The Impact of Branding on Levels of Awareness about Local Authority Services

2025 Customer Service Special Theme Report

December 2025
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LGMA
An Ghníomhaireacht
Bainistíochta Rialtais Áitiúil
Local Government
Management Agency

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland

Foreword

The diversity of services provided by local authorities has increased over the years. One of the challenges faced by the sector has been to keep the public informed and updated about this increasing range of services. The annual local government customer service research reveals that many members of the public remain unaware that some of the key services they know about and utilise are delivered by their local authority. To understand why this is, and the role branding may play, this research explores the question: **what role does branding play in shaping public awareness about local authority services?** Through a combination of a nationally representative survey and a series of focus groups with members of the public, local authority staff, and elected members, this report investigates whether branding, or the lack thereof, contributes to low levels of awareness about services delivered by local authorities.

The research confirms that branding does matter. When logos, messaging, and visual identities are used inconsistently or are disconnected from the local authority identity, the public often attributes services to other bodies, such as national agencies, private companies, or NGOs. This is particularly evident in areas like tourism, business supports, and environmental services. Conversely, where branding is clear, consistent, and visible, such as in libraries and parks, awareness of local authority involvement is higher.

Importantly, the report also highlights the challenges faced by local authorities in managing branding across a complex landscape of partnerships and shared services, while channels of communications and engagement expand and change rapidly. Staff and elected members alike expressed a desire for strategic, proactive communications to get important messages about what the local authority is doing out to the public and acknowledge that this requires considerable agility and professionalism.

This report presents a nuanced picture of the current landscape and considers possible solutions that could be adapted to local contexts. These include enhancing visibility through consistent use of logos, investing in communications capacity, clarifying terminology, and leveraging national structures to support local efforts. However, the research participants identity the commitment and support of senior management and the Chief Executives as the key to the success of developments in this area.

This report should serve as a valuable resource for local authorities seeking to strengthen their communications strategies and build greater recognition of the vital work they do. By improving how local authorities present and promote their services and the impact they have on individuals, communities, the environment and the economy, stronger connections can be fostered, transparency enhanced, and the real value of the role of local government evident.

Kieran Kehoe
Chair
CCMA Corporate and Emergency Planning Committee

Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association

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Introduction

Local Government Customer Service

Since 2021, the LGMA has been responsible for an annual local government customer service research programme. The LGMA engage with the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) each year to agree a 'special topic' relating to customer service delivery that needs to be explored in some detail.

In 2025, it was agreed to look at the impact of branding on low levels of awareness about key services provided by local authorities.

The first objective of the research was to identify the reasons why people didn't know that local authorities were responsible for delivering services, who they thought were delivering these services, and whether they recognised any of the logos used across the sector.

The second objective was to explore how to address the issues raised through identification of challenges and possible solutions with staff and elected members.

Combined, these provide a comprehensive overview of the current status in the sector and a road map of possible actions that could be taken to improve service awareness levels.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Research Background

