



LGcommunications



Building Trust

Moving beyond the local government
reputation campaign

Consultation Document

May 2013

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Introduction

The challenge

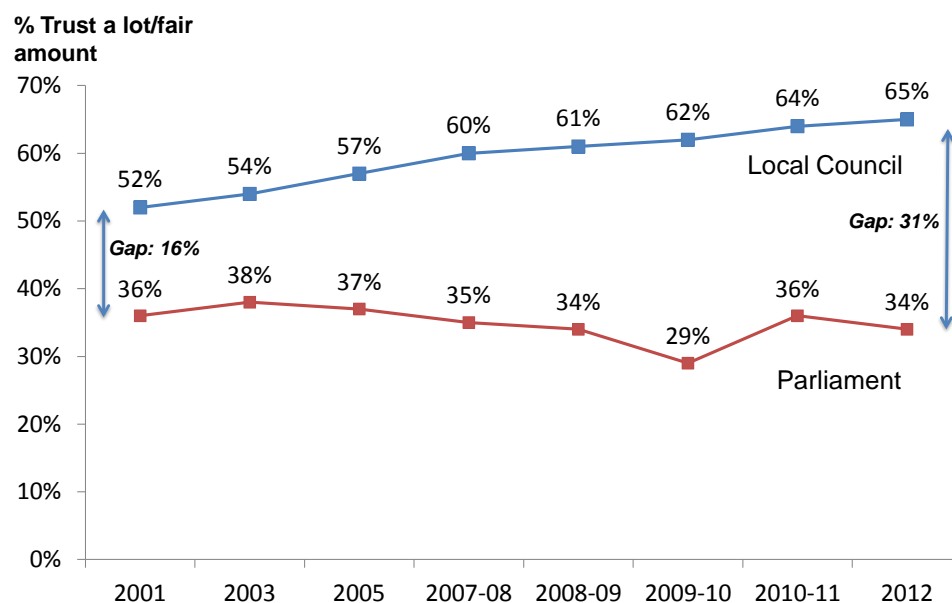
The Building Trust campaign is an idea that the LGA, SOLACE and LGcommunications wish to consult on;

For local areas to survive and thrive we need to change the relationship between local government and the public.

We believe that those in local government have the opportunity to lead the nation out of a current malaise. This will be done in part through improving the reputation of local places. Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector and has maintained a robust, innovative and sustainable approach to severe budget cuts. Those councils that have achieved the most have done so by working with the public and not simply imposing harsh cuts. Many have shown that local government can not only manage a more efficient supply of services but the expectations and demands of the public. It is local government that is best placed to understand local needs, prioritise limited resources and drive economic growth and jobs.

But the current malaise is more than just financial. The last couple of years have seen a number of public institutions undermine their own reputation. We cannot trust the food we eat, the expenses claims of MPs, the journalist standards of the newspapers we read or the behaviour of the banks we invest our money with. Local government has suffered its own reputational issues over the years. However, it has worked hard over the last decade to act in such a way as to deserve a good reputation and trust in local councils has increased from 52% to 65%.

Trust in Public Institutions



Source: Citizenship Survey (2001-2011), c.10,000 GB adults 18+, Community Life Survey (2012), c. 2,500 GB adults 18+

The reputation campaigns from 2005 onwards, led by the LGA and LGcommunications, genuinely helped focus councils on serving the public better. They encouraged local authorities to think about how their actions would be perceived as a test to drive improvement. They worked on the basis that the more a council engaged and informed the public about the work they were doing the more the public would understand and be satisfied with the work being done. We believe local government has responded well to the challenges presented to it and therefore is best placed to lead the way in restoring trust in this country to deal with the issues we face.

The tide has gone out and we need a radical redefinition of the relationship between public services (the State) and the people that we serve (the Citizen). We have a compelling and rare (if not unique) set of reasons to build a new and sustaining trust bond through deeper dialogue and communications.

In early 2013 Ipsos MORI carried out a survey of public sector leaders¹. Only 3% said that the most important issue facing their sector was the reputation of their sector. No-one from local government said this was the most important issue. Unsurprisingly the top priority for managers was seen to be budget cuts. We would challenge this view as for us the reputation of the sector is at the forefront of how we will deal with budget cuts. We feel the view among elected officials may also have been more focused on reputation to help lead local areas. The challenge for the Building Trust project is not just to engage with communication teams, but also elected members and senior managers. This is why this project is championed by the LGA, SOLACE and LGcommunications.

We believe we can improve the relationship between local government and the people they democratically serve. The way to do this is to focus on improving understanding on both sides. The public should be properly informed about the responsibilities and activities of their local council. Local councils should be clear on the needs of the public and understand whether their expectations are being met. Both sides should work together to address the challenges we face. Gone are the days when local government can seek to maximise the delivery of services to meet the needs of the public. With limited resources there has to be compromise and commitment on both sides.

