



Your Homes  
Newcastle



**Connect and engage**  
A communications strategy for YHN 2010-2014

Version control table	
Version number:	1
Date current version produced:	January 2011
Due date for next review:	November 2012
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## Useful information

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction and context</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1	National drivers	4
1.2	Local drivers	5
1.3	Our mission and strategic objectives	5
1.4	Our core values	6
1.5	How communications drive the achievement of our organisational mission, objectives and values	6
1.6	Purpose of the strategy	7
1.7	Scope of strategy	7
1.8	Impact of the strategy	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Our vision for communications</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Our vision	9
2.2	What will our vision look like?	9
<b>3</b>	<b>Where we are now</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1	Our current approach	11
3.2	What people have told us	12
<b>4</b>	<b>Our strategic priorities</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1	<b>Priority 1:</b> To position YHN as the leading provider of quality housing and excellent housing services in the North East	<b>15</b>
4.2	<b>Priority 2:</b> To ensure two way communications are established with both staff and customers to enable continuous improvement	<b>18</b>
4.3	<b>Priority 3:</b> To raise YHN's profile with local and national media	<b>22</b>
4.4	<b>Priority 4:</b> To make information about YHN accessible to all of our different audiences	<b>24</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Implementation and monitoring of the strategy</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Responsibility for the communications strategy</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Review</b>	<b>28</b>
	<b>Appendix one: The Communications Strategy Action Plan 2010 – 2014</b>	<b>29</b>
	<b>Appendix two: 2009-10 - a year in the life A snapshot of our communication activity in one year</b>	<b>42</b>

# 1. Introduction and context

Communication is a broad term that is often used to describe a far wider range of personal interactions than just how we give people information. It is about connecting and engaging with people.

Your Homes Newcastle is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) set up in April 2004. We manage over 31,000 tenanted and leasehold properties on behalf of Newcastle City Council and employ over 800 staff. We are run by a Board which comprises of Council nominees, tenants and independent people. We are organised into three distinct organisational directorates and a Chief Executive's Office:

- Business Development
- Chief Executive's Office
- Finance and Resources
- Tenancy Services.

YHN was originally set up to improve homes so that they met the government's Decent Homes standard, a task that is due for completion in 2012 thanks to our extensive Modern Homes Programme. We are more than a traditional housing provider. We offer a range of support services for customers that can significantly increase their life chances as well as services that contribute financially to the business that we are then able to reinvest for the benefit of tenants. We are also developing new homes through our charitable subsidiary, Leazes Homes.

## 1.1 National drivers

### Government policy

We are currently in a period of transition in terms of government policy and one in which it is still too soon to identify all of the potential impacts. What we do know is that:

- we remain in the business of managing, maintaining and building housing albeit in a tighter economic environment
- housing reform is accepted as inevitable and flexibility to allow us to be fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century whilst welcome, has the potential to change some of the fundamental principles underpinning social housing
- welfare system reform will affect a significant number of our tenants and customers and we may need to alter the way we work to respond to this
- communication expectations under different government led frameworks such as the Equality Framework for Local Government, Investors in People and Customer Service Excellence can be at odds with current thinking in central government around value for money and Community Cohesion, particularly as it relates to language needs.

We are well placed as an organisation to respond positively to change but we need to make sure that our communication systems are flexible

enough to respond skilfully to whatever challenges lie ahead. Our customers, partners and staff alike need to remain confident in us as an organisation that is able to deliver quality and relevant services that respond to local need.

### **The new national regulatory framework**

The government has said that the regulatory framework, implemented by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) in April 2010, is to continue until recommendations from the recent 'Review of social housing' are formalised. However, it has been confirmed that regulatory functions are to be transferred from the TSA to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) by April 2012.

For further information on the framework and how we comply with it, please see our official report to the TSA for 2009/10.

The review also addressed the current inspection process. It is likely that in the future inspections will only be carried out on providers who have, or are at risk of, breaching the standards outlined within the regulatory framework.

## **1.2 Local drivers**

Our Communications Strategy has been informed by and contributes to a number of local plans and strategies. It supports them through the promotion of related activity and communicating positive outcomes. These include:

- YHN's Business Strategy 2010-2014
- Your Homes Newcastle's Delivery Plan 2010-2011
- Your Homes Newcastle's People Strategy 2010-2014
- Every Customer Matters - YHN's Customer Service Strategy 2010-2014
- Customer Insight Policy and procedure
- Your Homes Newcastle IT Strategy 2010-2014
- Customer Involvement Strategy and compact

## **1.3 Our mission and strategic objectives**

Your Homes Newcastle intends to be the best housing provider in the North East.

We will achieve our mission by investing in:

- **Support and care to communities**
- **Three star excellent services**
- **A quality workforce**
- **Refurbishing and building homes.**

## 1.4 Our core values

Our core values are at the heart of the business and are the principles and standards that influence the way we work and behave. They make a difference by giving us a sense of pride and belonging at work, and show we care and are committed to people and the work we do. They have been developed following consultation with staff, Board and customers. They are:

- **Accountability** – acting openly and taking responsibility
- **Integrity** – acting fairly and honestly
- **Passion** – working positively with enthusiasm
- **Respect** – treating everyone with care and professionalism
- **Forward thinking** – proactively seeking improvements and solutions.

## 1.5 How communications drive the achievement of our mission, objectives and values

An effective approach to communicating with all of our customers contributes to their general perception of and satisfaction with YHN as an organisation and with its continuing success in being able to meet customer needs and preferences. Services that are not in step with the needs and aspirations of customers may be adversely affected in terms of customer satisfaction.

Effective communication between YHN teams and tiers of management enables clear, concise messages to be cascaded amongst staff. This in turn should create an environment in which information flows freely and quickly and one which will ultimately help resolve more customer enquiries at the first point of contact.

Timely, accurate and useful information should ensure that the right people access the right services at the right time and in a way that suits them. It is also useful in promoting customer understanding of why certain decisions have been made and what difference their involvement has made.

Knowing and understanding what YHN is about, where it is heading and what it is doing to meet the challenges it faces, enables staff to remain motivated and improves morale. Quality internal communications are important in keeping staff engaged and informed on news in the organisation, successes and changes in policy and in offering them a chance to be involved in developing those where possible. A motivated and engaged workforce normally results in quality provision and an organisation where staff are more likely to demonstrate core values and are prepared to 'go the extra mile'. This is all good for the customer experience.

With over 31,000 council tenants and leaseholders and over 800 staff based in over 50 locations across the city, YHN is similar to other organisations in

that, despite the availability of increasingly sophisticated technology, getting a coherent and consistent message out and understood can be very difficult.

For staff, one of the main reasons for this is having to cope with constant change. This has been a constant feature for them since 2004 both in terms of YHN's role and in terms of the way they are expected to work. For customers, understanding YHN's constantly changing role can be a factor but their understanding is much more likely to be influenced by their own life experiences and exposure to different services and individuals.

So even though there is more opportunity than ever to send consistent messages from a central point, staff and customers can unwittingly and sometimes purposely filter them out. For these reasons our strategy has to make a move away from communication activities that we know are becoming less effective as attitudes, human nature, or personal tastes and preferences change.

## **1.6 Purpose of the strategy**

This document sets out our approach to communications and shows how this meets our organisational strategic objectives. This strategy has been drawn up to complement YHN's Business Strategy. It sets out how we want our organisation to be perceived by customers, the communication channels by which two way communications will be maintained, the standards that our printed and verbal information will meet, and how internal policies and procedures will help staff meet the needs of customers.

This strategy highlights and incorporates some specific things that we can do better where they have been identified by both external and internal customers. They have done this through ongoing feedback, service user focus groups, a staff survey and specific sessions about communications. In addition to these specific issues, we have to recognise that customer expectations are changing all the time. What is acceptable today may be less so tomorrow and, perhaps most significantly, the emerging policies and strategies of the government are changing the context in which we operate.