Local government customer service reports have been produced by the LGMA annually since 2021. They have consistently shown that the public were unaware that local authorities were responsible for or involved in the delivery of many key services, such as motor tax, fire services, tourism/events, homeless supports, environmental protection, etc. Two primary factors influence awareness levels – using a service and seeing or receiving information about the service.
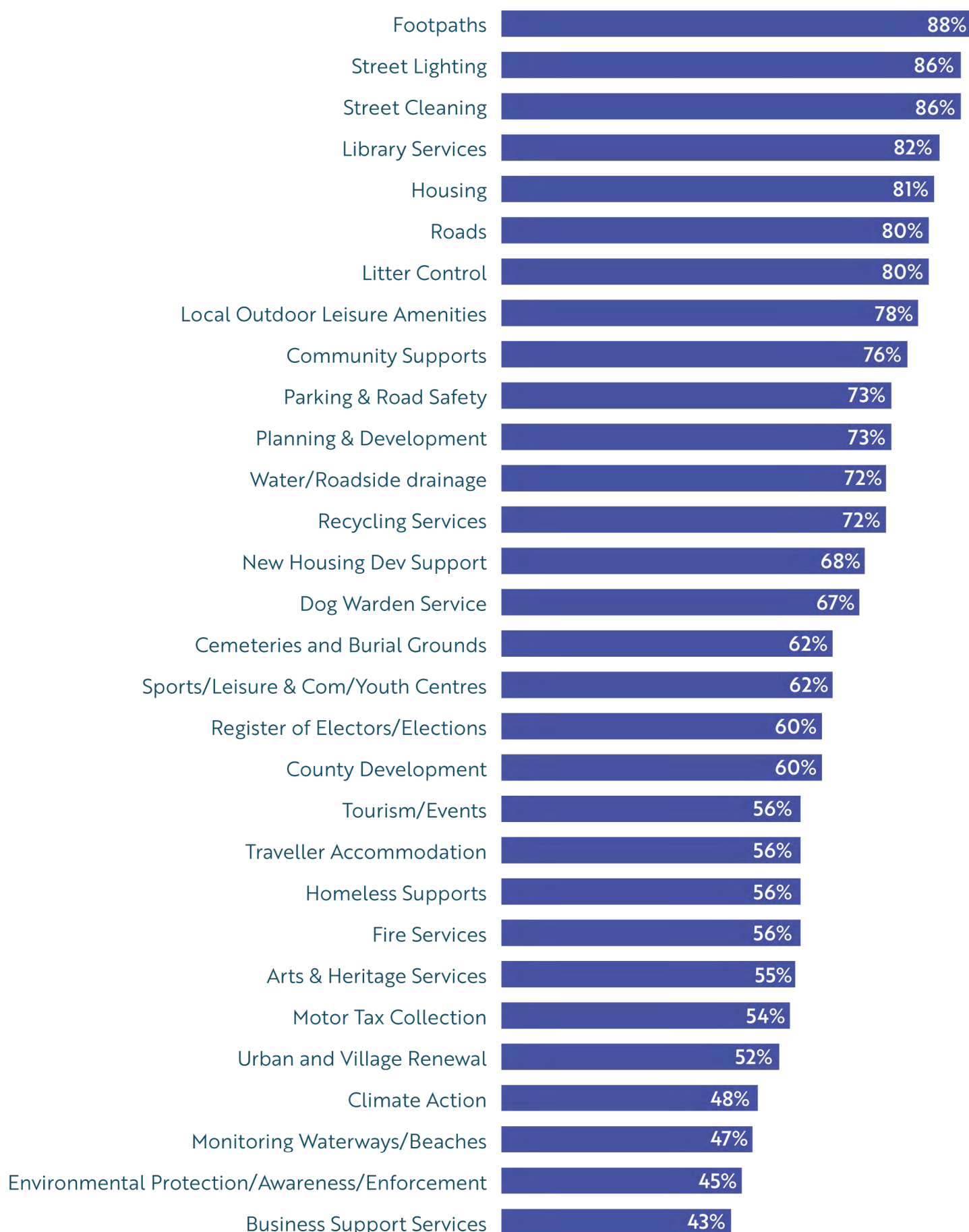
The annual surveys reveal that people using local authority services were more inclined to know the service was being provided by their local authority – but not always. People actively using services like enterprise support, online motor tax renewals or attending tourism events that were provided or supported by local authorities, did not always know that local authorities were involved.

Regarding advertising or the provision of information about services, considerable challenges have been identified in previous research about communicating details of up to 1,100 different services plus the activities in the community associated with those services. To assist in the exploration of this topic, extra questions were added to the 2025 customer service survey and 8 focus groups were held to:

- Confirm that branding, or a lack of it, was impacting awareness about local authority services.

- Identify the possible the causes of low awareness levels and the implications for the sector.

- Capture proposed solutions to the issues from the perspective of various stakeholders (the public, local authority staff, and elected members) that could improve awareness levels.

Figure 1 2025 respondents aware that local authorities delivered the service

| Service	Percentage
Footpaths	88%
Street Lighting	86%
Street Cleaning	86%
Library Services	82%
Housing	81%
Roads	80%
Litter Control	80%
Local Outdoor Leisure Amenities	78%
Community Supports	76%
Parking & Road Safety	73%
Planning & Development	73%
Water/Roadside drainage	72%
Recycling Services	72%
New Housing Dev Support	68%
Dog Warden Service	67%
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	62%
Sports/Leisure & Com/Youth Centres	62%
Register of Electors/Elections	60%
County Development	60%
Tourism/Events	56%
Traveller Accommodation	56%
Homeless Supports	56%
Fire Services	56%
Arts & Heritage Services	55%
Motor Tax Collection	54%
Urban and Village Renewal	52%
Climate Action	48%
Monitoring Waterways/Beaches	47%
Environmental Protection/Awareness/Enforcement	45%
Business Support Services	43%

Setting the Scene:
What is Branding?

As part of the research process, there was engagement with LGMA Communication Team members who provided definitions that assisted in framing the research.
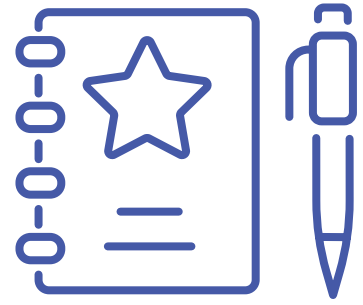
> Branding is the way in which an organisation presents itself to the public, so that people can easily recognise and understand what it is and what it does.

Branding includes:

- The logo
- The name of the organisation and how it is used
- The colours, fonts and design style
- The tone of voice in communications
- Messaging and how consistently it's delivered
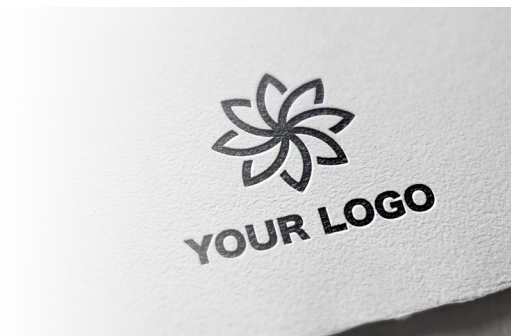
> A logo isn't a brand – and a brand doesn't act alone – to be most effective, branding should be part of a wider communications strategy.

