The Offsite Advantage

A new model for local government communications

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Introduction

Defining local government communications means talking about a diverse range of messaging – from revenues and benefits to specialist elections documentation and everything in between.

The sheer volume and complexity of everyday communications that local authorities must produce to keep citizens informed, protected or engaged demands constant financial and strategic attention.

The picture is made even more challenging by some current, critical factors. The drive to digital and the requirement to engage with citizens in a way that is more closely aligned to the private sector customer experience is a core target. Additionally, a commitment to environmental and sustainability goals must also underpin all strategic planning. The post-pandemic landscape is also delivering its own questions in terms of flexing to how and where people work.

So – a broad range of communication types meets a growing number of ways of communicating at a time of significant change. And herein lies the problem – legacy ways of working are becoming severely tested by this matrix of challenges.

This guide presents a fresh way of looking at communications management in the local government sector. We question the traditional model of onsite communication production and point towards a model that utilises offsite expertise to deliver efficiencies and excellence.

We've steered away from jargon to offer valuable knowledge that will aid councils in taking their communications management strategies forward. We explain the meaning behind some commonly used terms such as digital transformation and hybrid mail. We look at the significant cost-savings available through postal optimisation. We explain the mechanics and importance of buying frameworks. And we explore the communication management-related certifications that any respectable supplier should hold.

Our deep experience in the local government sector enables us to identify pain-points and outline solutions without the hard sell.

Today's communication landscape is complex and challenging. The good news is that local authorities don't need to go it alone. This guide will help decision makers navigate with confidence towards communication management processes that are ready for now – and fit for the future.

Gerry Crawley
Strategy Director – Public Sector
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The hidden cost of onsite print production

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The hidden cost of onsite print production

Inefficient onsite processes are costing councils approximately £1.50 per letter sent. Over the course of a year, assuming volumes of 100,000 mailed items per annum, that equates to £150,000 of unnecessary spend.

So why does this overspend happen? The vast majority of daily postal correspondence sent from councils to citizens is still produced internally. And yet the cost of doing so is staggering.

The difficulty here is that volumes are varied and unpredictable, and associated expenditure is difficult to track due to production being spread across numerous sites, people and departmental budgets.

Even if the authority has some way of tracking the final postage total associated with mail of this nature – always the largest element of communication spend – it is highly unlikely that related 'burdened costs' will be calculated. Burdened costs are those direct and indirect costs that must be absorbed in order to print and mail documents in-house.

Our experience in working with over 100 authorities across the UK has enabled us to calculate these burdened costs – and to revise them year on year.

> **The vast majority of daily postal correspondence sent from councils to citizens is still produced internally. And yet the cost of doing so is staggering.**

The hidden cost of onsite print production

The true cost of onsite production

The table below shows the average burdened costs per document based on our work with local authorities.

Burdened costs per document	Average cost
Visible hardware – rental, toner, inks, maintenance	40p
IT support – installation, testing, training, network connections	10p
Administration and purchasing – selection, storage, restocking, management	12p
Document production – end user time	42p
Document management – creation, filing, storing, binding, retrieving	40p
2nd Class Mail	55p
Total burdened cost	**£1.99**

* This cost will be greater in reality as other post will be issued 1st class

Looking at these figures it becomes clear that much of the hidden cost of internal document production is generated by the reliance on staff time. Staff will be skilled in many facets of their role but print production will not be an area of expertise – nor should it be one that imposes on their daily tasks.

Consider also the impact of energy prices and the knock-on effect to net-zero ambitions – not only from running desktop print equipment but also from lighting and heating the offices used to house this equipment.

Costly office space is being devoted to expensive print practices at a time when fewer council staff are onsite due to hybrid working. Latest reports from councils such as East Lothian suggest that nearly one in four council staff who were able to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic have applied to make the change permanent. Councils throughout the UK are accommodating more agile hybrid working patterns, which ultimately poses huge questions regarding required office footprint.

Reducing costs to 49p per letter is easily achievable

A **hybrid mail** solution enables staff to send print jobs via a desktop portal, from wherever they are working, to specialist production sites, rather than producing mail on costly office printers. Expert, purpose-built production centres and **postal optimisation** solutions reduce these costs to around 49p on average, an estimated saving of around £1.50 per letter.

It quickly becomes obvious that offsite printing (via hybrid mail) can deliver huge advantages over the legacy onsite model. Cost savings are an obvious benefit. But the bigger picture is that these solutions enable councils to flex operations to fit new ways of working.