## **1.7 Scope of strategy**

We have set our strategy over a period of four years to match the timeframe of our Business Strategy and the term of our current management agreement with the Council. The attached action plan provides a focus for the work we need to do to both maintain our current high quality approach and to bring about improvement through exploiting opportunities to engage with customers.

Although we are confident that we are doing reasonably well to date, a more strategic approach to communications planning and monitoring is needed to help us:

- differentiate from other housing providers
- remind and reassure existing customers, potential customers and stakeholders (particularly staff) that we deliver excellent services
- inform existing customers and potential customers and stakeholders about performance and improvements to services, involving customers where appropriate, and clearly showing where customer involvement has informed those improvements
- persuade potential customers to use our services or consider us as a possible employer.

## **1.8 Impact of the Strategy**

We believe that successful implementation of the strategy will have a positive impact:

### **For our customers**

- Enable more two-way conversations.
- Offer an improved customer service.
- Make information more accessible.
- Increase confidence in the YHN brand, our services, and any new services.

### **For our staff**

- Enable us to create a 'can-do' culture and build a committed and high-performing workforce focused on achieving our organisational goals
- Boost morale and motivation.
- Encourage staff to be our ambassadors.
- Help the organisation learn – our staff are a vital source of information and ideas.
- Enable us to deliver excellent customer services – informed frontline staff will be up to speed on what's happening in YHN and why.

### **For our organisation**

- Increase confidence in the brand.
- To be seen as a reliable and ethical social housing provider.
- To be the best housing provider in the North East.
- Allow us to build effective relationships with other ALMOs and relevant organisations across the region.

## 2 Our Communications vision

### 2.1 Our vision

Customers, staff and partners are advocates for Your Homes Newcastle and are aware that YHN provides excellent services that have been shaped by the involvement of customers. They are involved in a two way relationship and are confident that the information we provide is innovative, timely, relevant, and accurate, and is in tune with the needs of individuals.

### 2.2. What will our vision look like?

Miss D is a Housing Services Officer in one of the Community Housing Offices. She receives a call from the carer of a YHN tenant who says that the tenant has received a letter but cannot read it as he is blind. The carer asks if it would be possible to get the letter produced in Braille and sent to the tenant, and whether future correspondence could be sent in Braille – just in case, at some point in the future, there's no-one on hand to read the letter out to the tenant.

Miss D arranges the Braille transcript and also puts a flag onto Northgate (computer system) to show that the tenant has distinct communications needs. The flag means two things will happen - that bulk mailing items, such as Homes + People or the annual rent increase letter, are automatically issued in a more appropriate format, and that other Housing staff are alerted about the tenant's communications needs before sending them any bespoke letters in the future.

Miss D then deals with an enquiry at the office reception from a visit from a tenant whose first language isn't English. They have an issue with their tenancy but can't understand the documents they have, because the younger members of the family that previously translated letters for the parents have grown up and moved out.

The tenant had used the language straplines from the back of a YHN letter to contact YHN's Communications team, who used a phone interpreting service to advise her to visit her local housing office to talk about the issue and to discuss what information she might need in the future. Whilst the tenant is in the office, Miss D directs her to the website where there are a number of information videos in different languages about holding a YHN tenancy.

The tenant gets the most important information she needs for now from the videos on the website and says that she doesn't need any further assistance for the time being as she is keen to develop her skills - although she is clear that she is welcome to contact us again if there is any information that she doesn't understand.

Mrs B is a YHN Head of Service who needs to conduct a Service review as part of YHN's Service Improvement Programme. It's one of YHN's core services, and has been through significant change since YHN opened for business in 2004. Mrs B is aware that staff across the organisation should have the opportunity to contribute to the review, although some work is required to improve wider staff understanding of the current role of the service.

Mrs B meets with the Communications team who help her draw up a communications plan for the review, centred around a briefing for all staff that is enlightening, interactive, and encourages teams across YHN to make comments and suggestions that might ultimately improve the service.

Management Team then publishes feedback that gives staff confidence that changes to the service have been introduced to benefit customers. A few weeks later, the briefing is referenced in the Chief Executive's blog which is available to all staff. This discusses the review against the backdrop of wider organisational change, and is careful to reassure staff that their comments are appreciated and will be considered. He also invites staff to ask any additional questions on things that they think have been lost or were unclear. This is followed up by inclusion in the next edition of Rewind that is sent directly to all staff electronically.

Mr C is a young person living in a multi-storey property managed by YHN. He has been experiencing anti-social behaviour. He thinks that YHN might be able to help him, but he is reluctant to be seen talking to the Concierge that serves his block. He has no access to the internet or a landline and his Pay-As-You-Go mobile is low on credit.

Since moving into his home he has received a range of information booklets and newsletters from YHN. He has found these easy to understand and has noticed that they always include details of how to contact YHN.

So he looks for the most recent thing he has been sent by YHN. It's the latest edition of Homes & People. He goes straight for the contact details, where he notices that YHN can be contacted by SMS. He sends a text message to our customer services team. He receives a text message back to say his report has been received and that someone from HASBET will be in touch shortly to discuss his situation.

## 3 Where we are now

### 3.1 Our current approach

Our communications activity can be grouped into three distinct, yet interdependent types:

1. Corporate-type communications, organised by the Communications team. Examples of this include press releases, Homes & People, our website and staff intranet, promotional and consultative event support and 'All staff' e-mails.
2. Operational communications that are conducted by individual services (customer facing and back office) within YHN. Examples of these might include publishing Service Standard booklets and service newsletters, running customer focus groups, and service specific guidance or information for staff within YHN via the staff intranet.
3. Face to face and direct communications between customers and staff and amongst staff. Examples might include interviews, telephone calls, home visits, collecting demographic information, team meetings.

Face to face contact is the most important factor in determining how individual customers, staff and other stakeholders view YHN. In order to make this as effective and consistent as possible we have policies and procedures in place to support staff. These include:

- Service Standards for responding to letters and complaints
- Making Information Accessible policy
- Media Policy
- Corporate style guide
- Same sex interview provision.

We also have a range of Communications toolkits and guidance for staff that include:

- use of logos, photos, display banners and templates
- good news stories and working with the press
- communications support for disabled people
- information in other languages (key information on film or as text in 10 languages)
- use of interpretation and translation services
- how to use Typetalk
- working at events
- Plain English guidance
- improving written communication skills
- general communication skills advice
- using the design, print and fulfilment framework.

These tools have played an important role in helping us reach our current position. However, we need to regularly review them to make sure that they are fit for the future and meet the needs of customers and staff going forward.

Our approach to communications has improved since we were set up in 2004. Since then we have invested in making sure that we not only provide information but that it is appropriate and relevant to individuals and not only do they understand it but it is a two way process.

However, there is scope to improve the consistency of our communications and encourage more two way conversation with customers. Every single member of staff has a responsibility for giving and receiving information in the most appropriate way, in a way that meets both the needs and preferences of customers but also contributes toward YHN achieving its wider strategic objectives.

A summary of our activity is attached at appendix 2.

### **3.2 What people have told us**

In producing this strategy we have reviewed how we communicate with customers, staff, partners and other stakeholders. They have been able to influence this strategy and how we communicate through a range of activity including:

- Inspection/assessment/accreditation processes
- Service and /issue specific consultation including two ‘communications’ specific events
- Consultation with hard to hear groups
- Homes & People feedback forms
- Service newsletters
- Readers’ Panel
- Editorial Panel
- Mystery Shopping
- Internal and external service standard consultation
- Senior Management Team meetings
- Communications workstream
- Business and Financial Planning sessions
- Chief Executive’s Viewpoint sessions
- Team Brief
- John’s Blog

We know that people’s general perceptions of YHN have improved over time from the feedback we have had from customers, staff and other stakeholders. This shows that the general trend is one of increased confidence in YHN. Customers are more satisfied with our overall service and recognise that we are committed to not only improving services but that we also involve them in those changes and keep them informed as changes take effect. We need to make sure that their continuing

perception of YHN is based on reality and ensure communication with all of our stakeholders is a good experience.

