

# **Communications Strategy**

## **Communications Strategy 2009**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Overview**

We (HHL) recognise the importance of good communication both internally and externally. As a growing organisation it is important that we ensure every opportunity is used to promote a positive image and to ensure that all communications reflect the Mission, Vision and Values of the Company in an appropriate manner. The Communication Strategy will act as a framework to assist Herefordshire Housing in this as well as setting the standard for effective communication.

The strategy shows who we need to communicate with and through what media. The strategy will be used to improve internal and external communication as well as to increase the profile of Herefordshire Housing and to ensure the promotion of relevant successes and achievements. The strategy defines how we will measure the success of communication methods used.

#### **1.2 Executive Summary**

The Communications Strategy is intended as a guide for internal and external communications for colleagues, customers and stakeholders. It states who we communicate with, it lists the stakeholders we deal with and the information different stakeholders require from us. It sets out the communication mechanisms we will be using and the key elements of information to be distributed. It aims to show how frequently information is shared and where and how it is done appropriately.

The Communications Strategy also defines the roles and responsibilities of individuals for ensuring communications are adequate, appropriate and timely. It sets out the role of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team and clarifies the responsibilities of colleagues and managers in ensuring they fully utilise the communications channels available to them.

#### ***Related Documents:***

**Writing in Plain English:** This is a short guide designed to help colleagues provide information in Plain English.

**Communications Toolkit:** A basic guide explaining the role of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team and the role of Colleagues in relation to communications.

**Communication Guidance Notes:** Guidance for communicating with people who speak a different language, are visually or hearing impaired.

**Translation & Interpretation Services Step-by-Step Guide & Monitoring Form:** Step-by-step guidance notes for using our translation and interpretation services, including language line.

### **1.3 What is communications?**

Communications covers all aspects of the way we communicate with people, communities, other organisations and businesses whether intentional or not. This could be an advertising campaign, or consultation event; or may be the impression given to someone who telephones or visits one of our offices.

It is important not to think of communications as spin or propaganda – this gives a very false image of what we do – good communications is about honesty, openness, realism and having respect for people.

Communications is a two-way process. It's not just telling people about our organisation, it's also about listening to make sure the messages are received and understood and to help improve our services.

### **1.4 Communication Objectives**

Communication occurs on a day-to-day basis and needs to remain at a high standard. The following objectives have been developed in conjunction with residents.

We will aim to:

- Provide accurate and timely information to customers and the wider public using a range of mechanisms;
- Develop and maintain communications throughout the Company;
- Raise the profile of the Company and promote positive publicity both in the local and national media;
- Ensure stakeholders receive relevant information and reports;
- Communicate with our customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders in a clear, effective and respectful manner;
- Ensure that sufficient resources are available for effective communications with our customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders;
- Ensure reviews are undertaken so that our methods of communication remain effective;
- Promote the principles of equality and inclusiveness by providing information in Braille, Large Print, Audio format and other languages where requested.

### **1.5 The role of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team**

We have a dedicated Customer Involvement and Communications Team. It is the responsibility of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team to ensure that channels are made available to communicate effectively with customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders. The Customer Involvement and Communications Team will support and encourage all departments to communicate with the above but ultimately it is the responsibility of individuals to ensure they communicate the relevant information.

With regard to external communications, it is essential that we promote the best possible image for the Company. It is therefore important that any

communication material maintains the defined 'HHL brand'. To achieve this, ***all material prepared for external use should be directed to the Customer Involvement and Communications Team for approval.*** This includes anything more significant than a letter to an individual person; for example: leaflets, flyers, posters, press releases, newsletters or booklets, promotional materials, surveys and questionnaires.

The Customer Involvement and Communications Team will provide guidelines on 'writing in plain English' and will advise you on the most appropriate communication mechanism (See 'Writing in Plain English' and 'Communications Toolkit for Colleagues').

The Customer Involvement and Communications Team will monitor the use of multi-lingual boxes used on external communications. The Team will also ensure all communications meet the legal requirements as set out in THE COMPANYS REGULATION ACT 2006.