Hybrid mail:
A solution
for now

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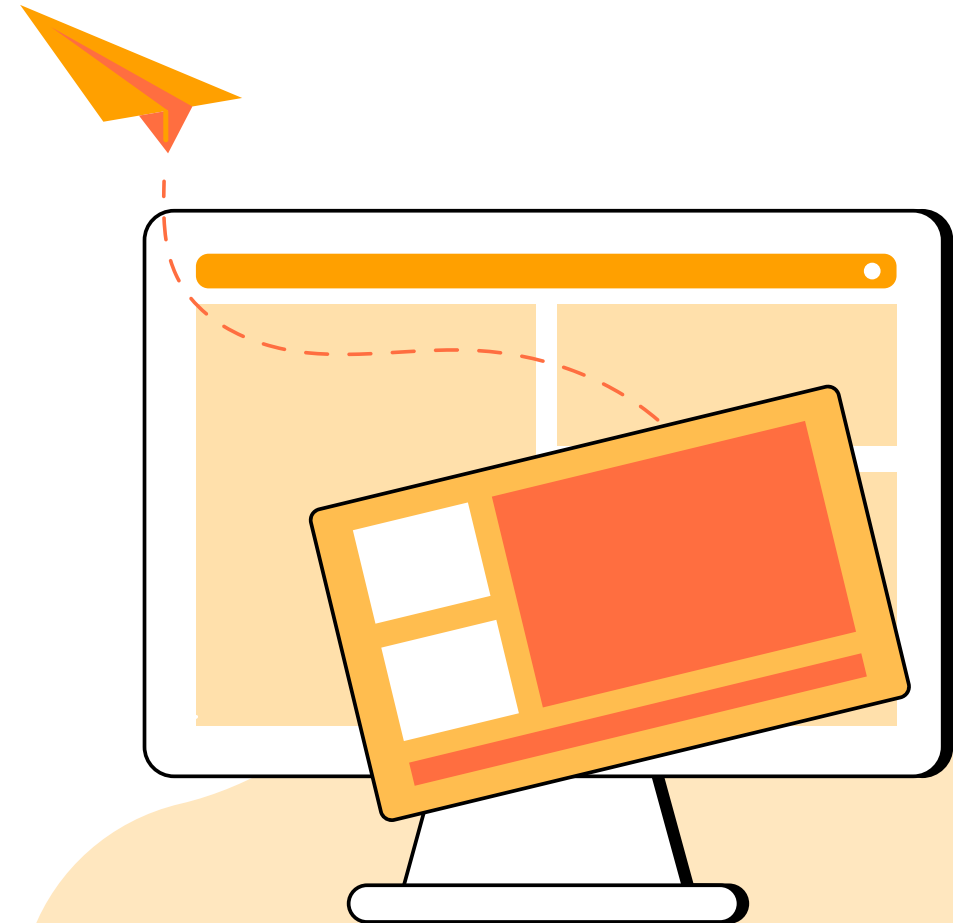
Hybrid mail:
A solution
for now

What is hybrid mail?

Hybrid mail is really a very simple concept, and one which is coming of age in the post-pandemic landscape. Hybrid mail enables employees to create documents on their computer as normal and to then click and send these documents to a specialised offsite hub for printing and despatch. Why? Because doing so can save employee time, can slash print and post costs and can provide better control over document quality

and compliance - particularly when staff are working remotely.

Increasingly, hybrid mail is recognised as a multi-channel solution rather than simply producing print and mail output. So, in addition to sending documents for print and post, council staff can select document delivery via digital channels including email, SMS, or self-service portals.

One, tens, or thousands of documents can be sent without leaving the desk.

How hybrid mail works

At your end, a print driver is installed onto the computers of those tasked with printing. Document templates can also be set-up to speed the creation of commonly produced documents. This then enables colleagues with the installed driver to create their document and simply click 'send', whereby the documents will be routed to the chosen hybrid mail partner's production site.

At the production site the document is printed, paired with the specific envelope type and postal tariff and despatched. Alternatively, the document is delivered digitally.

Hybrid mail:
A solution for now

How hybrid mail is being used in local government

Consider the typical council operation. Despite a growing focus on digital communications, local authorities still rely heavily on paper and print to deliver vital information to residents. Offices will usually have desktop printers allocated to departments or teams. Everyday communications will be created by council employees at their desktop and sent for print on these departmental printers. Often, employees will also spend time placing the printed documents into envelopes and walking them over to the point of despatch.

The true spend associated with local authority staff producing everyday mail can be hard to quantify. But we've done the maths. Our own **burdened cost**

analysis details the costs that many councils simply absorb in order to print and mail documents in-house. It's an inefficient and expensive way of operating.

In simple terms, hybrid mail is ideally suited for any council or department sending a regular volume of mail. Using hybrid mail can deliver savings in the region of 40% for each letter sent.

Even against more regular, high-volume communication processes such as annual billing runs or electoral documentation, hybrid mail can still deliver significant efficiencies. Typically, the scale and predictability of these bulk communications means that these processes are more visible to decision-makers and therefore more carefully analysed, monitored and controlled. But hybrid mail is the choice for many

councils across such processes – and post-pandemic working patterns are likely to result in further take up.