Some key information about what we have learned from this activity and some of the more significant issues is outlined in the following summary and in more specific detail under each Priority in section four.

### **Audit Commission 2008**

The Audit Commission identified Communications as an area of strength at their spring 2008 inspection. They said: 'Customers are well-informed about the services offered by YHN ... an extensive range of very high quality customer information is available – including a comprehensive, interactive website – which has been developed with service users'.

### **STATUS survey 2009/10**

Compared to the 2008/09 STATUS survey there have been substantial improvements in levels of satisfaction regarding information, contact and communication. 73.5% of respondents felt that YHN was good at keeping them informed about issues that may affect them as a tenant and 81.8% of respondents that contacted YHN found staff helpful.

### **Diversity Peer Challenge 2010**

In June 2010 IDEA conducted a Diversity Peer Challenge to assess our progress against the Equality Framework for Local Government. They commented on a number of areas of communication good practice but also said that in the opinion of some staff there remains some room for improvement

### **Customer Service Excellence Award 2010**

We were assessed as being fully compliant against Criterion 3, Information and Access and that 'YHN is experienced in providing information in ways that meet their customers' needs ... there is good evidence to show that information is accurate and complete.' They did say however that 'YHN could do more to evaluate how customers interact through the telephone system with the Community Housing Offices.'

### **Homes and People**

We have an editorial panel of customers which meets every quarter to review the previous edition of Homes & People, and to give us their views about what should go in the next edition. Their ideas are used to make changes to articles before they go into the newsletter. For example, they said that information about events or things that are taking place in the future, which customers can get involved in, should take preference over information about things that have already taken place.

Additionally, the wider customer readership also has the opportunity to comment about Communications in every edition of Homes and People through a response slip but this has had limited success in driving the content of the newsletter as many people use it as an additional way to highlight issues with individual services rather than their views on communications.

### **Readers Panel**

We have a Readers' Panel that makes sure that any new or revised leaflets and documents that we are planning to print are easy to understand and include all the information that customers need to know about. Before customers join the group they are offered training if they want it. They recently reviewed our Service Standards and Tenants Handbook.

### **Staff survey 2009**

Communications was a theme in the 2009 Staff Survey with over half of respondents answering favourably across the 11 related questions. This exceeded the Public Sector benchmark and only fell slightly below the high performing benchmark. Whilst within this there were some very positive responses there were some negative areas. The most significant being that, only 38% of staff responded favourably to 'Reasons behind decisions are fully explained' and only 40% responded favourably to 'My opinions count'. Even taking into account that general dissatisfaction with other employment issues can often be articulated as a negative view of communications it clearly needs to remain an area of focus.

### **Investors in People 2010**

The Investors in People Bronze review report in February 2010 did not look at communications specifically as part of its assessment but referred to it on a number of occasions as contributing positively to the organisation, particularly as it relates to Learning and Development opportunities, goals, plans and achievements of the organisation, staff sharing information and knowledge and strong consultation processes. It did however suggest that some improvement was needed with regard to improving the reward and recognition message.

### **Communications focus groups**

In addition to the general activity we have also held specific focus groups with customers to look explicitly at communications issues. These took place in September 2009 and May 2010. The focus groups were attended by 20 and 27 customers respectively, and were representative of our customer base. Both groups said that they viewed us more positively now than five years ago and that they felt proud to be a Council tenant. However, their satisfaction was a fluid thing that could be adversely affected by neighbour disputes, or problems with ongoing repairs. They also felt that we could do more to increase the face to face contact we have with customers.

### **Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA)**

Officers and the Chair of the Strategic Independent Advisory Group carried out an EINA on the strategy on 19 December 2010. No areas of negative or positive impact were identified as they related to the protected characteristics. However, it was felt that the Strategy would ensure that we maintain a fair and equitable approach to providing accessible information and one that also provides value for money.

## 4. Our Strategic Priorities

In considering how we achieve our vision, and from what people have told us is important to them, we have identified four strategic priorities:

1. To position YHN as the leading provider of quality housing and excellent housing services in the North East
2. To ensure two way communications are established with both staff and customers to enable continuous improvement and demonstrate that we are able to act on the feedback we receive
3. To raise YHN's media profile, reporting on good news and dealing effectively with the bad
4. To make information about YHN accessible to all of our different audiences.

### 4.1 Priority 1: To position YHN as the leading provider of quality housing and excellent housing services in the North East

In 2008 we were the first housing organisation in the North East to receive a 3 star 'excellent' rating, and have been recognised at a national level for the quality of our service. The 2009/10 STATUS survey showed that tenant satisfaction with the overall service provided by YHN was 79.1% compared with 73.1% for 2008/09. We must continue to ensure that customers have good access to information about the high quality services we provide, and that they are made aware, in cost efficient and effective ways, of our performance, and of changes and improvements to existing products and services and new products and services as and when they become available.

#### **What we currently do**

YHN has its own in-house Communications team which is responsible for developing and maintaining all internal, external and strategic communications on behalf of YHN and its portfolio of services. This includes:

- managing relations with the press
- production of newsletters and Annual Reports
- advice to staff around advertising, marketing, specific campaigns
- support for and organisation of events and exhibitions
- managing contracts for, and providing guidance on, producing information in alternative formats
- internal communications - to support business objectives. For example Team Brief, which is a regular briefing session for staff, internal newsletters, arranging screensavers on staff computers
- website and intranet content - development and testing of new aspects and functions, content management, trouble-shooting
- printing – managing the printing framework

- working to Service Standards agreed with customers and other staff and monitored through the Delivery Plan
- managing the YHN brand - the team produced YHN's corporate style guide. Last updated in November 2006, this demonstrates how the consistent use of our visual identity has an important role to play in how people perceive us and the work we do. It includes detailed guidelines on how to use the YHN corporate style and create a strong, consistent brand for the organisation so that staff, customers and the public in general can easily identify us, and are aware that we are independent from Newcastle City Council.

### **What our stakeholders have told us**

#### - External customers

- Customers felt that they receive a more personal service from YHN and feel more involved with the organisation.
- Staff in housing offices are polite, knowledgeable and provide a good service.
- The YHN brand is recognised and valued, but some customers think the relationship between YHN and NCC is confusing.
- Verbal communications can be inconsistent, although YHN staff have improved with their use of the telephone.
- Information on notice boards (in communal areas) is sometimes out of date.

#### - Internal customers

- Not all staff recognise the positive impact of the work other staff do.
- Teams should be more integrated within YHN; it can be quite a fragmented organisation at times.
- Constant change can have a negative impact on staff morale
- Staff are nervous as to the impact of the government's increased accent on efficiency and cutting costs.
- Some negative behaviours of staff are unconscious, whilst some negative attitudes are entrenched and pre-date YHN.
- Staff awards are felt to be an improvement but not everyone felt they were fair or motivational.

### **What we need to do**

Make it easy for staff to get detailed information about services, policies and procedures when they need it.	1a
Increase our positive press coverage.	1b
Provide customers with timely, authentic, honest and relevant information.	1c
Help customers compare our performance against that of similar organisations.	1d
Ensure customer perception is the reality.	1e
Encourage staff to take personal responsibility for their own skills and knowledge of YHN.	1f

Promote YHN as a great place to work.	1g
Promote a 'one organisation' culture and a strong leadership message.	1h
Plan effective communication to support organisational change and service review.	1i
Enable staff to answer customer enquiries at the first point of contact wherever possible.	1j
Be explicit with customers about what public services YHN is responsible for.	1k
Be consistent in the quality of the interactions we have with customers.	1l

### **Key outcomes**

- Staff are positive and knowledgeable advocates for YHN.
- YHN is known as a great place to work.
- Perception is the reality for customers and staff alike.
- Stakeholders benefit from quality information and this supports frontline services.

## **4.2 Priority 2: To ensure two way communications are established with both staff and customers to enable continuous improvement and demonstrate that we are able to act on the feedback we receive**

Every day our staff communicate with thousands of individual customers. This can be about a huge variety of issues because of the wide range of services that we offer, the vulnerable nature of a significant number of our customers and the number of different outlets from which we operate. On each of these occasions, it is vital that we provide the right information and make the right impression, regardless of how that exchange takes place. Customers need to be sure that they can access the same quality of information and exchange no matter where or whom they approach and about what.