The Customer Involvement and Communications Team are responsible for the production of the Annual Report, quarterly editions on 'in vision' and the 'Leaseholder Bulletin' and the overall 'look and feel' of the Company website and Intranet. The design work for posters, displays (if corporate) and public information leaflets will also be the responsibility of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.

It is the responsibility of individual managers to ensure that communication material is directed to the Customer Involvement and Communications Team to ensure a consistent and professional look and feel in line with the HHL brand. Communications content should be produced by the information holder unless otherwise agreed with the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.

The information holder could be a director, head of service, manager, colleague, author of a strategy or policy, or any person who has the knowledge to produce the desired information, to be communicated internally or externally. For example, a newsletter article on right to buy/right to acquire would be produced by a member of the legal team who in this instance would be the information holder. It is the responsibility of the information holder to produce the desired information and ensure that it is accurate, relevant and timely (for guidance on producing information, please see the 'Communications Toolkit' and 'Writing in Plain English')

## **2. The Strategy**

### **2.1 Who do we want to communicate with?**

We need to effectively communicate with a range of 'target audiences'. These include the following:

- Tenants
- Tenants & Residents Groups

- Leaseholders
- Colleagues
- Management
- Stakeholders (including our funders, regulators, local authority and other housing associations)
- Board of Management
- Housing regulation authorities (i.e. TSA)
- Other members of the public

## 2.2 What communication channels can we use?

We will use a variety of channels to communicate with our target audience. The channel must be considered against the audience's preferred methods of communication and the suitability of the message. Channels include but are not limited to:

Email	Press Releases
Letter	Photography and other images
Website	Notices in local press
Intranet	Annual Report
Telephone	Satisfaction survey
Colleague training	Public information leaflets
Reports	Tenant Handbook
Displays	Meetings
Newsletters	Service Review Groups
Team Briefing	What's gone well
Leaseholder Bulletin	Leaseholder Handbook
Fax	Face to face
Minicom	Audio CD
Braille	Large Print format
Text	

**Please see our 'guidance notes for communications' (Appendix 2) to view the mechanisms available when communicating with someone who speaks a different language, is visually or hearing impaired.**

## 2.3 Maintaining the HHL brand

To ensure all external communication maintains the HHL brand it should be directed to the Customer Involvement and Communications Team for approval. External communication should include:

- Herefordshire Housing logo
- 'in business' logo
- QHS logo (where appropriate)
- Positive about disabled people logo (where appropriate)
- Mission statement 'Delivering quality housing services to diverse communities' (where appropriate, speak to the CI & C Team)

- Herefordshire Housing banner (where appropriate)
- Legally required information: Herefordshire Housing Limited Registered Office: Legion Way, Hereford, HR1 1LN. Registered with the Housing Corporation No: LH4353. Registered in England 4221587. Registered Charity No: 1105907.

***Further guidance:***

- Our Corporate font is Arial and where possible information should be provided in size 12pt. All large print information should be produced in Arial font 24pt for headings and 22pt for the main body of text.
- When using the Herefordshire Housing logo, please do not stretch it. Dimensions for the logo on standard A4 is 9cm (w) x 2cm (h) from the leaf to housing.
- When using the Herefordshire Housing banner, please do not stretch it. On A4 portrait paper the banner should run across the top of the page left to right. It should not be placed in the middle or bottom of any page. When using on a landscape A4 page the banner should not be stretched to fit across the page. To ensure this is visually correct please get this approved by the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.
- When using a power point presentation please use the standard template set out by the Customer Involvement and Communications Team. If you do not have a copy please request one from the team.

***Please note; the Herefordshire Housing logos/Corporate brand should not be used by any external party without prior consent of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team. Please ensure you direct external parties to us.***

## **2.4 Communicating with our Customers**

### **2.4.1 Overview**

All customers should have access to information about us (HHL) and our services and should be kept up to date with any significant news and changes.