A solution for now

In common with the private sector, councils across the UK have developed a range of flexible working practices to enable work to be achieved from a variety of settings. Hybrid mail is a perfect fit for this 'hybrid work' model.

Where previously colleagues have had to be within council premises to create, print and despatch communications, now they are equipped to conduct these everyday processes from any location. As long as the hybrid mail driver is installed on their laptop, authenticated employees can keep communications flowing, safe in the knowledge that these documents

are routed to highly-secure, quality-controlled sites for production.

As working patterns evolve, reliance on physical locations is diminishing. Instead, solutions that enable best-practice work from anywhere will come to the fore. Hybrid mail is just such a solution.

We've written in depth about hybrid mail on our website, including a free hybrid mail calculator which will give you an idea of possible savings. **Read more here** about this powerful, flexible and secure solution.

> " Using hybrid mail can deliver savings in the region of 40% for each letter sent. "

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Understanding
postal optimisation

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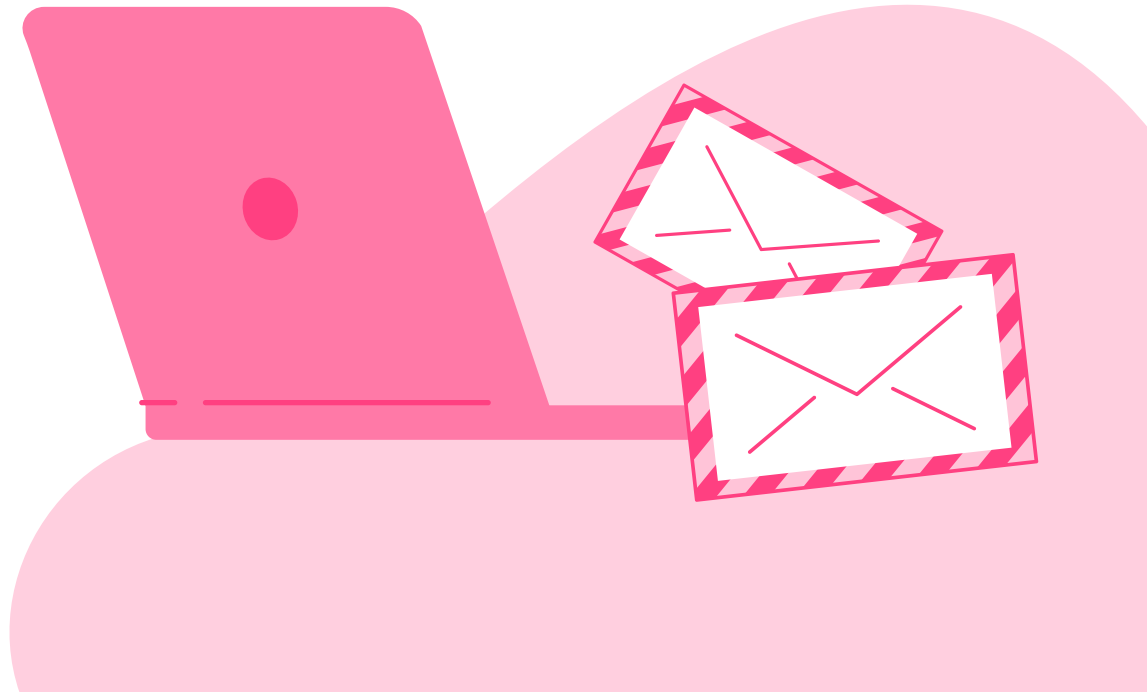
Understanding postal optimisation

Postal costs represent the most expensive component of any hard-copy communication. Our analysis reveals that non-optimised post accounts for 25%+ of total document production spend.

Given this analysis, and given the typical postal volumes produced by councils each year, it's clear that optimising postal costs can quickly deliver significant savings. So why aren't all councils doing it?

The disparate and somewhat siloed nature of council communications undoubtedly plays a part here. Some communications may be handled at a departmental level, others may go through an internal print and post room, others still may be handled by outsourced print providers. Getting an overview of this total spend - and knowing where savings can be achieved - takes an expert eye.

> " **It's clear that optimising postal costs can quickly deliver significant savings. So why aren't all councils doing it?** "

The perceived difficulty of disrupting and replacing legacy processes also dissuades many from taking the first step. The 'If it ain't broke don't fix it' mantra becomes more pervasive if the rewards for fixing it remain unknown.

The franking fallacy

For anyone without detailed knowledge of the postal system, the assumption is that post can either be sent first-class, second-class or via the expensive courier route. Certainly, where everyday office mail is concerned, many councils settle on second-class franked mail as the best available option.

In fact, franked mail is the second most expensive way to pay for postage, behind only stamps. That's before any consideration is given to the additional expense of buying or leasing the franking machines in the first place, maintenance, and the power and space required to run such equipment.

The truth is, there are a multitude of efficient postal services available to councils. These include discounts for volume, zonal or national pricing, and commercial benefits and savings.