Why is branding important?

When an organisation's logo is used consistently within a strong brand framework and supported by a clear communications strategy, it:

- Builds recognition and credibility with communities and other stakeholders.
- Reinforces your presence in the area.
- Helps people to connect your work to the local authority.
- Supports accountability and transparency by making your role visible.

National Survey Findings:
Service Awareness
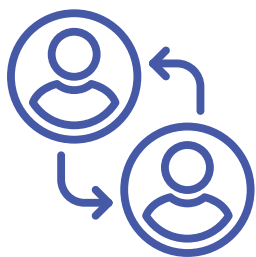
Who do you think deliver services?

There were 13 services where 800 or more people did not know the local authority was involved in the delivery of the service.

They were asked, who they thought was delivering the service:

- Government department
- State agency
- Private company
- NGO, or
- A specific agency

A government department or state agency was the most popular choice. Combined, they were selected by 70% or more of respondents for motor tax, the register of electors and the fire service, and 50% or more of people for urban and village renewal, climate action, traveller accommodation and homeless supports.

Three agencies were associated with six of the services listed:
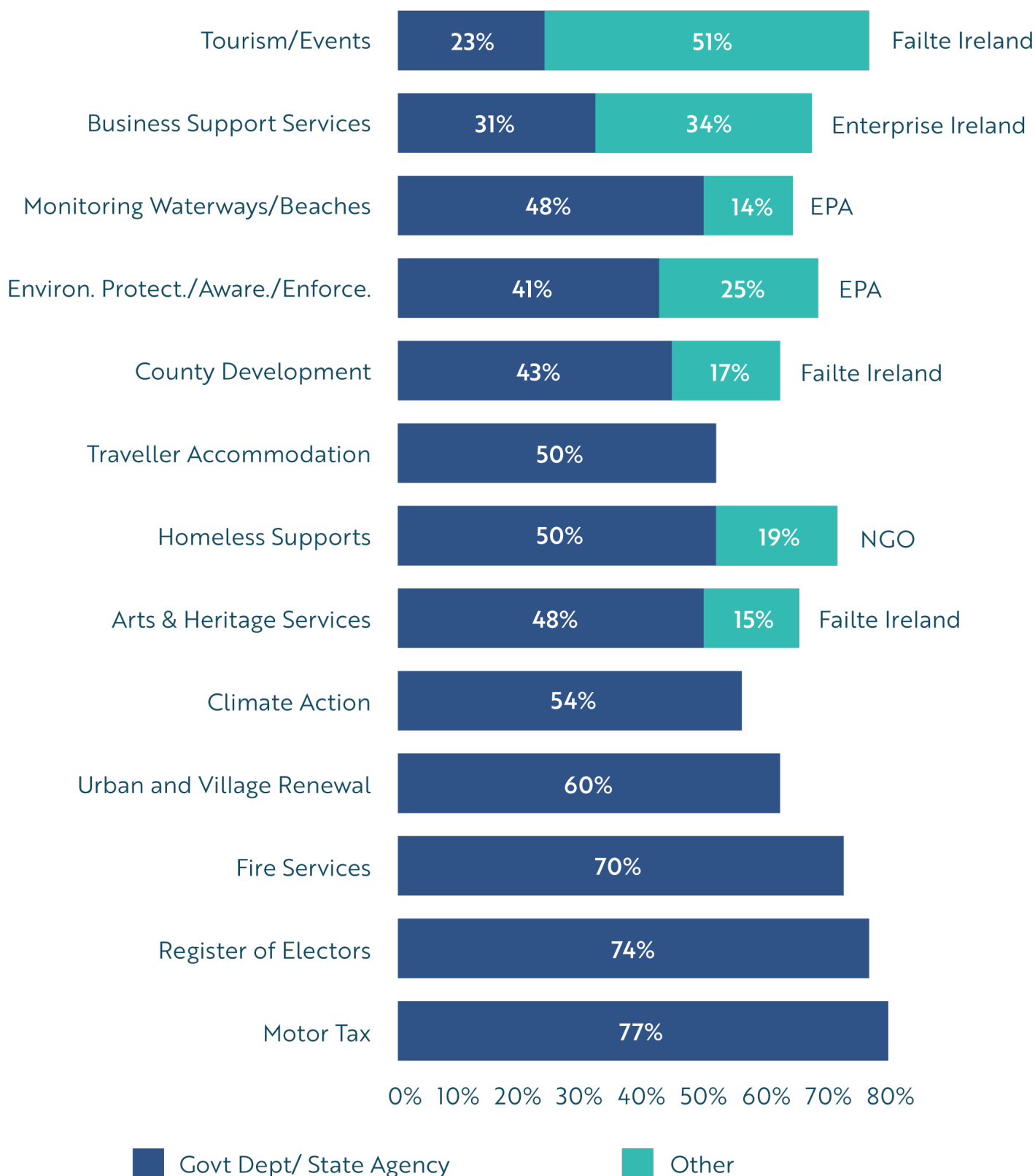
- Failte Ireland was identified as a key agency involved in the delivery of tourism and events, county development and, arts and heritage services.
- Enterprise Ireland was seen as the primary agency responsible for the provision of business support services.
- The EPA was selected for monitoring waterways and beaches as well as environmental protection, awareness and enforcement.