Information should be available upon request in Audio versions, Large Print, Braille and in other languages.

### **2.4.2 How will we communicate with customers?**

The following channels will be used to communicate with our customers:

#### **2.4.2.1 Residents Newsletter**

We will produce a quarterly newsletter for our customers. The newsletter will be produced with the involvement of our residents Communications Panel. The newsletter will be used to report back on consultation taking place as well as results from surveys/questionnaires, our improvement programmes, help and advice, updates on Company changes, new services, and human interest articles.

We will encourage feedback from customers and will actively seek their involvement in the production of the newsletter. Newsletters will include a translation box to allow customers to request information in an alternative language as well as Braille, Large Print and Audio CD.

We will automatically produce the newsletter in Braille, Large Print and Audio CD for those who have requested it.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Communications Officer, Wider Management Team, Communications Panel

**Write content:** Information holder, Communications Officer (if agreed in advance)

**Design:** Communications Officer, Communications Panel

**Authorisation:** Communications Officer, Chief Executive

**2.4.2.2 Annual Report**

We will produce an Annual Report to feedback achievements made throughout the year. The report will be distributed to the Board of Management, Tenants and Residents groups and Stakeholders. The Annual Report will be made available to Leaseholders and Tenants who attend our Annual General Meeting and consultation event. The Report will also be available in our reception areas and to everyone on request.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Chief Executive, Communications Officer

**Write content:** Information holder, Communications Officer

**Theme/Design:** Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Chief Executive

**2.4.2.3 Notices in local press**

We will place notices in the local press to advertise relevant meetings, consultation evenings open to tenants and the general public, garage's or commercial premises to rent, and any other key issues.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Information holder

**Write content:** Information holder

**Design:** Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Communications Officer

**2.4.2.4 Website**

We will provide information to customers on our Company website. Information will include contact details, electronic versions of annual reports, newsletters,

information leaflets, information about service areas, press releases, job opportunities and much more.

Our website has been constructed to conform to level Double-A of the WC3 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0.

To ensure our website is accessible to all we have included the following features:

**Browsealoud:** This enables you to listen to rather than read our website content, including all pdf documents.

It can offer a practical website access service to a range of people who may:-

- Have reading or literacy difficulties
- Not be fluent in English as it is not their first language
- Have Dyslexia
- Have mild visual impairment
- Just find it easier to listen, rather than read

All pages have 'text-only' versions; which allows the site to be viewed without images or colour. Once in 'text-only mode, the colour scheme of the page may be changed, as well as the font style and size, allowing for maximum visibility and readability and therefore maximum accessibility.

We include a function to increase the text size and we provide key information in Polish, Russian and Portuguese. We will review the translated information on an annual basis.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Communications Officer, Communications Panel, Wider Management Team

**Write content:** Information holder

**Design:** Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Communications Officer

**2.4.2.5 Public Information leaflets**

We will produce public information leaflets which will be displayed in our offices. Public information leaflets will include translation boxes for those who require information in alternative languages or formats. We will review the information in our leaflets on an annual basis in conjunction with the annual handbook updates.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Information holder, Communications Officer

**Write content:** Information holder

**Design:** Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Communications Officer, Information holder

#### **2.4.2.6 Press Releases**

We will send press releases to the media to promote the positive work we do. Our target is to have two press releases published each month or 24 over a 12 month period.

Reactive press releases are sent as and when needed but we will always try and speak with the journalist before sending a statement.

All press enquiries should be directed through to the Customer Involvement and Communications Team. No statements should be issued without approval of the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.

#### **Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Communications Officer

**Write content:** Information provided by the Information holder, press release written by the Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Customer Involvement and Communications Team

#### **2.4.2.6 Service Review Groups**

Service Review Groups provide a two way face-to-face communication channel. We will consult with customers and gain valuable feedback on the services we are providing. This communication channel will give customers the opportunity to influence the services they receive and ensure they are an integral part of the way we operate.