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Understanding postal optimisation

Working with experts

The key is working with a supplier that can unlock these savings. The vast scale of postal volumes demands experience and insight. This expertise will not only ensure that costs are optimised but will also deliver process transparency - including essential certainty around when post will drop through citizens' letterboxes. Specialist suppliers to councils are equipped with the necessary technologies and skilled expertise to process vast quantities of mail and to securely and intelligently prepare and sort that mail to ensure postal costs and services are optimised.

This isn't a once-and-done arrangement. Postal prices change regularly, so a trusted communications partner will continually monitor available options and amend services accordingly.

Not just a price play

Cost-savings are key to any council strategy - but so is reducing the carbon footprint.

Certainly, by routing communications via **hybrid mail** for print and post, councils are benefitting from the energy-efficiencies that come from purpose-built, offsite production.

Equally, an expert and experienced postal partner will not fixate solely on postal mail. How to facilitate the **digital delivery** of citizen communications should be a key element of any cost-efficiency and green discussion.

Postal optimisation can drive significant savings for councils of every size. An experienced supplier will assess current processes, conduct a postal audit and reveal the true savings potential.

The expertise and solutions are out there. Every day that passes without postal optimisation is a day of wasted spend and operational inefficiency.
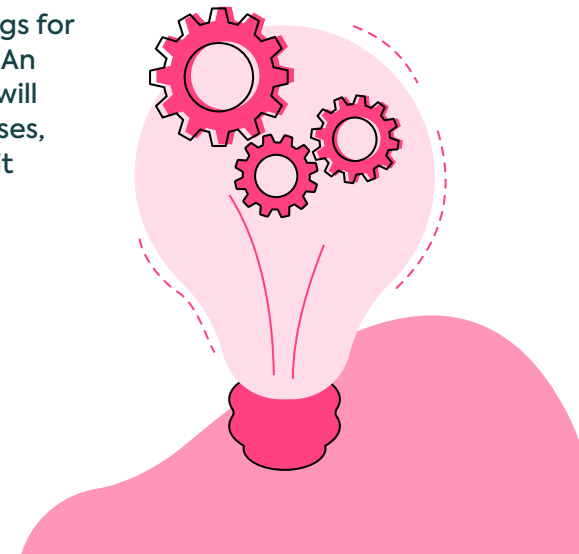
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Digital transformation in local government communications: What's the reality?

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Digital transformation in local government communications: What's the reality?

A read of any council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) document will reveal the drive to digital as a core focus. 'Digital transformation' is a commonly used phrase within the private and public sector, but what does it mean to local government?

Focusing solely on communication management, 'digital transformation' can be summarised as "the adoption of digital technologies to improve processes, reduce costs, manage risk and deliver an improved citizen experience". Simplifying even further, the digital transformation of legacy processes is helping council teams to communicate more efficiently and effectively with citizens and with each other.

Digital transformation in practice

So what does the digital transformation of legacy communication processes really encompass?

Amongst the ambitions outlined in its Local Digital Declaration, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities states: "We will 'fix our plumbing' to break our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that doesn't join up effectively." Fixing the plumbing becomes even more critical at a time when council teams are dispersed, hybrid working patterns are being adopted and citizens expect flexible, multi-channel ways to communicate.

Some councils are more advanced along the digital transformation path than others. But every council will recognise the operational and efficiency challenges presented by these inflexible and outdated processes that are heavily reliant on manual intervention.

This description, taken from a London Borough Council's Digital Strategy document, will resonate with many. Despite significant steps forward with its digital programme, the council states: "Like all councils, we have a sprawling portfolio of legacy applications and databases, built in a pre-digital era and often unfit to support modern online services. We also continue to operate a high number of paper-based and manual processes, and there is significant potential for the council to achieve savings, higher staff satisfaction and provide better services for residents from digitising more of our internal operations."
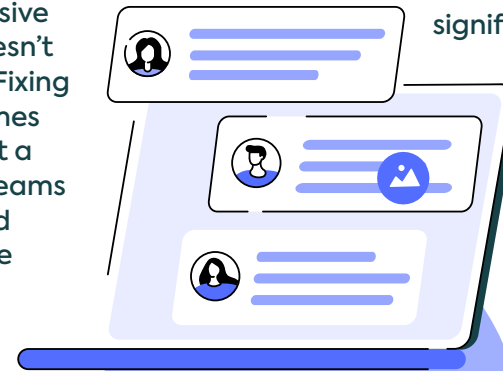
Digital transformation in local government communications: What's the reality?

Where to focus?

Often, knowing where to focus digital efforts can be difficult. The term 'digital transformation' isn't especially helpful, suggesting as it does the necessity for total and sweeping change. In fact, digital transformation can start small and expand.

Working with expert suppliers will enable councils to plot sensible and achievable pathways to progress and to identify obvious points of entry. Such partners will work with councils to assess current operations and to establish factors such as: where are the current pain-points? What's causing service delay or operational expense? Is feedback from citizens centred on any specific failing?

