

## Comms teams face familiar challenges in a new landscape

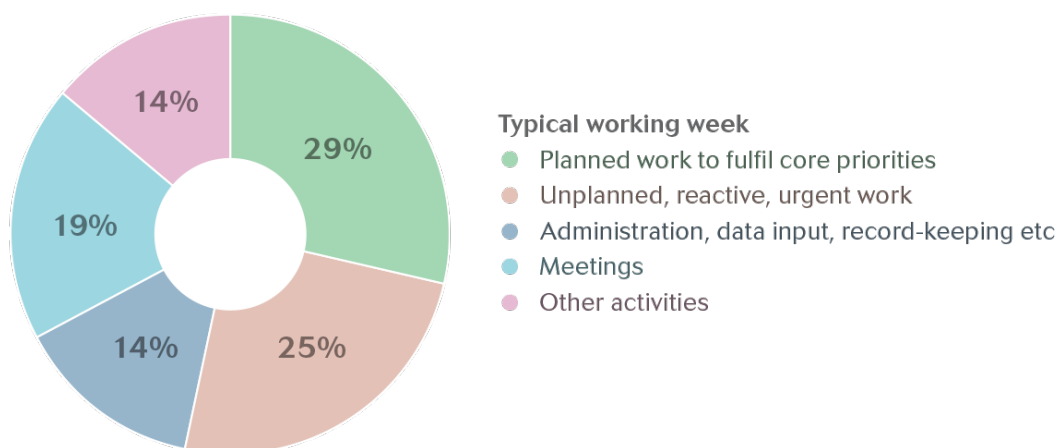
With the general election only a month gone and the Christmas season barely over, it is too early to see the extent to which the government will honour its promise to end austerity, and what this will actually look like. The only certainty is that Brexit will happen on 31 January, heralding a period of readjustment.

Councils and other public sector organisations can be sure that the gaping holes in funding that opened during the last decade will not be plugged immediately, and that improvements in efficiency and productivity remain high on the political agenda.

### Room for improvement

A survey conducted by LG Communications in partnership with Panacea Applications Limited shows that, in the realm of public sector communications, there is certainly an appetite to improve and innovate, and scope to do so.

By studying work patterns, the survey identified that teams continue to be dogged by reactive work patterns and less than a third of personnel's time was spent on core priorities.



Firefighting and fielding urgent, unplanned requests, coupled with repetitive administrative tasks, accounted for nearly 40% of the working week, representing a frustrating diversion of resources.



Pressure on staff to fulfill their workload remains high with only one third of respondents feeling they have enough time to do so, up slightly from 28% last year.



More than a quarter of teams had to contend with staffing cuts in the last 12 months, and 50% feared that still further budget cuts would affect their ability to deliver a high-quality service.

### **Morale continues to climb**

Against this tough backdrop, the resilience of staff is evident by their growing sense of job satisfaction on previous years, no doubt boosted by their confidence that management teams value their work (a feeling rising to 74% from 66% in 2018 and 67% the year before). This is reflected in a solid sense that their team in fact continued to meet its core objectives (up from 81% to 84%).

### **Where to focus effort?**

Staff were asked to specify their business priorities for the next 12 months. They were able to give multiple answers. The table below ranks these and also gives figures for the previous two years.

PRIORITY	2017	2018	2019
Increase use of digital, online and social media	76%	56%	64%
More efficient ways of working	68%	63%	60%
Corporate or strategic planning	52%	66%	54%
Income generation	42%	44%	50%
Press and Media management*	n/a	n/a	44%
Encourage self-service	49%	45%	37%
Brand management	35%	40%	37%
Performance monitoring and improvement	35%	36%	36%
Cost savings	39%	39%	33%
Share services, collaborate or work in partnership	40%	31%	27%
Reduce print, paper volumes		23%	26%
Better value from suppliers		6%	18%
Procurement		11%	14%
Bring in-house services currently managed by external providers		3%	8%
Reduce staff numbers		11%	6%
Out-source services to other organisations		6%	1%

\* Not listed in previous years.

### Recognizing Opportunities

Digital media is still most widely seen as a priority, although the fact that fewer people rank it could indicate that more and more organisations are getting to grips with new technologies. In general, there is a fair degree of correlation over recent times, although a few things stand out. For example, a growing number are recognizing the potential to actually generate income using in-house skills and resources.

Despite facing the same financial challenges as most local authorities, in 2019 Camden Council's in-house creative services team generated over £730K in revenue for their communications department, with over 15% of this coming from external clients.

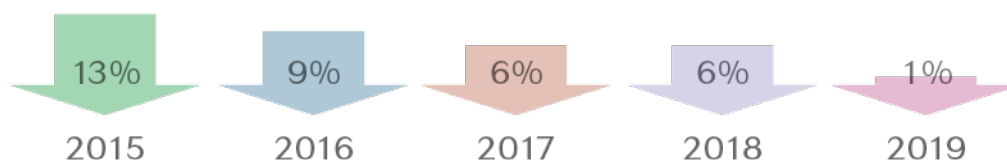
### Still seeking efficiencies

The drive to find more efficient ways of working remains strong, indicating that staff still perceive slack in the system.

### Out-sourcing

It is notable that the trend towards out-sourcing has all but dwindled to naught from its height a decade or so ago. The ease with which staff can themselves produce high-quality material, using applications such as Panacea Software, means there is no longer the need to buy in costly, external expertise.

#### Downward trend for out-sourcing services



### Asset Management

Nearly a year on from when the new GDPR rules came into play, 29% of respondents said they still did not have compliant asset management processes in place, despite 89% saying that their organisations held personal data.



### Training needs

While most felt that their team possessed the right skills and resources to complete their jobs, 45% perceived a shortfall, with only 50% indicating the

availability of a training budget. There was however little consensus on the type of training needed, with priorities spread across 24 categories - digital creativity being deemed the most necessary. There would certainly be benefits to linking teams across organisations to access training and knowledge transfer. Organisations, such as LG Communications, can facilitate such networks and offer training and coaching in a wide range of communications roles.

**Looking to a more certain future**

Public sector comms teams can hope that funding streams remain constant in the coming year, and if not about to splurge, at least dwindle no further. It is important to keep on course and deliver an excellent service using resources judiciously while grasping opportunities to improve. Once the dust settles, it will be easier to see how to get to where we need to be.

**Data source:**

126 communications professionals took part in this research, including officers, managers and directors. The vast majority are employed by central or local government organisations, the fire service or police, with the remaining 5% contracted to provide communications services for these organisations.