#### **Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Information holder

**Deliver content:** Information holder

**Authorisation:** Head of Service/Director

#### **2.4.2.8 Annual General Meeting**

We will hold an Annual General Meeting. The meeting will be open to everybody and will be advertised in the local press. The meeting will be used to communicate achievements, challenges and the annual accounts. Customers will be given the opportunity to put questions to Directors, Board Members and Colleagues

#### **Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Wider Management Team

**Deliver content:** Information holder

**Authorisation:** Wider Management Team

#### **2.4.2.9 Posters & displays**

We will use posters and displays to communicate a variety of messages to our customers. All external posters and displays will maintain the 'HHL brand' and

should be directed to the Customer Involvement and Communications Team for approval.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Information holder, Customer Involvement & Communications Team

**Design:** Communications Officer

**Authorisation:** Customer Involvement and Communications Team

**2.4.2.10 Tenants' Handbook**

We have a tenants' handbook which is made up of a series of leaflets about our services. The handbook is used to inform customers about the housing services the Company provides. The handbook leaflets will be reviewed annually ahead of the budget setting process for the next financial year to identify cost implications. The final decision as to whether the leaflet is amended will rest with the Customer Involvement and Communications Team. Updated leaflets will be posted to all residents ensuring they have the most up to date information.

**Roles & responsibilities:**

**Decide content:** Customer Involvement and Communications Team, Wider Management Team

**Design:** Customer Involvement and Communications Team, Communications Panel

**Authorisation:** Customer Involvement and Communications Team, Communications Panel

**2.4.3 Measuring the success of communicating with our customers**

We will undertake consultation to identify how satisfied customers are with the ways in which we keep them informed. We can measure and monitor our performance through the following:

**Status survey** This will be sent to all tenants to gain valuable feedback on the services we offer and the way we communicate with tenants. We can measure success through improved levels of satisfaction.

**Customer Involvement monitoring form:** We will use a Customer Involvement monitoring form to measure success and performance. The form will be used to record all outcomes of customer involvement.

**Website feedback forms:** We have a 'contact us' section on our website where we provide online contact forms to encourage feedback.

**Website Poll:** We will use a polling system on our website to periodically assess the information we provide.

**Mystery shoppers:** The whole Company will be mystery shopped on a regular basis. We can measure success by ensuring we meet our service standards.

**Communications Panel:** The Panel will look at the ways we communicate with customers, for example, in vision, our website, posters and displays and, public information leaflets. The Panel will establish from a tenants perspective, any key

issues, concerns, or areas for potential improvement, and provide feedback on how effective our communication is. The Communications Panel will review information via email or meetings when necessary.

**Ad hoc tenant consultation:** We will hold consultation events on an ad hoc basis which will be open to our residents. The consultation will be used to communicate issues to tenants and gain feedback.

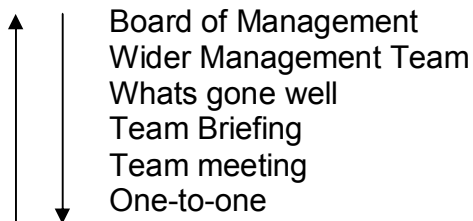
## 2.5 Communicating with Stakeholders and Partners

We will use some of the channels listed in 2.4 'Communicating with our Customers', when communicating with Stakeholders and Partners. Information will be provided to Stakeholders and Partners as and when we feel it is necessary to inform them. We will review the information sent to Stakeholders and Partners to ensure they only receive information which is relevant to them.

## 2.6 Communicating with Colleagues

### 2.6.1 Overview

We understand the importance of communicating with colleagues to ensure they are fully aware of how we are performing and any changes that take place. We will communicate in a clear, effective and respectful manner, we will ensure they are kept informed of our activities, and we will seek their involvement and influence over our operations. We aim to do this through a two way flow of communication:



It is the responsibility of individual colleagues to ensure they utilise the communication channels made available to them. The line manager is responsible for ensuring this happens.

### 2.6.2 How we will communicate with colleagues

We will seek to use all of the following channels to ensure effective communication.

