



Communications and marketing activity protocol

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Introduction

Via East Midlands Ltd (Via) has working protocols to support and govern all of its communications and marketing activity – including press relations. The aim is to promote clearly, honestly and openly our services, activities and decisions to local people, and position Via, CORSERV and Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) positively in the eyes of its stakeholders, while offering a professional service to local and national media.

This document outlines the reasons for the protocols. It is important that all officers from Via assimilate the headline working protocols which are underpinned by the joint values of the company.

Context

Positive working relationship between Via, CORSERV, NCC and Cornwall Council will develop and it is therefore recognised that communications staff must work together to ensure an informed, consistent approach to media, internal and external communications and public relations activity.

To prevent any potential confusion on areas of responsibility it is necessary to consider the key roles of the respective parties.

Highways are the council's most visible and universally used service and this is reflected by a high level of local and regional media attention every year. The management of this attention is paramount to the Council's reputation. Therefore minimising confusion regarding the role and status of Via is vitally important. The protocol will complement and supplement our contractual agreement and seek to illustrate in practice how some of the obligations are fulfilled.

Principles

It is important to recognise that CORSERV, NCC, Cornwall Council and Via have their own distinct functions, values and priorities.

CORSERV has a specific responsibility (as the holding company), to oversee the work of Via. The communications will be governed to some extent by the opinions and concerns of the staff and key stakeholders. All communications will be agreed by all parties.

Working together, and being seen to work together will enhance the quality, consistency and reliability of information released to staff, stakeholders, the media, and enhance the reputation of Via. A coordinated approach with regards to communications will benefit all concerned and most critically staff during the cultural change period.

Protocol

This protocol is designed to ensure the following:

- Effectiveness, clarity and timeliness of action when matters concerning Via are, or are deemed likely to be, of employee/public/media interest.
- That the areas of responsibility and related working practices across all parties are clearly defined to enable a coherent and informed response to employee/public/press interest.
- A good working relationship between Via, with particular emphasis on the

respective communications leads.

- Agreed wording and branding is used in all resident facing communications and marketing activity and brand guidelines are followed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Via will lead on communications and marketing activity relating to day to day operational service delivery such as:

Roadworks	Existing speed limits	Pavement damage
Road closures/diversions	Weight/height restrictions	Skips
Pothole filling	Traffic regulations	Street lights
Grass cutting/weed spraying	Broken traffic lights	Surface dressing
Tree and hedge maintenance	Dropped kerbs	Abnormal loads
Road safety initiatives	Existing traffic calming	Existing cycle/bus lanes
Empty grit bins	Road signs	Billboard/scaffold licences
Christmas lights/hanging baskets	Blocked drains	Junior road safety officer
Bridges/structure damage	Pre driver training	Café pavement licences
Existing pedestrian crossings		

Nottinghamshire County Council will lead on communications and marketing relating to:

Highways strategy, funding and policy i.e. Lighting/Energy
Decisions to install new: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian crossings • Traffic lights & junction improvements • Traffic calming • Cycle/bus lanes
Significant highways improvement schemes and major projects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hucknall Improvement scheme • Gedling Access Road
Winter weather planning (gritting, etc.)
Transport Planning
Emergencies (flooding, etc.)
Commenting on national highway/transport initiatives

Media/ Resident Enquiries

In cases of proactive or reactive communications to negative publicity, it must be determined if the enquiry is of a **policy nature** or an **operations nature**.

- **Policy:** Strategic, policy and political influences, budgets, value of contract, reason for outsourcing etc. **These will be managed by Nottinghamshire**

County Council in liaison with Cornwall Council with support from Via/CORSERV.

- **Operations:** Standards of service, day to day highways management and maintenance activities, customer interfaces, staffing, service related incidents etc. **These will be managed by Via with support from CORSERV and Nottinghamshire County Council.**

The appropriate partner will prepare statements and responses according to the nature of the enquiry. Additional Q&As to be included if these are deemed to be helpful and to address further enquiries.

The designated media contact for each partner will gain all internal approvals and cascade communications internally to all appropriate stakeholders and those impacted by the events.