In addition, the NGOs were identified as supporting homeless services.

Local authorities had not been significantly involved in areas like tourism or economic development prior to reform in 2014. The research results seem to suggest that people continue to associate the original actors with these services, and remain unaware of the revised role of local authorities.

Agencies that were already strongly associated with enterprise and tourism services before local authorities became involved in 2014 dominate awareness

Figure 2 Agencies/Government Departments identified as delivery agent of local authority services by respondents

Service	Govt Dept/ State Agency	Other	Agency
Tourism/Events	23%	51%	Failte Ireland
Business Support Services	31%	34%	Enterprise Ireland
Monitoring Waterways/Beaches	48%	14%	EPA
Environ. Protect./Aware./Enforce.	41%	25%	EPA
County Development	43%	17%	Failte Ireland
Traveller Accommodation	50%		
Homeless Supports	50%	19%	NGO
Arts & Heritage Services	48%	15%	Failte Ireland
Climate Action	54%		
Urban and Village Renewal	60%		
Fire Services	70%		
Register of Electors	74%		
Motor Tax	77%		

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

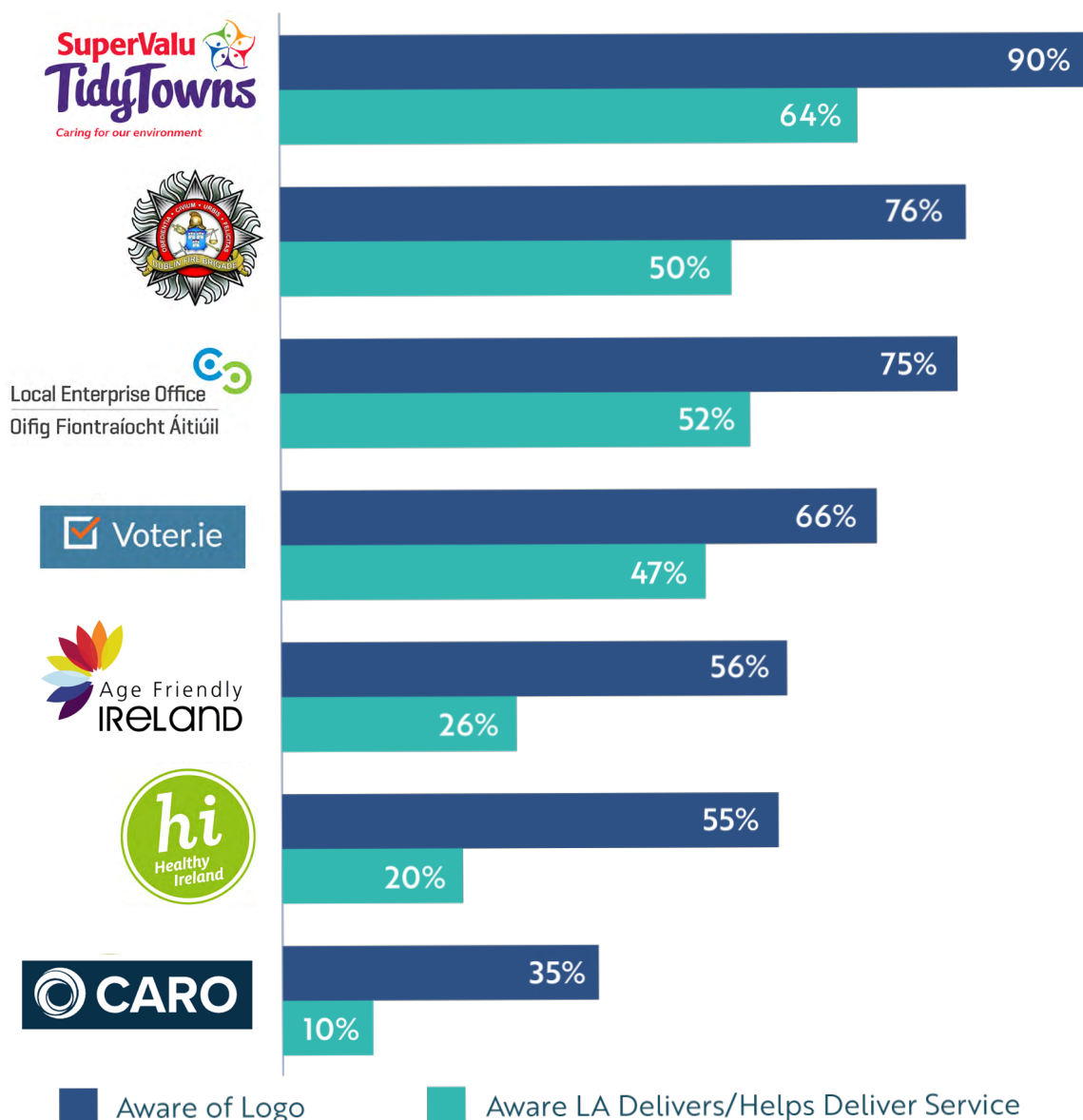■ Govt Dept/ State Agency   ■ Other

National Survey Findings:
Logo Awareness

Local authorities use a suite of logos to differentiate and promote services. Many of these services are high profile services, sometimes carried out in partnership with other stakeholders. Seven logos used by local authorities, 6 national and one for the Dublin Region, were shown to survey respondents and they were asked to indicate whether they were aware of the logo, and whether they thought the local authorities had a role in the delivery of that service. The findings reveal that there is a gap between logo awareness and awareness about Local Authorities' involvement in the 7 services presented.

Logo awareness is not necessarily translating into awareness about the role local authorities play in the delivery and support of services

Figure 3 2025 respondent awareness of logos and local authority involvement

Logo	Aware of Logo	Aware LA Delivers/Helps Deliver Service
SuperValu TidyTowns	90%	64%
Dublin Fire Brigade	76%	50%
Local Enterprise Office	75%	52%
Voter.ie	66%	47%
Age Friendly Ireland	56%	26%
Healthy Ireland	55%	20%
CARO	35%	10%

■ Aware of Logo   ■ Aware LA Delivers/Helps Deliver Service

* Dublin Fire Brigade only shown to respondents in the Dublin region.

Focus Group Findings:
Methodology

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the role of branding in low awareness levels of local government services
- Identify possible solutions to the issues raised

KEY FACTS

8 Online Focus Groups

4 FG General Public (n=37)
3 FG Local Authority Staff (n=28)
1 FG Elected Members (n=6)

71 Participants

- Led by an independent consultant in March & April 2025
- 22 local authority areas represented
- Mix of age and gender cohorts attended

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS

General Public

1. Assess general levels of awareness about local government services
2. Explore reasons for low awareness of 6 key services:
   - Tourism and Events
   - Business Support Services
   - Fire Services
   - Homeless Services
   - Traveller Accommodation
   - Motor Taxation

Local Authority Staff & Elected Members

1. Exploration of awareness and branding challenges
2. Identification of possible solutions under the following headings:
   - Branding of local authority services
   - Messaging - local authority communications
   - Resource implications of possible solutions
   - Terminology used to describe local authorities and