- **Board of Management:** The Board of Herefordshire Housing will meet regularly, setting the broad strategic direction for the organisation, and receiving updates on key issues and changes
- **What's gone well:** This is posted once a month on the Intranet and plasma screen in stores reception. Information includes what's gone well from each team, this is collected at the Wider Management Team meetings.

- **Team Briefing:** Developed around our company values, this includes brief updates, signposting colleagues if they would like more information. This is sent out once a month and the information needs to be delivered to colleagues as soon as possible, so that everyone is regularly up to date.
- **Team Meeting:** Each department will hold a team meeting on a regular basis to discuss team targets, performance and action plans.
- **Intranet:** This is the main internal communications channel. It is the responsibility of individual departments to ensure they maintain their homepage and upload important information. It is the responsibility of colleagues to ensure they check the intranet regularly ensuring they are kept up to date with Company issues. For colleagues without direct access to the intranet we will provide access on a computer in the colleague canteen. The 'whats gone well' will also display on the plasma screen in the stores reception area.
- **Email:** Emails are used to request and pass information throughout the Company. It is important that we do not over use emails and should consider whether email is the best method of communication.
- **Notice boards:** Notice boards will be used to provide information to colleagues on performance, Health and Safety, Job opportunities.
- **In vision:** All colleagues will receive a copy of the residents' newsletter. Keeping them informed of the information being communicated to tenants and leaseholders.

### 2.6.3 How will we measure success?

**Colleague Survey:** We will aim to send an annual questionnaire to all colleagues to find out how satisfied they are with the channels used to keep them informed. We can measure success through improved levels of satisfaction

**Colleague Suggestion Scheme:** Colleagues can send suggestions to the Wider Management Team through this channel. Boxes are placed in the colleague canteen areas. Suggestions can be anonymous but we would encourage colleagues to disclose their name to ensure they are informed of the outcome of their suggestion.

**Intranet Statistics:** We will monitor usage via the statistics module which can be purchased from Interact. This will also show us trends and the most frequently used information. We will also set up an intranet user group who will look at the statistics and discuss ways to increase usage if necessary.

**Regularity of meetings:** Ensure meetings at every level are held on a regular basis to maintain the timely flow of communication.

**CDS and CSS:** Ensure all employees receive a review on an annual basis to evaluate performance and targets.

**In vision:** Ensure all colleagues receive a copy, or have access to a copy (via the intranet) before/at the time it is sent to customers.

**Updating Colleague notice boards:** Ensure information is accurate and up to date

## **2.7 HHL's key Corporate activities and messages**

To ensure HHL keeps colleagues, customers and stakeholders informed of relevant changes and successes the key activities and messages listed below should continue to be communicated.

These include but are not limited to:

- Promotion of company mission, vision and values – how we are living these
- KPIs and financial updates
- Value for money
- Positive press stories – successes
- Project updates
- Strategies and Policies
- Service Review Groups
- Resident consultation events
- Successes and achievements – company and individual
- Training (colleagues and residents)
- Website updates
- Audit commission inspection
- Annual General Meeting
- Annual report and financial statements
- Improvement works – 5 year improvement plan

This list is not exclusive. Other key activities/messages that arise will be communicated accordingly.

## **3. Equality and Diversity**

We are committed to promoting the principles of equality and inclusiveness and this is reflected in the communications strategy.

HHL will ensure that customers can communicate with us by removing any barriers that may prevent this.

HHL will provide information in the following alternative formats:

- Braille
- Large Print
- Audio CD
- Other languages – we use an external company to translated written information where requested and where appropriate

### **3.1 Translations**

We include a multi-lingual box on external communication advertising the availability of information in other languages. Currently we offer translations into Polish, Russian and Portuguese as these were established in Herefordshire Councils Census as the top three non-English speaking languages in Herefordshire. Through our Residents Census, we have also identified a need to translate into Lithuanian.

We have step-by-step translation and interpretation guidance notes and monitoring forms which should be followed when carrying out any translation including a telephone translation, face to face interpretation, translation of a document or requesting a British Sign Language Interpreter.