Once entry points for transformation have been established, change can

happen rapidly. Often, pre-existing software templates can simply be tailored to suit a specific challenge, with the result that digital solutions can be devised and implemented in as little as eight weeks.

This is not about simply transferring existing paper-based services onto a computer screen. A broken process is a broken process. It's about designing new and better approaches that place internal efficiencies and citizen outcomes at the core.

Enabling citizen choice and empowering hybrid work

Without digitisation, the new world of hybrid working becomes difficult to maintain. Legacy processes require people on site, manually handling and amending documents. With colleagues attending council offices less

frequently, manual intervention isn't possible. Instead, digital transformation of these processes can empower authorised remote workers to edit and share and issue documents from wherever they're working.

Citizen choice is another key driver for digitisation. Presenting citizens with choice over how to respond or sign-up or complain can ease the burden on internal teams and expedite vital functions such as payments and collections.

Work with experts

The advice for any council really should be to work with experienced suppliers who recognise specific council communication challenges, who understand the various types of local government communication, and who have the expertise to swiftly

implement dynamic changes without placing an extra burden on the council's own IT teams.

Transformation will not happen in one go. Instead, step by step, changes will happen that bring greater efficiency and agility to council operations, driving a better communication experience for citizens.

> " Often, pre-existing software templates can simply be tailored to suit a specific challenge, with the result that digital solutions can be devised and implemented in as little as eight weeks. "

Climate emergency, net zero and the role of communications management

Climate emergency, net zero and the role of communications management

More than 40 UK councils from across the political spectrum have declared a climate emergency. Ten per cent of first and second tier UK councils have passed motions committing to working towards going carbon neutral by 2030. The environment is a headline concern for councils throughout the UK. So how does communications management impact these green targets?

Onsite legacy models are far from green

There is a clear disconnect between the onsite print production model and stated environmental ambitions. Onsite print happens in two ways – via a network of tens or even hundreds of departmental desktop devices and, in several councils, via a dedicated in-house print room stocked with equipment capable of higher print speeds and volumes.

At a time when councils are carefully evaluating floorspace and site occupancy, a dedicated print room is difficult to justify. It is not simply about the energy required to run the devices and power the room. There is also the added impact of deliveries to and from the site and the storage of paper and consumables.

Directing print via a **hybrid mail** solution for offsite production enables councils to benefit from all the advantages of production facilities that are purpose built with optimal efficiency in mind.

Beware vampire devices

A new phrase has entered the discussion recently – vampire devices. These are electrical appliances that drain power when left on standby or when they aren't in use. The departmental desktop print set–up relies on multiple devices, most of which will not be unplugged during the day or overnight when sitting idle. Price comparison site Confused.com estimates that the UK wastes £470 million a year just from leaving devices on standby or plugged in at the wall.

Again, a hybrid mail solution effectively eliminates most, if not all, such devices from a site, instead routing this departmental print and mail for highly efficient offsite production.

Of course, this is not merely a cost consideration. Eliminating an entire fleet of desktop devices would play a significant part in any council becoming more energy efficient – a key factor in reducing carbon emissions.

> " There is a clear disconnect between the onsite print production model and stated environmental ambitions. "

Climate emergency, net zero and the role of communications management

The role of the supplier

Councils such as West Sussex and Hammersmith and Fulham have developed their own Social Value frameworks and statements which set out stated social value aims (including climate and net zero goals) and their expectations of suppliers in helping to advance these aims.

Credible suppliers will have their own list of certifications outlining proficiencies relating to areas such as the environment, quality, safety and more. We've outlined which accreditations to look for **in the supplier excellence section of the guide.**

Over and above these accreditations, one important point to clarify with communication management suppliers is - who will handle the work? In some cases, chosen suppliers will then sub-contract work to other print businesses. There is no guarantee that the sub-contracted business will hold the same accreditations, with the same dedicated focus on net zero and environment. Equally, will this sub-contractor have sufficient technical and

operational capacity to cope with any spike in council requirements - and will they have the desired focus in terms of service and project management? Always be sure exactly how the work is processed.

The climate emergency demands a communications management re-think

Councils have no time to waste if published environmental targets are to be achieved. However, achieving these targets whilst continuing with legacy onsite print and mail strategies will be hugely challenging. These legacy environments are simply not geared towards environmental efficiency, nor do they provide an easy pathway to transforming to more digital interactions.

Moving towards the offsite print model via hybrid mail can help councils make huge strides towards environmental goals. It's a model that also supports **digital transformation** - a critical element of any discussions around communication management efficiency and greener operational outcomes.