Additionally, communication is a key driver of staff engagement. Research has shown that organisations with highly engaged employees are 50% more productive and have 56% higher levels of customer loyalty.

YHN has only been able to bring about effective continuous improvement because of the valuable contribution made by customers and staff. It is important not only that people understand what has changed as a result of their involvement, but what can't and why, as well as being aware of what they can and cannot influence.

We have made considerable progress in being able to 'close the loop' when it comes to informing people how they have made a difference. Our customer service strategy 'Every Customer Matters' sets out the vision for customer service that our communications activity has to support through using information effectively to ensure the same level of service and the same information is available to all, irrespective of what access channel is used.

Additionally, and in order to support the delivery of our Customer Insight Policy we also need to be able to communicate the effectiveness of consultation and demographic information to our customers

### **What we currently do**

We communicate with internal and external customers in a variety of ways, and always provide details of who to contact for more information.

#### Written communications

- **Leaflets** – we make a range of leaflets routinely available to customers about our services. For example, tenants about to have Modern Homes work to their home receive an information pack about each element of the work.
- **Posters** – in a range of outlets, to publicise events, involvement opportunities, performance and changes to policy and services.

- **Letters** – customers are sent a mix of bespoke and generic/system generated letters, including four rent statements a year.
- **External newsletters** – every tenant and leaseholder currently receives our Homes & People newsletter four times a year. Two pages in each newsletter are written by an editorial panel of tenants. Individual services send annual newsletters to their customers to report directly on their performance. All these are available on our website.
- **Internal newsletters** - Rewind is sent out to all staff via e-mail each month, rounding up of all the news and important website and intranet changes that have featured in the preceding month.
- **Annual Reports** –produced each summer, these review our progress over the previous year, most recently with regard to how we have performed against the TSA’s national standards
- **E-mail** – the majority of staff have their own e-mail address and access on desktop computers and are provided with guidance on its usage. Customers can contact a range of services through generic e-mail addresses (i.e. [byker@yhn.org.uk](mailto:byker@yhn.org.uk) for Byker CHO). Mails sent by external customers to some generic addresses trigger an automated response, which thanks the sender for the initial e-mail and sets out a timetable for the response
- **Press** - since October 2009 we have been working with a marketing communications specialist to exploit opportunities for positive press and respond to negative enquiries.
- **Surveys** – we conduct a range of customer and staff surveys which are either printed, on the telephone, or online.

#### Other published communications

- **Internet** – Communications team maintains [www.yhn.org.uk](http://www.yhn.org.uk) by way of a Content Management System (CMS). Some staff members have been trained and have access to update specific pages of the website.
- **Intranet** – Communications team also maintains the staff intranet. Some staff members also have access to update their own team’s pages. This is seen as the preferred information exchange and provider within YHN. It includes contact details for all staff, policies and procedures for all operational activity, information about YHN as an employer, a blog written by the Chief Executive, a Wiki site and a staff noticeboard/forum.
- **DVD** – General film introduced at tenancy sign up in 2007; all tenants are required to watch this at sign up, and are given a copy for their own use. The film is available on the YHN website, which also has dubbed versions of short key information films available in alternative languages. A similar DVD is given to tenants about the Modern Homes programme.
- **Digi TV** - Customers can access information about YHN services any time of the day or night, for free, via a digital TV service which is available to customers who have Sky or Virgin Media interactive TV packages. As well as information about how to find a home, pay rent or report a repair, the channel provides advice about how to

access other YHN services. Customers can also get in touch using the interactive Contact Us form.

#### Verbal communications

- **Phone** – internal and external. We have a corporate greeting and expected response times and this is monitored on a regular basis.
- **Face to face between staff and customers** – a high proportion of contacts in our wide range of services are delivered face to face. This can be from Community Housing Offices, Customer Service Centres, Concierge Lodges, on the Talk to Us bus or out on estates. Same sex interviews are available for customers, and staff are required to wear uniforms to make them easily identifiable.
- **External meetings** – staff attend regular Tenants and Residents Associations meetings as well as a range of consultation and community events.
- **Internal team meetings** – Team Brief is the main way we cascade key messages to all staff members. It is a two-way process that informs staff on key issues and allows staff to see what the Executive team plans to do about their feedback. We also have a range of other two-way formal meetings such as Business and Financial planning, 1-2-1's, Appraisals, Area Briefings.
- **Service Improvement Programme** – Project Management of improvement activity using staff from across the organisation.

#### What our stakeholders have told us

##### External

- Customers feel that they receive more information now, and that it helps keep them informed and up to date with changes.
- A greater proportion of telephone access should be free.
- A more tailored approach to customers' individual preferences should be used.
- Not everyone reads Homes & People.
- Some tenants throw away lots of the mail they receive.
- We could respond better to electronic means of communication, including Repair requests sent by e-mail
- More tenants are using the website and think it is improving, but YHN should consider things like SMS (text messaging).
- Future use of SMS could extend past simple appointment reminders, repairs reporting by tenants etc.

##### Internal

- Although e-mail protocols are in place to discourage misuse and reduce the volume of mail, some staff still feel that they receive too much e-mail and that not all of it is relevant to them. We do not receive that much contact from customers by e-mail.
- Some staff do not think that the reasons behind decisions are fully explained, and that their opinions count.
- Not all staff feel that communications are open and honest.

- There are mixed views about how effectively change is handled at YHN. Communication is important in this area.
- Shifts to community ownership of assets and large regeneration projects will have a major impact on staff and customers

### What we need to do

Facilitate regular discussions with employees about the impact of change on them and the organisation.	2a
Agree standards for responding to e-mails from customers.	2b
More use of local noticeboards, including libraries, doctors surgeries etc	2c
All leaflets should be on the website and contact details across the site should be up to date.	2d
Improve contact by phone.	2e
Give customers more options for how we communicate with them.	2f
Investigate whether social media (such as Facebook, Twitter etc) can further improve our relationship with tenants.	2g
Provide evidence that customers' viewpoints have been used to improve services.	2h
Ensure all large regeneration projects are supported by a communications plan	2i

### Key outcomes

- Staff have a better and broader understanding of their colleagues contribution.
- Staff and customers are clear that their involvement makes a difference.
- Staff are supported through change.
- Customer access to services is efficient, effective and appropriate.

### **4.3 Priority 3: To raise YHN's media profile**

One of the best ways we can strengthen our relationship with customers is to develop effective written and verbal communications with the media.

A mutually beneficial relationship with the media will help us get the best publicity for our service, promote ourselves in a positive light, and give us as much control as possible on stories appearing about us in the press.

The size and nature of our core business mean that the press will always be interested in what we do and will look to hold us to account for things they think should have been done differently, thereby representing the interests of their readership as a whole. Public services are often represented as big and bureaucratic, so when customers take us on in the press it can take on the form of a 'David versus Goliath' type story. Indeed, many of the negative enquiries that we are required to respond to have been prompted by customers that see the Evening Chronicle and Sunday Sun as an extension of our complaints process. On a more positive note the work of frontline staff often produces good news stories, which, when presented in a timely and appropriate fashion, have achieved significant and eye-catching coverage. Using the press effectively also ensures that potentially larger groups of people become aware of the range of services we offer that they may have not previously considered.

Since 2009 we have built and let a number of bungalows to older customers and are now in the process of building more homes for a variety of customer groups. Each development will present an opportunity for positive promotion, whilst some may require planned communications to allay any potential concerns from neighbouring residents.

#### **What we currently do**

Since 2004 we have taken a consistent approach that is open, transparent, honest, proactive and assertive, and helpful to the media in facilitating photograph opportunities, interviews and other reasonable requests. We have a Media Policy in place which sets out our approach in more detail. This can be found at [http://yhnintranet/corporate/corporate\\_guidance/communications\\_corporate\\_styl.aspx](http://yhnintranet/corporate/corporate_guidance/communications_corporate_styl.aspx).