We will not automatically carry out translations; we will assess each request individually. When we receive a translation request we will consider if this is the most appropriate method of communication e.g. would face to face communication be more appropriate. We will always translate legally binding information.

We provide translation pages on our website in Polish, Russian, and Portuguese. These pages will be reviewed on an annual basis, at the same time as the leaflet review, ahead of the budget setting process. We will also review the languages used.

### **3.2 Literacy difficulties**

We will always produce audio copies of written information for those who have requested that they receive information in this format e.g. newsletter. Information such as an individual letter would not be produced in audio format but customers should be contacted via telephone and a face to face meeting offered.

We have installed Browsealoud on our website. This enables you to listen to rather than read our website content, including all pdf documents such as our information leaflets, policies and newsletters.

It can offer a practical website access service to a range of people who may have reading or literacy difficulties or have dyslexia.

All pages have 'text-only' versions; which allows the site to be viewed without images or colour. Once in 'text-only mode, the colour scheme of the page may be changed, as well as the font style and size, allowing for maximum visibility and readability and therefore maximum accessibility.

### **3.3 Numeracy difficulties**

In our 'Writing in Plain English' guidance notes we provide advice on how best to write numbers and time, see appendix 1.

### **3.4 Learning difficulties**

We can produce pictorial guides for residents who have severe literacy problems or learning difficulties. A pictorial guide is a very simplified version which includes images and would work in conjunction with other support services e.g. support worker/HHL Housing Support Advisor.

If you think you may need a pictorial guide please contact the Customer Involvement and Communications Team and we will establish whether this is the most appropriate means of communication.

Makaton can also be used when communicating with people who have learning difficulties. Makaton is a much simpler form of communication and uses common vocabulary that is used in everyday speech. It also incorporates the use of picture cards and ties in facial expressions with the word to produce more content in the shortest form.

If you think you need a Makaton signer, please contact the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.

### **3.5 Visual impairment**

We can provide information in Braille for customers who require it. We produce this in house, if you would like information in this format please contact the Customer Involvement and Communications Team.

All of our information can be produced in large print for those who require it. You can produce this yourself by putting the document in 22pt font for the normal body of the text and 24pt font for the heading.

Audio CD can also be used for customer's who are visually impaired, this is only appropriate for "mass" translations. e.g Newsletter, Leaflets or Tenancy Agreements. If you would like information in this format, please contact the Customer Involvement and Communications Team. If you have an individual letter you should arrange to speak to the customer one to one to talk through the document with them.

Browsealoud can be used on our website to enable customers to listen to the website content being read out loud, rather than having to read it. All pages also have "text-only" versions; which allows the site to be viewed without any images or colour. Once in "text-only" mode, the colour scheme of the page may be changed, as well as the font style and size, allowing for maximum visibility and readability and therefore maximum accessibility. There are also three text sizes available.

### **3.6 Hearing impairment**

It is important to be aware of low literacy levels and never make the assumption that you can just write out to a customer with a hearing impairment. It is quite common for people with hearing impairments to have low literacy ability, particularly for older people. Always offer to go and see the customer face to face with an interpreter if necessary.

When communicating with customers who have a hearing impairment we have the following interpreters available; British Sign Language Interpreter, Lip speaker, Electronic note taker, Speech to text reporter.

We can also text customers in some areas of the Company including Income Services, Lettings and Customer Involvement.

Customers can be contacted via email. General enquiries go to [info@hhl.org.uk](mailto:info@hhl.org.uk) – this is picked up by our reception team and forwarded to the correct department. The website provides contact forms for the following teams.

- Repairs and maintenance
- Rents Team and Arrears Advice
- Improvements
- Getting involved
- Lettings
- Anti social Behaviour
- Estate Management/Tenancy Enquiries
- Sheltered Housing
- Herefordshire Careline
- Complaints and Compliments

We also have a Minicom system for customers. The Minicom is a telephone typewriter device. The number is 01432 378487. This service is currently run through Careline.