The importance
of frameworks
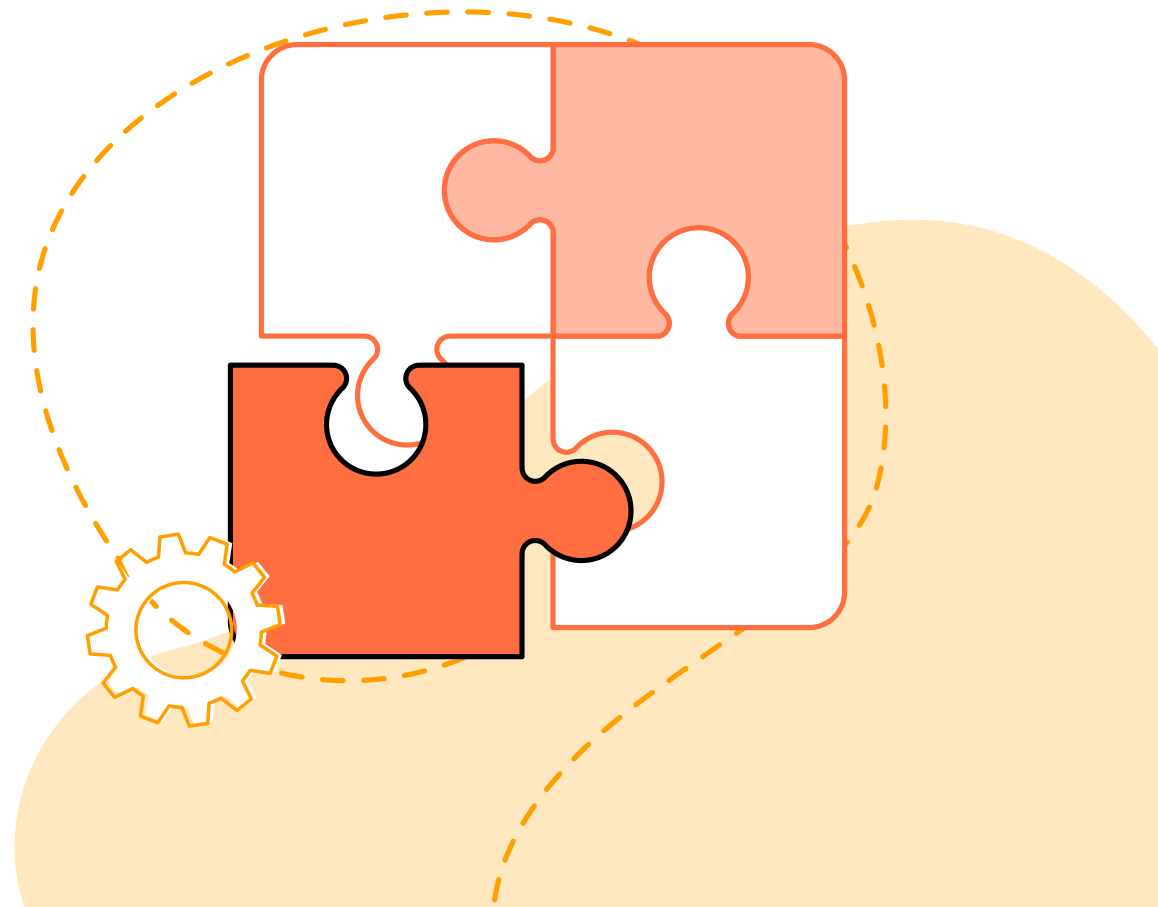
The importance of frameworks

Effective procurement plays a critical role in enabling local government to achieve published performance targets. Increasing demand for public services, coupled with decreasing resources, places councils under huge pressure to find suppliers capable of driving better outcomes.

Procurement regulations oblige public sector bodies to tender from suppliers when they want to buy goods and services above a certain value. The overriding procurement policy requirement is that all public procurement must be based on value for money, defined as "the best mix of quality and effectiveness for the least outlay over the period of use of the goods or services bought". This should be achieved through competition, unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary.

Finding expertise

The difficulty for many councils is twofold – knowing what to ask for and knowing where to look. This is an over-simplification, but there are obvious challenges for councils to overcome. Technology and solutions move on quickly. Skilled procurement professionals will have particular areas of expertise, but they can't be expert in all areas. Very few councils have the bandwidth in terms of staff capacity or experience to keep up-to-speed with the very latest developments.

The tender process burden

Many councils will publish their tender opportunities on a tender portal or similar. But consider the tender process in its entirety. There is a huge burden on council staff in terms of conducting a requirements analysis, running the rule over supplier selection, creating the tender itself and then managing the subsequent award of contract and monitoring ongoing performance.

> " The difficulty for many councils is twofold – knowing what to ask for and knowing where to look. "

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The importance of frameworks

The framework advantage

So how else can councils buy? Becoming familiar with procurement frameworks can deliver a real advantage.

A number of professional buying organisations (PBOs) provide expertise and knowledge to assist the local government sector. These PBOs list a range of frameworks which effectively enable local government buyers to place orders for services without running the detailed and lengthy full tendering exercises outlined above.