In September 2009 we entered into an arrangement with a marketing communications agency that specialises in public sector and housing related communications to replace a Service Level Agreement with the council. The main aim was to increase our share of voice in local and national press and provide value for money. The arrangement has already made a positive impact, although there is still more work to do. Press enquiries of a potentially negative nature are typically dealt with by YHN's Communications team after discussions with appropriate service managers.

We have sponsored the Evening Chronicle's annual 'Good Neighbour of the Year' scheme since 2008. This runs between July and October and includes weekly articles, culminating in a dedicated eight-page supplement.

### What our stakeholders have told us

#### External

- Our sponsorship of the Chronicle's Good Neighbour Awards was 'worthwhile', but they had not considered making nominations of their own.

#### Internal

- Improving the image of the important support services we provide would help those services improve their customer satisfaction.
- Not enough exposure in local/national press of good news. The Communications team should be more proactive in collecting good news from staff.
- YHN staff are unclear about how they should respond to press enquiries, and who is allowed to talk to the press.

### What we need to do

Take a more proactive approach to identifying good news from all staff across YHN.	3a
Develop our internal capability for dealing with potentially negative enquiries.	3b
Take a planned and co-ordinated approach to publicising our new build projects and progress.	3c
Offer regular news updates to staff and external audiences on bigger issues such as our Concierge Service Review.	3d
Raise awareness of press policies and procedures amongst staff.	3e
Build relationships with local and national media.	3f
Encourage senior officers to be more proactive in generating good news and give industry opinions.	3g
Produce a specific communications plan for Leazes Homes.	3h

#### Key outcomes

- Increased share of voice and proportion of positive coverage in local, regional, and national media
- YHN staff are engaged in raising and protecting the profile of the organisation

#### **4.4 Priority 4: To make information about YHN accessible to all of our different audiences**

YHN's customer base has changed considerably since 2004. Whilst it is considerably more diverse, it is less so than other comparable social housing providers in regional centres, particularly in terms of ethnicity. We do know that a significant proportion of customers may be considered vulnerable because of age, disability or other reasons. We are continually improving collection and access to demographic data to enable us to offer people centred services but we know that we need to strengthen how we share access and fully utilise this information internally.

It is important that we know about and understand the communication needs and preferences of customers preferably without them having to tell us what they are at every contact. We also need to build on improvements in regularly communicating with hard to reach groups such as LGBT tenants and leaseholders.

Even when we have this information we should not rush to produce information in alternative formats for customers that may not actually want them. We need to strike a balance between cost and benefit and may need to look at how we develop our understanding of what our customers actually need, rather than what they might prefer.

Cost is not the only test in terms of continuing to offer bespoke information and communication channels. We are increasingly being asked to meet the challenges posed by change to previously traditional thinking, for example around the degree to which organisations contribute to multiculturalism or integration and the part they play in community cohesion. These are hard decisions and choices when trying to maintain excellent levels of service for all customers.

There are new IT proposals under development such as Sharepoint that may provide opportunities for more logical and cost effective ways by which staff can access translated versions of existing documents and will help them get them out to customers quicker for example generic Your Choice Homes application letters.

##### **What we currently do**

We have a range of policies and guidance that shape the way we address the different needs and preferences of our customers.

Our **Corporate style guide** is predominantly concerned with protecting our brand, use of our logo, our company colours, and easy to read writing style (associated guidance is explained in more detail in section 3).

Our **Making Information Accessible policy** sets out the minimum standards that staff should always adhere to when they produce information on behalf of YHN. Last revised in December 2007, the policy

is designed to help staff produce information that is easily accessible to everyone in the community, including people who are visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or who have difficulty reading English.

All documents for customers are written in plain English. To this point, key documents have been passed to the Plain English Campaign (PEC) for analysis. We have then worked with the Campaign to bring the documents up to Crystal Mark standard. Once this is in place, any amendments have to be approved by PEC prior to printing. 60 staff have completed Plain English training. We also have a Readers' Panel (customers) in place to review new and revised information that we are preparing for publication so that we do not have an over and costly reliance on PEC.

The policy sets out how we deliver information in alternative languages. This is done in two ways: either by interpretation or translation.

Our own staff and those of our partners who are dealing with a customer with language needs can access an interpreter in a three-way telephone conversation. We share a contract with Newcastle City Council to use Language Line, which provides 170 languages and is part of the largest Interpreting company in the world. This is our preferred method of providing information in other languages for two reasons:

- the cost of translation and subsequent printing is prohibitive
- some ethnic groups can speak and understand certain languages better than they can read them

This approach

- provides good value for money - with Language Line we only pay for what we use; and
- provides a faster resolution of queries for customers.

At the moment translation of written materials is generally restricted to;

- straplines in prominent positions in all letters and correspondence, documents and publications and on the website promoting the availability of interpretation and translation services. These are currently provided in nine community languages and these are reviewed regularly so that they remain relevant to customers in Newcastle
- important notices about a customers tenancy (such as notices and correspondence around anti-social behaviour, rent arrears)
- important notices about a customers application to Your Choice Homes (such as a notification of ineligibility, request for additional information, or offer of property)
- any other occasion whereupon an officer strongly feels that there is a reasonable case to do so (such as translating key leaflets within the tenancy handbook where we think it will encourage the customer to pay their rent promptly, or report repairs etc).

Since April 2004 we have translated approximately 500 documents for customers. Information has rarely been translated into the community languages automatically, as we try to strike a balance between meeting individual needs and value for money, as well as being aware that such provision can sometimes support isolation and contribute negatively to social exclusion and community cohesion. We will always look to alternative methods before written translation. This has led to a steady reduction in the number of requests we have received. However, we will translate information beforehand if we anticipate there is a need; for instance in February 2006 we translated display materials into a number of community languages for a BME focus group about our review of Housing Management services. Translations are typically provided within 10 working days.

Written translations are procured under a framework agreement that was set up in 2009. This agreement has worked well and delivered cost savings per translation. Again, we should retain a similar approach in the future.

YHN staff also arrange face-to-face interpretation for:

- important appointments in housing offices (tenancy sign up for instance) when staff are aware that a customer would benefit from an interpreter
- planned public events or focus groups (pre-event invitation letters and posters always encourage customers that need an interpreter to request one)
- translation and interpreting – sourced / organised for community languages and disability support (British Sign Language etc.) for written translation, face-to-face interpreting, Braille, audio tape and other formats as needed.

We already offer customers face-to-face interpretation, induction loops, Typetalk, Braille, audio tape, large print and easy read. We are currently looking at the possibility of implementing BrowseAloud on the YHN website.

#### **What our stakeholders have told us**

- Staff in housing offices could have better awareness of arrangements for translating information and particularly as to when it is and is not appropriate.
- Customers read the letters that we send them and feel that the volume of letters we send them is acceptable.
- Written communications are sometimes too long.
- Not all leaflets are available on the website.
- More guidance for staff on budget issues/restraints would be useful.
- BME tenants have told us that they prefer to receive information from us in English as it provides a learning opportunity for them – and they

know that they can always contact their Community Housing Office if they need further explanation, or don't understand the contents.

- Our staff feel that working with the Plain English Campaign has become increasingly expensive and the end result does not justify the expense.

### What we need to do

Make sure that the information we publish is easy to understand and written for customers using internal expertise where possible.	4a
Involve customers in producing our information.	4b
Provide information in alternative formats for customers that need it, but strike a balance between this	4c
Make sure that a contract is always in place for a telephone interpreting service and for written translation services; and that these provide good quality services and good value for money.	4d
Ensure staff and customers are aware of the translation/alternate formats we can offer information in.	4e
Promote to staff any positive outcomes for customers that can be attributed to any of the policies as and when these arise (NB the outcome could be improving access, or saving money, or both).	4f
Include images in printed documents that demonstrate that our customer base is diversifying	4g

Please note that there is a particular crossover between Priority 2 and Priority 4. Several of the actions listed in Priority 2 will make a significant contribution to Priority 4.