Customers can also contact us using our fax machine, the number is 01432 384198

We have hearing loops in our offices at Legion Way reception, Board Room at Legion Way, Interview Room 1 at Legion Way, Jubilee Court Office and Widemarsh Street Office. We also have 9 portable hearing loops.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Guidance notes for writing in Plain English**

Writing in plain English helps to make sure that people understand what is written the first time they read it.

By using consistent and correct language we can communicate a professional image of Herefordshire Housing. This means that we must all take the same approach every time we write and present information.

These basic guidelines set out the rules for all written information. It's vital that information is clear, concise and direct.

For more in depth information you can visit [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk) for a free guide to plain English and guidelines on alternative words to use.

#### **General rules**

- Use the corporate templates for letters, presentations, agendas and reports.
- Keep your sentences short (15 to 20 words on average). Keep paragraphs to three or four sentences.
- Choose everyday words, not jargon and avoid American words, phrases and spelling.
- Use positive language.
- Avoid using acronyms if your audience won't know what they mean.
- Beware of common spelling mistakes – for example, affect, license and practise are verbs, and effect, license and practice are nouns.
- Use the corporate font, Arial, in 12 point size wherever possible.
- Use lists, paragraphs and bullets where you can to break up text.
- Avoid clichés and other overused phrases such as 'to name but a few'.
- Use active verbs instead of passive verbs e.g. This matter will be considered by us shortly (Passive), We will consider this matter shortly (Active)

- Use 'you' and 'we' where possible.
- Numbers with four figures and above use commas for example, 3,000 not 3000.
- With money remove the extra zeros so, use £50 not £50.00
- Avoid BLOCK CAPITALS which are hard to read and can exclude people with reading difficulties and can be interpreted that you are SHOUTING.
- With writing time, if on the hour remove the zero for example, use 9am not 9.00am
- Always check your spelling. Use the spellchecker (English, not American!), but remember it's not infallible, so read through as well and if in doubt get someone to check it for you.

## **Punctuation**

Punctuation helps the reader make sense of your writing, so it's important to get it right.

### **Comma (,)**

Use a comma where there is a natural pause or where something extra is added in.

### **Semi colon (;)**

Use where you need a strong pause but not a full stop.

### **Colon (:)**

The colon is a pause stronger than a semi-colon but weaker than a full stop. It can also be used to introduce lists.

### **Apostrophes (')**

The apostrophe has two uses:

### **Full stop (.)**

This shows that the sentence has ended. Avoid using them in headlines – it looks clumsy. There's no need to use full stops after Mrs and Mr. If a website address appears at the end of a sentence, you should remove the full stop.

### **Exclamation marks**

Don't use too many exclamation marks and never use more than one at a time!!!!

## **Layout**

Communications standards aim to achieve a consistent and co-ordinated approach to the presentation of all documents for external use. All leaflets, posters, booklets and other HHL documents are produced by the Customer Involvement and Communications Team (more information from Comms strategy)

For all other documents follow this guide:

- Always use the corporate templates
- Don't underline words – it makes them difficult to read - and never underline CAPITALS, even for headings.
- Avoid hyphens at the end of lines where possible by rewording or moving short words onto the next line.

Where possible align your text on the left. Justified text is more difficult to read as the spaces between words are different

## **Appendix 2**

### **Communications Toolkit for Colleagues**

We have put this toolkit together to act as colleague reference manual for all matters relating to the Communications Team within Herefordshire Housing.

We hope you find it useful and welcome any comments or suggestions you may have to improve it further.

#### **What is communications?**

In this toolkit we refer to 'communications' throughout and by this we mean all aspects of our organisation's communication with everyone who comes into contact with us, whether directly or indirectly.

Communications covers all aspects of the way we communicate with people, communities, other organisations and businesses whether intentional or not. This could be an advertising campaign, or consultation event; or may be the impression given to someone who telephones or visits one of our offices.

It is important not to think of communications as spin or propaganda – this gives a very false image of what we do – good communications is about honesty, openness, realism and having respect for people.