   - Local government proactive vs reactive communications

Focus Group Findings:
General Public

The focus groups with members of the public began with a poll of participants that revealed that there was higher awareness than average for some services, and lower awareness for other services when compared to the national survey. However, awareness about targeted services was low enough to give insights into what impact branding had on their awareness levels.

Table 1 Focus Group participant awareness of local authority services

Aware the local authority were responsible for these services	Focus Group Awareness n=37	Survey Awareness n=2,014
1. Local Outdoor Parks/Playgrounds	97%	78%
2. Library Services	95%	82%
3. Street Lighting	89%	86%
4. Footpaths	86%	88%
5. Planning Permissions	86%	73%
6. Supporting Communities (e.g., Tidy Towns, Grants, etc.)	84%	76%
7. Social (Council) Housing	82%	81%
8. Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	82%	72%
9. Roads	81%	80%
10. Litter Control	78%	80%
11. Street Cleaning	76%	86%
12. Register of Electors	75%	60%
13. Tourism and Events	**51%**	**56%**
14. Business Support Services (e.g. LEO)	**51%**	**43%**
15. Dog Warden Service	46%	67%
16. Cemeteries	46%	62%
17. Fire Services	**46%**	**56%**
18. Homeless Accommodation	**35%**	**56%**
19. Traveller Accommodation	**35%**	**56%**
20. Motor Tax Collection	**32%**	**54%**

No. 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20: Services explored during the focus groups

Many people were surprised to learn that their local authority provided all 20 services on the poll list.

Focus Group Findings:
General Public

Awareness of Local Authority Provision of Services

Qu: Who delivers this service?

Qu: How do you know about this service?

	Reasons for Low Awareness	Reasons for High Awareness
Tourism & Events	• Participants associated the service mainly with Failte Ireland or local groups. • Agreement that more promotion was needed of local authority.	• Awareness varied by local authority area. • Fingal County Council described as "prolific and brilliant".
Business Support Services	• Many participants assumed Enterprise Ireland were responsible for these services. • Some with direct experience with the Local Enterprise Offices were not aware of link to local authority.	• For those who were aware, some previously worked in a local authority and others were aware through family and friends or school enterprise programmes - nobody aware through seeing or hearing advertisements.
Fire Services	• Some participants assumed it was a service provided by the HSE, a national service similar to the ambulance service. • Other participants never thought about who provided the service.	• High visibility of the local authority logo on fire stations increased awareness (example given in Cork City). • Participants recalled hearing local authority adverts on the radio around Halloween.
Homeless Services & Traveller Accommodation	• Participants associated these services with voluntary groups and/or national government. • Some felt that local authorities didn't want people to know they were responsible.	• Some had work related knowledge of homeless or traveller services, and others were aware of local authority involvement as family or friends accessed the services.
Motor Tax	• Participants associated the service with the Department of Transport. • No visible local authority logo on correspondence.	• Participants who paid in person at a local authority office had high awareness. • High visibility of the local authority. • Motor Tax office in local area also increased awareness (example Blessington).