#### Key outcomes

- Information for customers is comprehensive and widely available
- Customers are provided information in ways that meets their individual needs
- Our information reflects customer's preferences for style, terminology and tone
- Information is visually representative of the communities we serve.

## **5. Implementation and monitoring of the strategy**

Once agreed the strategy will be discussed with Senior Managers, so that they can be clear about their role in the strategy and can describe to their teams what changes they are likely to see and what is expected of them. It will then be available on the Staff Intranet along with related communication policies.

### **Value for money**

We will continue to provide value for money communication activity and seek efficiencies on an ongoing basis without compromising quality. We will use framework agreements for print and associated services to support our main channels of communication. We will increase our use of electronic communication where possible to reduce costs. We will work with partners where possible to help us to achieve more than we could alone, and to share costs where possible. The next review of the service provided by the Communications team will focus on its ability to meet the needs of internal and external customers effectively and efficiently. We will maximise the use of internal skills and develop these where we think we can reduce our reliance on external providers.

### **Environment**

We will improve our approach to electronic communication through the website, social networking sites, audio and video files and e-mail, to reduce our reliance on printed materials and attendance at meetings and events. This will reduce paper usage and carbon emissions. Where we do use paper for communication activity, such as newsletters and leaflets, we will always use Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper as a minimum. Where possible, when producing bespoke publicity and display material, we will ensure that these can be used again.

Monitoring of the Strategy Action Plan will be carried out through the YHN Service Improvement Programme by the dedicated Communications workstream within this and through the Communication Team's work plan.

## **6. Responsibility for the Communications Strategy**

Each and every member of staff will have responsibility for ensuring effective communication both internally and externally as this is vital for the on-going success of our organisation. The Lead Communications Officer will be responsible for monitoring, review and delivery of the strategy with reference to identified Lead Officers from other service areas.

## **7. Review**

We will formally review this strategy in November 2012. However as it is a living document it will be amended and reviewed in the interim period as becomes necessary. We will update the action plan every six months to ensure it remains valid and up to date. We will involve the

Communications workstream members in this process – they will effectively become the ‘Action Plan Delivery Team’. They will also be involved in agreeing the Action Plan for 2013-2014, which we will complete by June 2012.

## Appendix one – The Communications Strategy Action Plan 2010-2014

### Priority 1 - To position YHN as the leading provider of quality housing and excellent housing services in the North East

Ref	Key outcomes	How we will do this	Responsibility	By when	Actions delivered
5.1.1.	Staff are positive and knowledgeable advocates for YHN	Promote the learning and development plan	Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development Manager	Every April	1f
		Formal review of the information about services, policies and procedures on our staff intranet	Lead Communications Officer	Every six months	1a
		Awareness raising sessions on policy development and listening to staff views on how policies should be introduced	Lead Performance Management and Policy Officer	30/06/2011	1a, 1f, 1j, 1k
		Minimum of one blog by the Chief Executive per month	Chief Executive	31/03/2011	1h
		Managers engage staff in divisional action plans following the 2011 staff survey	Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development Manager	31/12/2011	1h, 1i
		Wider Management Team to report on activity and projects twice a year via Rewind	Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development Manager / Chief Executive	Twice yearly	1h
		Every Team Brief to include 'Looking back, Looking forward' slide that refers to headline issues discussed at Board / MT /	Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive	8 times a year	1i

		WMT Publish Management Team and Wider Management Team papers on the intranet	Management Support	Ongoing	1a, 1h
5.1.2	YHN is known as a great place to work	Run 2010/11 staff awards scheme to recognise learning achievement and staff that go the extra mile	Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development Manager	28/02/2011	1g, 1h
		Review success of 2010/11 Awards and identify future options	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	1g, 1h
		Promote Learning at Work day (May 19)	Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development Manager	31/05/2011	1b, 1f, 1g
		Good news stories at each Team Brief (eight per year)	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011, then annually	1g, 1h
		A minimum of 11 'A Day in the Life' features a year	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011, then annually	1h
5.1.3	Perception is the reality for customers and staff alike	Review the Corporate Style Guide	Lead Communications Officer	31/05/2011	1e, 1k
		Produce an Annual Report reflecting the six National Standards and relevant outcomes from Service Improvement Programme	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Customer Involvement Officer	31/08/2011	1b, 1d, 1k
		Agree process by which award entries by YHN are prioritised	Lead Performance Management and Policy	31/01/2011	1d

		<p>Produce communications guidance to support service reviews and significant change</p> <p>New contents page for H&amp;P / new web front page / revised contact details / poster campaign to bring clarity to roles and responsibilities of YHN</p> <p>Promote outcomes from Service Improvement Programme through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 edition of John's blog per quarter</li> <li>• at least 2 themed screensaver per year</li> </ul> <p>2 editions of John's blog that discuss themes arising from Viewpoint sessions</p>	<p>Officer / Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p>	<p>28/02/2011</p> <p>28/06/2011</p> <p>Quarterly Twice yearly</p> <p>Twice yearly</p>	<p>1i</p> <p>1k</p> <p>1h, 1i</p> <p>1i</p>
5.1.4	Stakeholders benefit from quality information and this supports frontline services	<p>Review the role of the H&amp;P editorial panel</p> <p>Two formal reviews of website contents, in addition to responsive change requests</p> <p>Four formal reviews of website pages that include contact details</p> <p>A minimum of one newsletter for</p>	<p>Lead Communications Officer / Lead Customer Involvement Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications</p>	<p>31/03/2011</p> <p>31/01/2011, 31/07/2011</p> <p>Quarterly</p> <p>by</p>	<p>1c</p> <p>1c, 1d</p> <p>1c</p> <p>1c, 1e, 1k</p>

		customers of distinct YHN services	Officer / Service Managers for ASU, CCAS, Concierge, NFS, Advice and Support, Leasehold	31/03/2011	
		Pilot an e-newsletter for partners	Lead Communications Officer	30/08/2011	1c, 1d, 1e
		Review of the Communications team	Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive	31/03/2012	1d
		Review the programme of spot checks to information provision in outlets and communal spaces	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Performance Management and Policy Officer	31/03/2011	1c, 1d
		Relaunch of staff intranet to include Sharepoint	Lead Communications Officer / IT Projects Manager	31/12/2011	1a, 1j, 1l

**Priority 2 - To ensure two way communications are established with staff, customers and stakeholders to enable continuous improvement**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Key outcomes</b>	<b>How we will do this</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Actions delivered</b>
5.2.1	Staff have a better and broader understanding of their colleagues contribution	Publish at least 11 editions of Rewind per year.	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	1a, 1g, 1h
		Managers prompted twice per year to keep team pages on the staff intranet up to date	Lead Communications Officer	Twice yearly	1a, 1c
5.2.2	Staff and customers are clear that their involvement makes a difference	Develop a regular dedicated briefing for involved customers	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Customer Involvement Officer	28/02/2011	1c, 1d, 1e, 2g, 2h
		At least eight Team Brief sessions a year, with the December session each year to round up on outcomes from previous sessions	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	1e, 1f, 1h, 1i
		Expand exposure to comparative information and 'You Said, We Did' through H&P and website, with link from front page	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Customer Involvement Officer / Lead Performance Monitoring and Policy Officer	31/01/2011	1c, 1d, 1e, 2g, 2h
		Rework feedback from in H&P to complement tenant access to comparative performance information	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Performance Monitoring and Policy Officer	31/05/2011	1c, id, 1e, 2g, 2h
		Develop new ways to promote the activity of the Board to a wider range	Lead Communications Officer / Lead Customer Involvement	30/06/2011	1a, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 2g, 2h

		of staff and customers	Officer / Company Administrator and Board Support Officer		
5.2.3	Staff are supported through change	<p>At least one Team Brief per year to be themed 'Working at YHN'</p> <p>Standing item on Team Brief focusing on significant change in previous six weeks</p> <p>10-12 randomly selected staff from across YHN to attend a Viewpoint session</p> <p>Quarterly blog from Chief Executive that focuses on change</p>	<p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>Annual</p> <p>8 times a year</p> <p>8 times a year</p> <p>4 times a year</p>	<p>1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g</p> <p>1c, 1e, 1f, 1h, 1i</p> <p>1h, 1i, 2a, 2h</p> <p>1h, 1i, 2a, 2h</p>
5.2.4	Customer access to services is efficient, effective and appropriate	<p>A minimum of three H&amp;P newsletter for all tenants and leaseholders</p> <p>Develop list of free poster sites and send relevant posters (and accompanying leaflets, where possible) to them</p> <p>Establish standards for dealing with e-mails from tenants</p> <p>Appraisal and business case for Customer Relationship Management software including use of phone,</p>	<p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Head Of Customer Services</p> <p>Head Of Customer Services</p>	<p>3 times a year</p> <p>30/06/2011</p> <p>30/06/2011</p> <p>31/01/2011</p>	<p>1a, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1g, 1k, 2h</p> <p>2c</p> <p>1l, 2c</p> <p>2f, 2g</p>