Communications is a two-way process. It's not just about telling people about our organisation, it's also about listening to make sure the messages are received and understood and to help improve our services.

Communications activities include (but are not limited to):

- Marketing
- Website
- Intranet
- Press
- Advertising
- Events
- Internal communications
- Publications
- Leaflets, Flyers and posters
- Annual reports
- in vision
- Leaseholder Bulletin

#### **How can the Communications team help me?**

We are here to help you promote the work you do, both internally (to your colleagues) and externally. Please ask us for advice and treat us like your very own consultancy service. If you need to tell people about something you're doing, such as a new project that you're working on, you have a new service to

promote, or you want to attract people to attend an event, please talk to us about it and we can give you advice on how best to get your messages across.

- Website – [www.hhl.org.uk](http://www.hhl.org.uk)
- Intranet
- Media relations including news releases and photo opportunities
- Posters, leaflets and brochures
- Banners and signs
- Newsletters / Bulletins
- Events and launches
- Advertising
- Branded goods such as pens, keyrings, bags etc
- Receptions

### **What can I do?**

While we are very willing to help, there are some things that you can do for yourself.

All we ask is that you follow our simple guidelines to ensure all of our communication looks and sounds as though it's come from the same organisation.

Here is a list of these guidelines and where to find them:

### **Communications Toolkit**

Reference manual for all colleagues.

### **Corporate Image and Branding**

This gives you everything you need to know about the Herefordshire Housing brand style including information on logos; this can be found within the Communication Strategy.

### **Writing in Plain English Guide**

Notes to help you write in Plain English – and produce clearer, more concise communications.

This also includes grammar notes – brief reminders of some punctuation and grammar rules. There is only a right or wrong way with grammar.

### **Communications Strategy**

The HHL communication strategy is on the Intranet under the Policy and strategy section.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

While we are very willing to help, there are some things that you can do for yourself.

**Q**

My mobile phone number has changed – could you update my profile on the Intranet?

**A**

*This is something you can do yourself - simply click on your profile, then edit profile and a box will appear containing your information. Don't forget to click save when you are finished.*

**Q**

I have some news I would like to tell colleagues and/or customers about – what do I need to do?

**A**

*Create a brief article. The Plain English writing guide may help you with this. Remember the five W's: Who? What? When? Why? Where? And a picture speaks a thousand words. Once you have created your article email it through to Jen Preedy.*

**Q**

I have seen something on the website or Intranet which is out of date. Who should I tell?

**A**

*It's inevitable the odd piece of information is overlooked. Please tell Jen if there is something on the website and notify Jen or the relevant manager if it is on the Intranet.*

**Q**

I want to produce or re-order a leaflet or some branded goods

**A**

*Speak to Audrey and she will be able to give you an idea of prices and gain quotes for budgeting purposes. If you want to place an order please ask Audrey who will go through her existing suppliers.*

## **Handy Hints**

### **Timing**

If you are planning a project and think you might need some help from the Communications team, please tell us as soon as possible. With a small team and a busy function to manage, time is precious. Giving as much notice as possible will help us give you a better service.

### **Be Clear**

Housing, like many other sectors, has its own acronyms, jargon and slang. Consider your audience when you are preparing a communication and keep it simple.

**Email**

Keep emails short and to the point – a good rule is if it's longer than four paragraphs then email is not the right method of communication. Think twice before you copy other people into your email, we all suffer from overload!

**If things go wrong**

From time to time things do go wrong – if a tenant, resident or service user has a complaint please let Jen Preedy know as soon as possible if you think they may contact their local newspaper. It's always best for the communications team to be aware of the situation so we can prepare for calls from journalists. We can also decide if some other form of communication needs to happen, such as writing a statement for the website or colleagues.

**Photos**

The communications Team maintain a library of photos for use in publications. Remember if you want to take pictures of tenants, service users or residents you should ask their permission first, and for children you need to get a signed permission form which you can pick up from the communications team.

For more information please contact us on (01432) 384011.