¹ Ipsos MORI, Public Sector Leaders Survey, 7th January to 2nd February 2013. 200 interviews were carried out with chief executives, directors and senior managers in the public sector, 50 each in the following sectors: central government, NHS, local government and education.

Establishing the principles

The Building Trust project focuses on the role of local government in providing clear local leadership and the support that communications can provide. It seeks to nurture the relationship between citizens and local government. It focuses on managing the expectations of local citizens by improving trust in public institutions to deliver, and help those institutions trust citizens in return. It will showcase the very best in engagement with the public, but also educate them in what is provided locally by their council and their own role in contributing to the community.

In doing so the project challenges the assumptions and conclusions of previous local government reputation campaigns that have run since 2005. In doing so it seeks to keep what was good from those campaigns but to refresh them for 2013 and beyond. We highlight three big issues that are crucial:

- your leadership
- your brand
- your strategy

And as with previously we set out the five rules of reputation - the areas that we all need to focus on to improve reputation. We do not think these have changed.

1. prove you provide value for money
2. always inform and engage residents and staff
3. build trust and confidence in what you do
4. improve key services and show you are doing so
5. focus on changing lives for the better

Maintaining momentum

In assessing what the Building Trust campaign could be the focus will be on engaging with those working within local government. This is a marked difference from previous campaigns where evidence has been assessed and a toolkit produced. We are looking for the ideas to be developed in consultation with the sector. This is a reflection of the fact that there are numerous people working within local government who are successfully supporting local leadership. Their expertise has to be incorporated into the new Building Trust campaign. We also wish to open up the discussion beyond just communication professionals. We wish to engage with elected councillors, senior decision makers and ideally the public themselves.

There are a number of phases to the project

1. Launch of consultation at LGcommunications Academy (21st May 2013)
2. Review of consultation at LGA Conference (2nd July 2013)
3. Final report and campaign plan launched at SOLACE Summit (9th October 2013)

Our consultation

We have five questions.

1. Is Building Trust the right approach? Have we identified the right challenge?
2. What is the role of elected members in the project?
3. What is the role of senior managers in the project?
4. What is the role of communication teams in the project?
5. How should the means by which we communicate with the public change?

Taking part

To take part in the consultation visit www.lgcomms.org.uk for more details. This will include a link to an online survey and also documents for you to download. We would hope that you use the information in this consultation document to help facilitate discussions so we would be more than happy to receive submissions and ideas that do not exactly fit the format of our consultation documents.

We now look at each of those questions in turn.

1. Is Building Trust the right approach? Have we identified the right challenge?

We would like to know that the principles we have established are correct. In considering your answer to this question there are some points you may wish to cover;

- What do the public really want from their local council?
- What in your experience really drives engagement with local people?
- What are the benefits of a good reputation for local government?
- How would you describe the eventual relationship you would like to see between the public and local government?
- Why do you think trust in local government has improved over the last decade?
- What is the prize if we get this right?

Please answer in the box below:

2. What is the role of elected members in the project?

We would like to know what you think the role of elected member is. In considering your answer to this question there are some points you may wish to cover;

- How can elected members build trust with the public both with the local council but also with them as politicians?
- How is democracy changing at a local level?
- How can we boost turnout at elections?
- What support should elected members receive from local government?
- What community networks should local councilors build?
- How can trust be built between elected members and officers?
- How can we encourage the best people to be local councillors?

Please answer in the box below:

3. What is the role of senior managers in the project?

We would like to know what you think the role of elected member is. In considering your answer to this question there are some points you may wish to cover;

- How can senior managers build trust with the public both with the local council but also to understand their own role?
- How is the perception of managers and council staff changing at a local level?
- How can senior managers improve the way they lead their staff to drive improvement?
- How can we encourage the best people to be local government managers?

Please answer in the box below:

4. What is the role of communication teams in the project?

We would like to know what you think the role of communication teams is. In considering your answer to this question there are some points you may wish to cover;

- How can communication teams build trust with the public both with the local council but also to understand their own role?
- How is the perception of communication teams changing at a local level?
- How can communication teams get more involved in service delivery? How can they deliver cost savings in services beyond their own?
- Can communications activity lead to behaviour change at a local level?
- How can we improve relationships with the media?
- How can we encourage the best people to be communication professionals?

Please answer in the box below:

5. How should the means by which we communicate with the public change?

We would like to know what you think the tools for building trust should be. In considering your answer to this question there are some points you may wish to cover;

- How can we build more trust and respect for the role of communications?
- If you had one communications channel which would you choose to keep?
- What communication channels do you want to develop more in the next few years?
- How tailored and audience based should communications be?
- What is the style of communications we should be developing?

Please answer in the box below:

