. Although geared towards the private sector (i.e. selling products) the templates are very useful and adaptable.



Aim 1: Improved understanding in community justice amongst the Scottish public in X

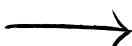
Primary audience(s): +18 general public in [insert local area]

Local area plan 2020 – 2023 alignment: [insert relevant text]

To achieve this, we will:

Use Scottish specific insight to build a collaboratively-produced public campaign, to increase general knowledge about community justice in local areas across Scotland. Including the following activities (not exhaustive), subject to budget allocation:

- Develop key message(s);
- Multi-media content creation;
- Social media and digital activity
- Engagement strategy
- Regional media strategy, print and broadcast. Focus on local stories of transformation.



Measurement:

Repeated public polling (post-campaign launch) will indicate a shift in public awareness, increased from the current baseline (X%) indicated in X 2022.

Media monitoring and analysis (national and regional)

Digital metrics and analysis (social media, website)

Evaluation criteria and plan

The communications strategy will be subject to on-going tracking and continuous evaluation over both the short and longer term.

Evaluation Criteria Method	Method of Evaluation	When Evaluated
Was the output/strategy completed on budget and on schedule?	Strategy and outputs produced according to schedule and budget	<i>[insert date]</i>
Did the strategy produce the communications outputs that were intended?	Production of communication outputs measured against comms strategy expectations	<i>[insert date]</i>



First published 2022

Community Justice Scotland, R1 Spur, Saughton House, Edinburgh, EH11 3DX

Tel: 0300 244 8420

www.communityjustice.scot