Focus Group Findings:
General Public

Qu: How can local authorities improve?

Visibility

Visibility was seen as key to enhancing awareness about local authority services provided to the public. Participants felt that their **council logo needed to be more prominent** across all services.

People said particular attention was needed in cases where organisations were working in partnership with the local authority or financed or supported by them to make sure the local authority was recognised.

'There is a real lack of advertising; more branding is needed. Even just putting their logo out there on things.'

Communications

Participants felt that more effective communication was needed, with **better messaging and an emphasis on good news stories**. They also proposed clarifying and amplifying information about the range of services provided underpinned by consistent and clear communications.

'It's a basic communication thing; people just aren't aware of all [the council] do. So, they need better ways to get the message out there.'

Examples of 'Good' Branding

Participants were asked if they could think of any examples of local authority branding that works well. Responses are varied, with the **library, parks and outdoor events** most commonly cited:

"The ... thing that really stands out to me is the library, because [the logo] is literally plastered [on the building]... And it's on the library card. It shows the logo of the library, and the council."

"They're good with their signage at parks, and woods and all those public spaces ... greenways or walkways, outside kind of spaces."

"I see pop up things when they've got stuff on in the parks. They're doing that really well."

"Events like the St. Patrick's Day Parade further strengthen community engagement and highlight the Local Authority's role in supporting businesses and cultural initiatives."

Focus Group Findings:
Staff & Elected Members

Branding Challenges Experienced by Local Authorities

Local authority communication staff, Directors of Service with responsibility for corporate affairs as well as elected members were not surprised by the feedback from the focus groups with the public. The participants discussed the issues and challenges experienced in relation to branding and communications generally before going on to identify possible solutions.

Branding Guidelines	There was general agreement on the importance of branding guidelines but there were challenges in ensuring adherence if there was a small communications teams and a lot of new staff because of staff turnover.
Multiple Brands & Logos	Concerns were raised about the use of multiple brands/logos, particularly where they seemed to dilute the overall council brand. Some expressed concern that it was often difficult to discern who/ what was being promoted – the council and/or the county.
Third Party & Shared Services	Local authorities found it challenging to manage branding and communications protocols across multiple third-party engagements as they were often numerous and varied. When formal arrangements were in place (e.g., service level agreements) monitoring was often resource intensive.
Social Media Accounts	Staff members highlighted the ongoing challenges of creating social media content and managing numerous accounts. All noted that there were resourcing issues at play that sometimes limited their ability to implement oversight effectively.
Elected Member Communications	It was agreed by elected members that there was a need to increase awareness about the positive work done by local authorities regarding funding and partnering activities, and the full range of services that were being delivered. Elected members were keen to receive comprehensive communications about the full range of supports and services, which could help them explain to the public where their Local Property Tax (LPT) payments were going locally.
Public Confusion – New Service Areas	There was a sense that the public were confused about the role of the local authority in the delivery of new services such as tourism and economic development, compared to previous services like water and bin collections.

Focus Group Findings:
Staff & Elected Members

Strategic Communications

Adopting a proactive, strategic communications approach was identified as the pathway towards successfully managing the full range of communication challenges faced by local authorities. A poll reveals that some local authorities had made progress towards that approach - 66% of communications staff and 53% of Directors of Service rated their work as strategic.

Barriers to taking a strategic approach to communications

Communications not always a key priority: In some cases, the communications function was not as high profile across the organisation as participants would have liked it to be. There was a sense that this was contributing to small or under resourced teams with limited capacity to be strategic.