A framework basically comprises a description of the solution or service offered, a list of suppliers providing that solution or service, and standardised contract terms. They are often divided into lots by product or service type, covering everything from construction and fleet management to IT, digital transformation, back-office processes and much more. So, as an example, a council wanting hybrid mail can look on the PBO site, search for the framework referencing hybrid mail, and check whether the services (Lots) listed under this framework meet the council's desired criteria. The council can then choose to conduct a mini-tender with all the named suppliers within that Lot.

Any supplier listed within a PBO framework has effectively been pre-vetted by the PBO and is deemed to be an expert and experienced supplier of the particular service or solution.

The key advantages of using a procurement framework can be summarised as:

Buy with confidence:
Any supplier on the framework will have had to demonstrate how they can supply the service or solution to an agreed standard. You can have confidence in the pricing and can expect quality and reliability in terms of pre- and after-sales support.

Simplified buying:
Removing the need to undertake time consuming, costly and resource heavy internal tender processes.

Faster purchases:
All the due diligence has been done upfront by the PBO, so there is no need to wait months while the tender process takes place.

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The importance of frameworks

Once you've chosen the framework, choose the correct Lot

Choosing the correct Lot within a framework is hugely important. Here, we use a real PBO framework to illustrate the point. For any authority looking to improve postal optimisation (for example), the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) has framework RM6280 titled 'Postal Goods, Services and Solutions'.

Within this framework are 8 different lots, each covering a different service, So, for example, Lot 3 covers '*Collection And Delivery Of Letters, Large Letters, And Parcels*', whereas Lot 6 covers '*Hybrid Mail, Digital And Transformational Communications*'. Under each Lot is a list of suppliers with contact emails. It makes sense to communicate with suppliers to understand precisely what they can provide within each Lot and to know which service provides the best fit.

We've identified some of the main PBOs below. All will provide useful guides and further advice to assist you with your purchasing decisions:

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

In particular:
Framework CCS RM6280 'Postal Goods, Service and Solutions'
Lot 5 – Business Process Outsourcing, Mailroom, Document and Data Managed Services
Lot 6 – Hybrid Mail, Digital and Transformational Communications
Lot 7 – Inbound Delivery, Mail Opening and Digital Scanning Services

Scottish Government Procurement

In particular:
Postal Services Framework

Lot 2:
Hybrid, Scheduled/Regular Bulk (Print and Post) and Digital Mail Services

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

In particular:
Framework CCS RM1557

G-Cloud 13

Lot 2:
Cloud Software (SaaS) Hybrid Mail

EEM

In particular:
Printing Fulfilment & Mailing Services Framework
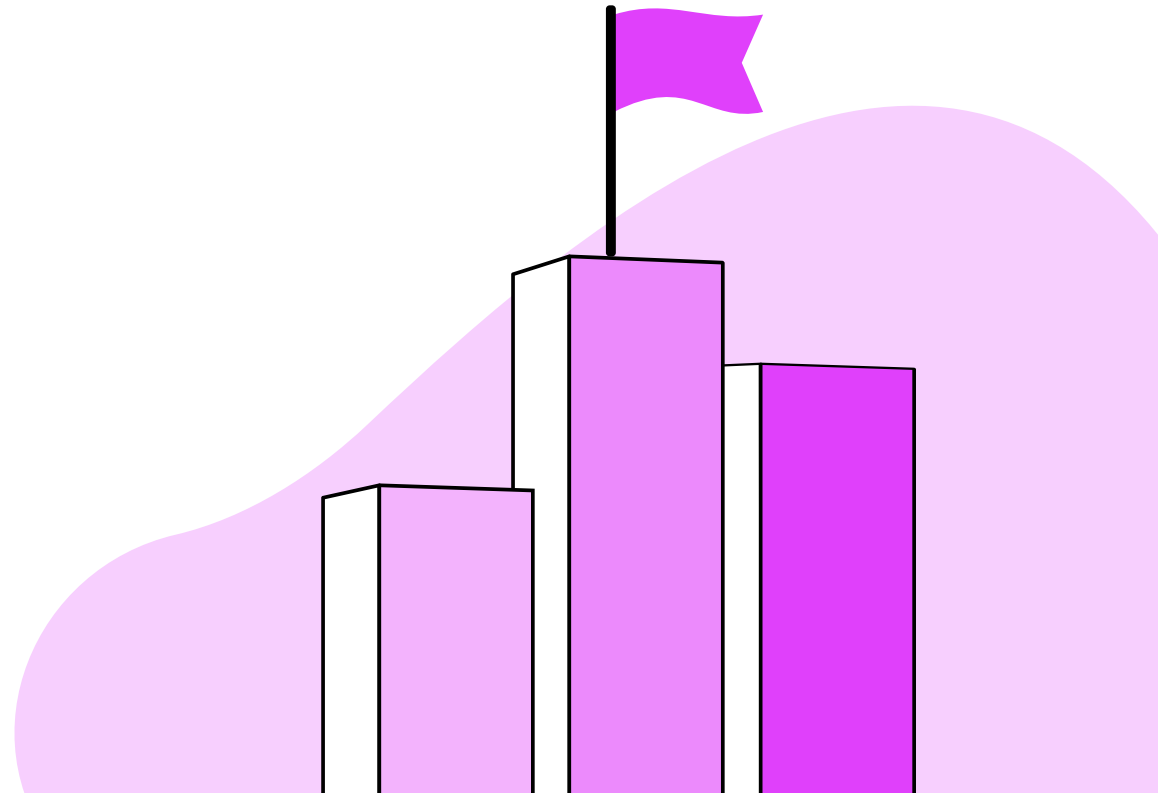
Lot 1: Printing, Fulfilment & Mailing