		SMS etc			
		Citybuild and YHN Repairs staff to review current approach to recording contacts by e-mail	Head of Property Maintenance	30/06/2011	1l
		Appraisal of how social media could improve our existing communications: to include at least creating and managing a YHN page on Facebook	Head of IT / Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	2f, 2g, 2h
		Communications plan agreed for revised intranet arrangements, to include Sharepoint	Head of IT / Lead Communications Officer	31/05/2011	1a, 1f, 1i, 1j, 1l, 2a
		Sharepoint installed	Head of IT / Lead Communications Officer	31/12/2011	1a, 1j, 1l

**Priority 3: To raise YHN's profile with local and national media, reporting on good news and dealing effectively with the bad**

Ref	Key outcomes	How we will do this	Responsibility	By when	Actions delivered
5.3.1	Increased share of voice and proportion of positive coverage in local, regional, and national media	Increase skill level of Communications team to deal with potentially negative press enquiries	Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive / Lead Communications Officer / Organisational Development	Annual	1e, 3b, 3f, 3e
		Each new build scheme to be the subject of at least one press release	Lead Communications Officer / Business Strategy Team	Ongoing	1b, 1d, 3c
		Raise the number of press notices by 10% year on year	Lead Communications Officer	Annual	1b, 1c, 1d, 3d
		Review our existing partnership with an appointed PR consultant	Lead Communications Officer	Annual	1b
		Review our existing sponsorship of the Evening Chronicle's Good Neighbour Awards	Lead Communications Officer	28/02/2011	1b
5.3.2	YHN staff are engaged in raising and protecting the profile of the organisation	Representative of the Communications team to attend divisional SMT's at least four times a year	Lead Communications Officer	4 times a year, once per quarter	3a, 3b, 3g
		Publish at least one H&P article per year about volunteering project outcomes	Lead Communications Officer	Annual	1g

		Review and relaunch of Media Policy, ensuring all Heads of Service have the skills to fulfil their role	Lead Communications Officer	30/09/2011	3b, 3e, 3g
		Re-introduce regular 'Dealing with the media' briefings for Managers	Lead Communications Officer	31/10/2011	3b, 3e, 3g
		Publish a quarterly report on our staff intranet about press and media activity	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	3a

**Priority 4: To make information about YHN accessible to all of our different audiences**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Key outcomes</b>	<b>How we will do this</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Actions delivered</b>
5.4.1	Information for customers is comprehensive and widely available	Publish a list, on our website, of all our current information documents and forms for customers twice a year (this has sometimes been called a 'publication scheme')	Lead Communications Officer	Twice a year	1a, 1c, 2d
		Review page metadata on www.yhn.org.uk (this improves the accuracy of the search facility)	Lead Communications Officer	Twice a year	1a, 1c, 1d
		Review page metadata on staff intranet (this improves the accuracy of the search facility)	Lead Communications Officer	Twice a year	1a, 1c
5.4.2	Customers are provided with information in ways that meets their individual needs	Put policy and/or process in place that ensures that visually impaired customers receive key information in their preferred format if they want it (i.e Newsletters, rent statements, rent change letters only)	Lead Communications Officer	31/03/2011	4c
		Work with NCC to appoint a provider of phone interpretation	Lead Communications Officer / Diversity Manager	30/09/2011	4c, 4d
		Review the framework agreement for written translation	Lead Communications Officer / Diversity Manager	28/02/2011	4c, 4d
		Make www.yhn.org.uk Browsealoud enabled	Lead Communications Officer / IT	31/12/2010	4c

		<p>Review the Making Information Accessible policy</p> <p>Expand the guidance available for staff on the Communications team pages of the staff intranet</p> <p>Staff satisfaction survey relating to use of the phone interpreting service- looks specifically at outcomes of recent calls made</p> <p>Buy proof reading element for translation requests for key documents (ie Service Standards, YCH 'Finding a home' leaflet)</p> <p>Introduce Quality Assurance measures for all translated material</p>	<p>Lead Communications Officer / Diversity Manager</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p>	<p>30/11/2011</p> <p>31/03/2011</p> <p>Quarterly from April 2011</p> <p>01/01/2011</p> <p>Quarterly from April 2011</p>	<p>4a,</p> <p>1a, 1j, 1l, 4f</p> <p>4d</p> <p>4d</p> <p>4c</p>
5.4.3	Our information reflects customers preferences for style, terminology and tone	<p>All significant information for customers to be reviewed by our readers panel</p> <p>Review our library of stock letters, notices and forms</p> <p>Publish an up to date list of staff with Plain English training (or equivalent), BSL or language skills on the staff intranet</p>	<p>Lead Customer Involvement Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p> <p>Lead Communications Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>31/03/2012</p> <p>31/03/2011</p>	<p>4a, 4b</p> <p>4a</p> <p>4a</p>

5.4.4	Information is visually representative of the communities we serve	Include ongoing quality assurance information relating to proportion of images reflecting our customer base in performance reports	Lead Communications Officer	30/09/2011	4g
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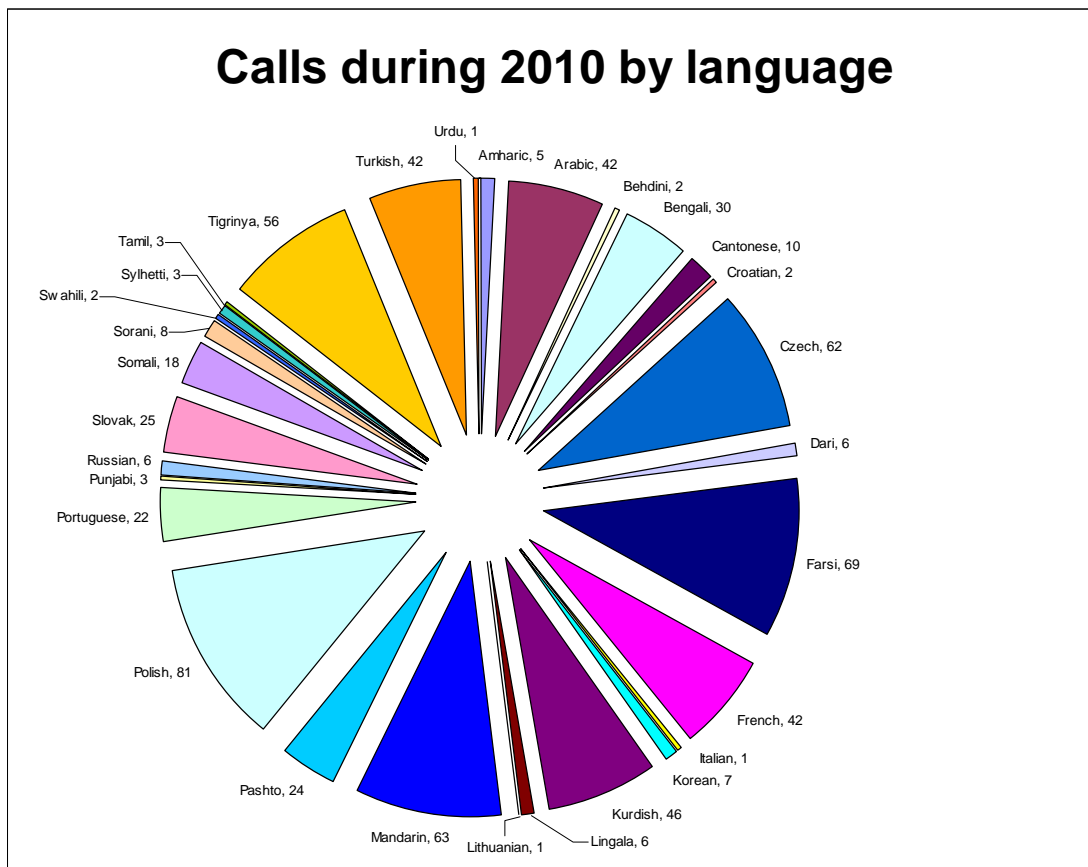
## Appendix 2: 2009-10 - a year in the life