Any interview requests about services funded by the Council should be discussed with the Council's media team to ensure that a strategic decision can be taken about whether to field a talking head and agree the key messages. In cases of an operational nature, Via will liaise directly with the media ensuring that Nottinghamshire County Council are kept informed and updated. Copies of all press releases will be shared with the Council's communication team and Chair/Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee.

Both parties will include an agreed Notes to Editors explaining the relationship between NCC and Via on all press releases and will continue to build a strong reputation with local and regional media outlets, generating interesting and engaging media opportunities, responding to enquiries within given deadlines and supplying spokespeople, when appropriate to do so.

All quotes issued will be from a named individual and not 'a spokesperson'.

Crisis/Critical Incident Management

There will be a shared approach to critical incident management as well as incidents which may reduce public confidence or create reputational damage.

Taking the Lead

Where there is doubt over which agency should lead this should be discussed and agreed upon by both parties before action is taken. A spirit of mutual support will be adopted by both Nottinghamshire County Council and Via as the organisations' reputations are inextricably linked.

Essentially the following will apply:

NCC Lead

- Strategy, policy, funding and budget decisions

Via Lead

- Staff communications

- New business and marketing and public relations activities which are outside of the NCC contract
- Out of hours in conjunction with First Call

Joint Communications

- Critical incident management
- Resident and stakeholder communications
- Events related to the services and activities covered by the contract

Photocalls

Via will involve and invite relevant elected members and officers, as appropriate to photocalls relating to operational matters. All photocalls with officers and councillors will be arranged through the council's communications team.

Media Monitoring

Via will log and record press releases and statements issued.

Both parties will monitor their own media activity and provide updates at communication review meetings.

Branding

All parties will ensure Via's brand guidelines are followed and applied consistently. Via will seek written agreement from the council's communications team for all uses of, or changes to, the council's brand on all assets, including buildings, marketing materials, stationery, posters, online branding including websites and social media, vehicles and signage.

Where a building, asset, service or activity is owned or funded by the Council, the Via brand will take the same level of prominence as the Council's brand, text such as "in partnership with" or "funded by" will be used in order to make clear the relationship between the Council and the Company, except in the following or similar scenarios: Major traffic schemes, activity or campaigns that are of reputational significance and information about strategy, policy or funding.

In essence:

- Joint branding will be used where the activity or service is funded by NCC and where the asset is owned by the Council
- The Via brand will be the sole brand where it acts independently of the Council

Both Parties will adhere each other's brand, values and principles to ensure that there is no reputational damage to either party through linkage.

Digital communications

Website

Nottinghamshire County Council's website will remain the primary source of general information for residents about all council-funded highways services.

Via's website will primarily focus on its commercial activities.

Social Media

The Council's corporate social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and established hashtags (eg #grittertwitter) will continue to be the primary source of information for residents.

Disruption/emergencies

Via will submit information to the disruption email disruption@nottscc.gov.uk due to heavy snow, flooding etc. to enable NCC Comms and Marketing teams to be able to provide timely updates to residents.

Media Access to depots/on-site at schemes

Any requests from the media for filming or recording in Nottinghamshire County Council buildings or on Council-maintained highways must be approved by the Nottinghamshire County Council Communications and Marketing Team before access is granted.

Managing the contract from a communications and marketing perspective

- A named Senior Communications Business Partner will manage the Reputation, Branding, Communications and Marketing element of the Via contract on behalf of NCC.
- Via will supply the Council with appropriate information, documentation or case studies that will enable it to promote its association with the Company.
- Via will notify the Council at the earliest opportunity about issues that may be of future media, social media or public interest so that statements can be prepared in readiness. This includes using if needed the Council's on-call communications number for weekends and Bank Holidays.
- Via will work with the Council in terms of arrangements for any official openings or reopening of buildings, roads or assets owned by the Council.
- Meetings will be scheduled to discuss and review communications and marketing activity.
- Via will share communication and marketing plans, information and event details related to the services and activities covered by the contract in a timely manner with the Council.
- Via will take account of the local government code of publicity and adhere to the guidance issued in pre-election periods.
- Via will provide an on call contact for NCC's out of hours media emergency service.
- When working in partnership with NCC, Via will adhere to all branding, reputation, media, customer, VFM and digital requirements as agreed in the contract.

Communications Contacts

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Review

This protocol shall be reviewed no later than 1st July 2017.