Lot 2: Hybrid Mail

NEPO

In particular:
NEPO504 Election and Electoral Registration Print

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Supplier excellence:
What to look for

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Supplier excellence:
What to look for

Having total confidence in the suppliers you work with is paramount. A number of certifications and standards exist to help suppliers ensure that their services meet statutory, regulatory and quality requirements. For authorities, these certificates effectively provide proof of supplier competence against specific measures.

Assurance of quality, compliance, risk management, environmental management and business continuity should always be a key component of any supplier agreement. This is particularly the case when it comes to managing the flow of citizen communications. Documents such as council tax bills, reminders, postal voting packs, planning notifications, benefit reviews and many more are

all highly personal and subject to the strictest controls. Processing errors cannot be countenanced. It is essential that supplier solutions and services meet these exacting performance levels.

Be sure to ask suppliers to outline which certifications they hold before agreements are signed. Also, be certain that the work will be carried out with the supplier that you sign with, rather than sub-contracted to another provider.

If the supplier is sub-contracting, ensure that the sub-contractor holds the same level of certification.

Many suppliers will also provide the option of site visits so your team can get a first-hand feel of how and where work will happen. Take the opportunity to walk the site and fully understand the process. Suppliers with multi-site provision might also tip the balance. This provides an obvious advantage in terms of business continuity and disaster recovery, but production location may also be a consideration in terms of factors such as local social value and carbon footprint.

> **Be sure to ask suppliers to outline which certifications they hold before agreements are signed. Also, be certain that the work will be carried out with the supplier that you sign with, rather than sub-contracted to another provider.**

Supplier excellence:
What to look for

Here is a checklist of those certifications that are relevant to the provision of citizen communication management.

Health & Safety

- OHSAS 18001 – Occupational Health and Safety Management

Quality Management

- ISO 9001 – Quality Management System
- PRINCE2 – Project Management

Security Management

- ISO 27001 – Information Security Management
- Data Protection Act – Registered as a Data Controller with the ICO
- C&CCC – Cheque Printer Accreditation Scheme (CPAS)
- Strict employment policy with security vetting to DBS Check Level 1

Business Continuity

- ISO 22301 – Business Continuity Management

Environment Management

- ISO 14001 – Environmental Management System
- Forest Stewardship Council®
- Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification

Electoral Services

- Association of Electoral Administrators membership

Revenues and Benefits

- Institute of Revenue and Ratings Valuation involvement

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The offsite advantage

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The offsite advantage

The 'matrix of challenges' mentioned in the introduction – cost-pressures, the push to digital, the environmental/social drive and hybrid working patterns – makes this a critical time for strategic communications management planning.

Communications strategy affects every department, every day, and citizen interest continues to rise in the mechanics and ethics of how local government work is done.

This guide is intended as a handy one-stop-shop of essential information relating to communications management. But an underlying theme runs throughout. The legacy model of onsite, manual handling of print and post has never looked more unwieldy and out-of-date.

The expense and inefficiency of this legacy model can be summed up by the three Ps – people, property and power. Colleague time (people) is used inefficiently, expensive floor-space (property) is given over to unnecessary hardware and energy (power) is wasted as technology stands idle.

Councils are making huge strides in reversing this model, but, as technology moves on apace, keeping abreast of best practice is no easy task.

Any process change can be daunting, but the solutions and expertise exist to make the transformation to a more agile, intelligent and future-proof operation without disruption and at a pace that suits.

An offsite model eliminates this 'three P' inefficiency and enables councils to flex more easily to evolving communication demands. Trusted suppliers bring security and quality to a process that simply can't be seen to fail.

We hope the guide has provided some useful insight as you consider the next stage of your communications management evolution.

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Let's talk

We work with over 100 authorities across the UK, trusted with the production of critical, highly secure communications such as revenues and benefits and electoral documentation, along with the volume of essential everyday communications that flow between local authorities and citizens.

If you would like to talk to one of our sector experts about your communication management requirements, please get in touch via **hello@adaresec.com**