Communications staff not at management grade: Where communications staff were in junior grades, they described relying on their capacity to "influence" rather than having the authority to adopt a strategic communications approach or to promote or champion effective branding policies.
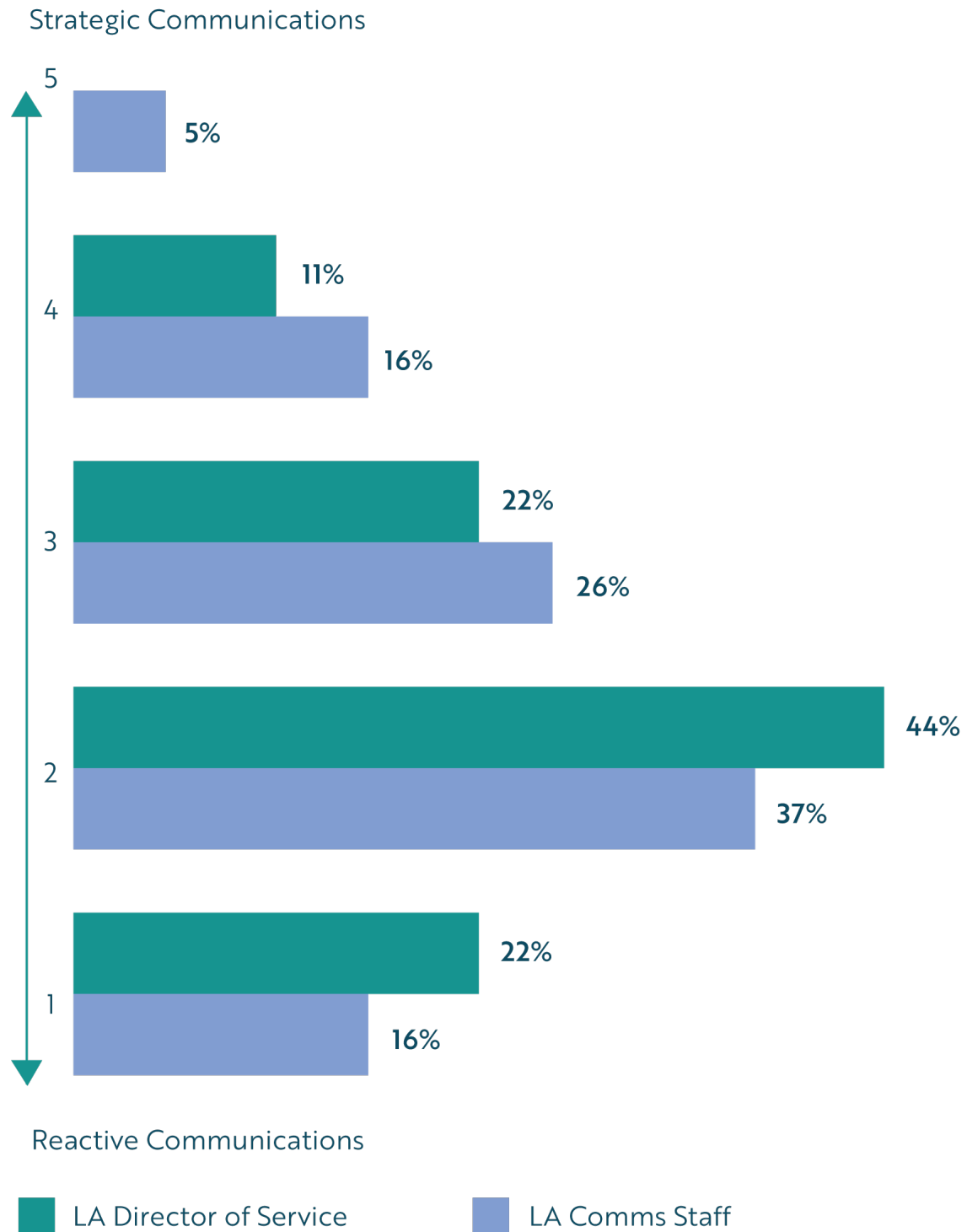
Need for specialist communication skillsets: Many staff had come from general administrative backgrounds but highlighted the need for specialist skillsets and training in the communications field. Participants felt there was an increasing need for a strong professional approach to manage increasing misinformation and disinformation and the call for more positive stories from the public.

Role of elected officials in endorsing brands and increasing service awareness not being fully utilised: Elected members and staff all agreed that councillors had a key role to play in promoting the work being done in local areas and the services being offered. They were described as the eyes and ears of the local authority on the ground.

Figure 4 Staff rating of the local authority communications approach

Local authority staff ranked their communications approach on a scale between 1. reactive (responding to request) and 5. strategic (planning and targeting messages).

Strategic Communications

5 — LA Comms Staff: 5%

4 — LA Director of Service: 11%
4 — LA Comms Staff: 16%

3 — LA Director of Service: 22%
3 — LA Comms Staff: 26%

2 — LA Director of Service: 44%
2 — LA Comms Staff: 37%

1 — LA Director of Service: 22%
1 — LA Comms Staff: 16%

Reactive Communications

■ LA Director of Service   ■ LA Comms Staff

Local Authority staff were more likely to be engaged with reactive rather than strategic communications.

Focus Group Findings:
All Participants

Qu: What are the solutions?

Possible Solutions to Branding Challenges

The findings from the public, staff and elected members focus groups were combined to identify a range of possible solutions to the issues raised. The findings emerged under eight headings:

1. **Strategic Importance of Communications Function**

   Leadership from the top, especially the Chief Executive and the senior management team, was seen as critical if adequate resources were to be allocated to ensure a strategic rather than reactive approach to communications was taken locally. However, the importance of the communications also needed to be understood at all levels of the organisation and was everybody's business.

2. **Targeted Recruitment or Training to Build Appropriate Skillsets**

   Formal recognition of the benefits of having staff with the necessary skillsets within a communications team was of interest to all. A framework outlining basic entry level skills, with a pathway to gaining more professional qualifications was desirable to participants.

- Strategic communications expertise
- Media relations skills
- Good writing skills
- Digital and social media expertise
- Ability to create engaging content
- Political awareness
- Good interpersonal skills

3. Branding Guidelines for all

Ensuring that branding guidelines were passed on to every new member of staff, or staff in new roles, was considered a practical and implementable solution. Consideration could be given to the inclusion of branding guidelines in induction training and information packs. They also need to be easy to share with partners, contractors and those receiving supports or funding.