### YHN customer profile

Registered on Northgate with distinct communication needs as of 31/03/2010: **75**  
(Language **41** / Sign language **8** / Large print **6** / Undefined communication needs **20**)

### Phone interpretation

688 calls made at a total cost of £10,254.20



### Written translations

**41** total translations (Afghani 1, Arabic 1, Bengali 1, Cantonese 3, Mandarin 5, Czech 2, Dari 2, Farsi 7, French 3, Korean 1, Kurdish 1, Mandarin 1, Polish 9, Russian 1, Turkish 1, Slovak 2)

Cost range (per word) 10p – 14p

**Subjects:** Your choice homes **20** Rent and service charges **6** Anti-social behaviour **5**  
Tenancy agreement **3** Concierge Service review **3** Modern Homes work **3** Leasehold **1**  
**Total cost for year** £7357.39

### Press

**72** press releases issued, **45** of which featured in local, regional and national press.

## Newsletters



- Circulation **31000**
- Total cost per edition: **£16000**
- Cost per household is **50p**
- Design (2p) Printing (19p) Packing (10p) Postage (19p)
- 12 customers involved, via quarterly editorial panel
- Average of **350** unique visits to the webpage for Homes + People in first month of publication

## Service newsletters



### Service and circulation

Advice and Support **1000**  
 Community Care Alarm Service **5500**  
 Leasehold **1400**  
 NFS **5750**  
 ASU **400**  
 ConciERGE **5500**

## Viewpoint

10 sessions held, with 105 staff in attendance

## Team Brief



	Session	Feedback from teams – total words submitted
<b>April</b>	Support and care	12716
<b>June</b>	Core values	8028
<b>July</b>	Finance	2901
<b>September</b>	Wellbeing at work	3006
<b>October</b>	Business Strategy / Staff survey	16312
<b>December</b>	Round up	7365
<b>January</b>	Equality and diversity	3961
<b>March</b>	Modern Homes	3097

# Website

Home | Accessibility | Contact Us | Freedom of information | Useful Links | View as PDF | Text Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

**Your Homes Newcastle**

**Read all about it!**  
The Autumn 2010 edition of **homes & people** is now available to download [Click here to find out more](#)

**homes & people**  
In this issue  
Futures  
Free football tickets

**SEARCH**


- Home
- Good Neighbour Awards 2010
- Listen Online
- About us
- Finding a home
- Tenancy services
- Modern Homes Investment
- Contact us
- Getting involved
- Jobs
- Events
- Backing Byker


**Other Languages**  
歡迎


**Latest News**  
Leazes Homes Board member needed  
Leazes Homes is looking for an Ordinary Trustee to join the Leazes Homes Board.  
[read story...](#)

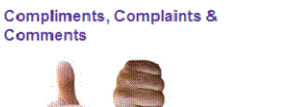
Get on board  
This article appeared in Homes & People Autumn 2010  
[read story...](#)


**Proposed new Allocations and**

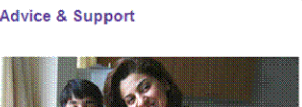
**Find a Home**  
  
[find](#)

**Your Rent Account**  
  
[view](#)

**Repairs**  
  
[report](#)

**Compliments, Complaints & Comments**  
  
[send](#)

**Anti Social Behaviour**  
  
[more](#)

**Advice & Support**  
  
[view](#)

**Getting Involved**  
[view details](#)

**Community Care Alarm**  
[view details](#)

**Young People's Services**  
[view details](#)

**Sheltered Housing**  
[view details](#)


**Leasehold Services**  
[view details](#)

**Right To Buy**  
[view details](#)

Website		
Number of pages live throughout year	450+	Number includes permanent pages only - doesn't include job adverts, news, events or Board pages
Number of content updates to pages	200+	Content updates include text changes, uploading documents, adding images (this figure doesn't include changes to the 'Tender opportunities', 'Job vacancies' and 'Board papers' pages which are routinely updated)
Number of news articles added	57	New articles are highlighted on the homepage
Number of events pages added	30	Includes estate walkabouts
Change in traffic over year	Unique users in April 09: 10184 Unique users in March 10: 15037  Visits in April 09: 16972 Visits in March 10: 25138  Hits in April 09: 1150522 Hits in March 10: 1826293	

# Intranet

Quick Links | Useful Numbers | NCC staff intranet | NCC public website | Your choice homes | View as PDF



Your Homes Newcastle


Welcome

The YHN Intranet


SEARCH

- Home
- Corporate
- Teams and Services
- YHN Policy, Procedure and Strategy
- A Great Place to Work
- Forms
- Useful tools and advice
- Newsletters and Briefings
- News
- Event Calendar
- Sports, Social and Wellbeing
- Contact Webmaster
- Board & Committee Information
- Board Members Area
- Single Status

YHN Public Website



### Free health checks for YHN staff



Book your appointment today and help prevent risks to your health

[Click here to find out more >>](#)

**Staff Noticeboard**

Buying, selling, leaving or just got something to say? Say it here

**Staff Directory**

Find contact details for your colleagues quickly and easily

**Wiki**

Share your hints, tips and info related to your job

**John's Blog**

**The government's new challenges**  
Thu, 21 Oct 2010

This month's team brief session looks at the challenges faced by YHN in light of the spending review that was announced yesterday. All teams will receive their session over the next week or so, but the manager's session was delivered on Tuesday, the day before the review... [\(Read More\)](#)

**Around the world in 3 minutes 41 seconds!**  
Tue, 05 Oct 2010

Thanks to all staff that took part in Palatine's mattress topple at the weekend. Rather a strange way to spend a Saturday morning, but one that we're not going to forget for quite some time! If you couldn't make it down we've made a little film about the event... [\(Read More\)](#)

**Latest News**

**Free health check for YHN staff**  
Over the next few months, an independent healthcare company will be offering YHN staff a free health check at various YHN locations across the city. [read story...](#)

**Health and Wellbeing survey results**  
Read about the key findings from the recent Health and Wellbeing survey [read story...](#)


**Latest Posts**

meatloaf  
2 tickets for tues 14 dec 201...

meatloaf  
Are they Seating or standing ...

meatloaf  
Thought it was a recipe!...

**Service desk online**



Click here to enter

Looking for information about IT services? [Click here to visit the IT section of the intranet.](#)

**Latest Updated Pages**

Finance & Resources Cmt

Local arrangements

Inter Faith Week 2010

Quick links

Home Page

Intranet		
Number of permanent pages live throughout year	500+	Number includes permanent pages only - doesn't include news and event pages
Number of content updates to pages	270+	Content updates include text changes, uploading documents, adding images (this figure doesn't include news and events)
Number of news article added	82	New articles are highlighted on the homepage
Change in traffic over year	<p>Users in April 09: 946 Users in March 10: 925</p> <p>Visits in April 09: 19312 Visits in March 10: 23931</p> <p>Hits in April 09: 1276377 Hits in March 10: 1396259</p>	