- Plain English
- All assets in a single sharable file
- Brand Champions/Guardians
- Part of staff induction

4. Building upon Current Centralised Supports

Maximising the use of central structures, like the LGMA Communications Unit, the LGMA Communications Working Group, and the Communications Network to enhance the impact of local resources was highlighted so that learnings could be shared, joint resources developed and guidance issued.

5. Active Management of Engagements with Third Parties/Partners

Most participants (staff and elected officials) felt local authorities needed to be more proactive in ensuring their branding was being included in all cases where they were funding, supporting or partnering in activities (i.e., providing premises, funding, or staff). They need to actively use SLAs to ensure there was an obligation on funded parties to display local authority branding/logos prominently. Elected members should be actively supported to help promote the work of local authorities and monitor implementation of branding requirements.

6. Proactive Communication with the Public

Consistently, survey results and previous focus group reports indicated that the public wanted more information from local authorities about what they do and what is going on in the local area. Communication staff and the Directors of Service all shared their desire to use strategic communications to share positive messages about the work of local authorities. This was seen as critical to addressing growing mis-information and dis-information.

7. Active Review of Logos and Branding

It was also proposed that locally a review could be done of the existing logos and social media accounts to determine whether they were supporting or detracting from the local authority brand. There were examples provided of strong governance in place to manage the development of new logos/websites/social media accounts to ensure they align to the overall branding strategy of the local authority, and examples of brand architecture being used to align existing logos to the corporate logo.

> *"We've linked the creation of new social media channels or websites to [Senior Management] … they must get approval from that person. They need to build a business case"*

> *"Brand architecture … brings in… separate projects, logos under the Council Brand … they still have a way of differentiating themselves, but not at the cost of the County Council"*

8. Awareness Campaigns

Participants felt on-going promotion of the work of the local authorities needed to continue centrally, building upon the localgov.ie project to supplement local activities.

Focus Group Findings:
All Participants

Consistent Terminology

In addition to the specific solutions proposed, a need for clarity and consistency in the use of terminology was also noted as being important. In most engagements, staff, elected officials and members of the public use the term "the council" but formal communications use the term "local authority", with few referring to their local council in the context of "local government".

Council vs. Local Authority

The Public

Generally, people were aware of the different terms but tended to use "council" when referencing the local authorities or thinking of local government. However, young people felt that the term "local authority" applied to some national body, and didn't associate it, or the term "local government" with their local council.

The Staff

The Directors of Service and staff used the term "council" when referring to external communications but sometimes used "local authority" when communicating internally.

Elected Officials

Elected officials tended to use "council" when engaging with the public.

The Role of Local Authority Websites

Websites were seen as key in making information available about all the services available. People wanted simple and easy to navigate lists of services. While a simple to use service catalogue was available on localgov.ie, most public participants were not aware of it.

Some participants mentioned that some of the local authority websites had a "corporate tone" and lacked up to date information about the council's activities. **Simple, accessible and easy to find, up-to-date information is what the public want**.

Conclusion

The annual customer service research is important for the local government sector as it is an opportunity to listen to what the public are saying they want from local authorities. This year people were telling the sector that they did not know about all the services being delivered (either directly, indirectly OR via partnerships, contracts, or shared services) or the support being provided to local groups and communities. The clear consensus was that the public want to know about the work being done locally and the services that are available. They also want to hear about the good stories happening in their area and the people involved.

The research finds that 'communications' has become a critical business function within local authorities, particularly as the demands for information increase and while mis-information and dis-information proliferate. However, to be most effective, recognition needs to be given to the specialist nature of communications work and professional expertise needed.

While the research started by looking at branding, it became clear quickly that branding was just one element of the communications mix that, when done well, gives local authorities an opportunity to enhance awareness of the role they play in local communities. As part of a wider communications strategy, it can help show people what the local authority does and help build positive associations. This in turn helps to counterbalance some of the negative stories that can dominate in the absence of the local authority effectively telling its own good news stories.

Locally, staff are looking for strong leadership from their Chief Executives and elected members are keen to partner with officials to help spread the word about the reach and impact of the work being done by the sector.

However, research is only beneficial if it results in action. The CCMA Corporate and Emergency Planning Committee which has overseen this research and has engaged with the sector's Local Government CCMA Communications Working Group to develop guidance for the sector. In addition, the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) will be involved in monitoring and assessing how the guidance will be implemented locally. This should result in an increased focus on a shift towards strategic communications that gives people the information they want, when they want it.

Key Messages

...the public want to know about the work being done locally and the services that are available. They want to hear about the good stories happening in their area and the people involved...

...communications has become a critical business function in local authorities...

...staff are looking for strong leadership from their Chief Executives and elected members are keen to partner with officials to help spread the word...

*...the **CCMA Corporate and Emergency Planning Committee** in conjunction with the **Local Government Communications Working Group will issue guidance to** the sector...*

...NOAC will be involved in monitoring and assessing how guidance will be implemented locally...

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