Mail Metrics

Digital by Default:

The smart path forward

A Mail Metrics Report

Government Commercial Agency
Supplier

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Digital-first – the smart path forward

The challenge of delivering effective citizen communications with limited resources is becoming ever more acute for local authorities. Rising costs (not least postal spend) combine with increasing citizen expectations relating to convenience and channel flexibility to place huge pressure on legacy operations. Councils are expected to communicate more effectively with citizens, while demonstrating transparency, efficiency and responsible use of public funds.

For many organisations, this makes the shift from traditional postal communications to a more digital-first approach a strategic priority. Moving away from paper-based processes can significantly reduce costs, increase operational agility and provide far greater visibility over communications activity. Digital channels also make it easier to track engagement, forecast future volumes and manage budgets with greater confidence – essential in the current climate.

Continually rising postal costs add real urgency to this shift. While print and post remain essential for certain communications and audiences – certainly in terms of inclusivity and reaching vulnerable citizens – relying on them as the default channel is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain financially. A more balanced, digital-led approach enables councils to manage these rising costs while ensuring that print continues to be used where it is most effective and necessary.

This guide has been designed as a practical overview of the key considerations in modern citizen communications management. While postal communication still plays an important role, the legacy model built around onsite print and manual handling of mail is increasingly difficult to justify. It ties up colleague time, relies on expensive space and equipment, and often lacks the data and flexibility organisations now need.

By embracing digital channels – supported by modern communications platforms and trusted partners – councils can reduce reliance on traditional post while retaining it where it remains essential. The result is a more agile, intelligent and future-ready communications operation – one that lowers costs, improves visibility and ensures the right message reaches the right citizen through the right channel.

As councils continue to evolve their communications strategies, the opportunity lies not simply in *replacing* one process with another, but in *transforming* processes to build a more efficient, measurable and sustainable approach to citizen communication.

The hidden cost of onsite print production

Inefficient onsite processes result in wasted council money for every letter sent. Over the course of a year, assuming volumes of 100,000 mailed items per annum, that equates to hundreds of thousands of pounds 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."

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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	**43p**
IT support – installation, testing, training, network connections	**11p**
Administration and purchasing – selection, storage, restocking, management	**14p**
Document production – end user time	**48p**
Document management – creation, filing, storing, binding, retrieving	**45p**
2nd Class Mail	**88p**
Total burdened cost	**£2.49**

** 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.

Reducing costs to 0.86p 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 0.86p on average, an estimated saving of £1.63 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

What is hybrid mail?

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.

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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.

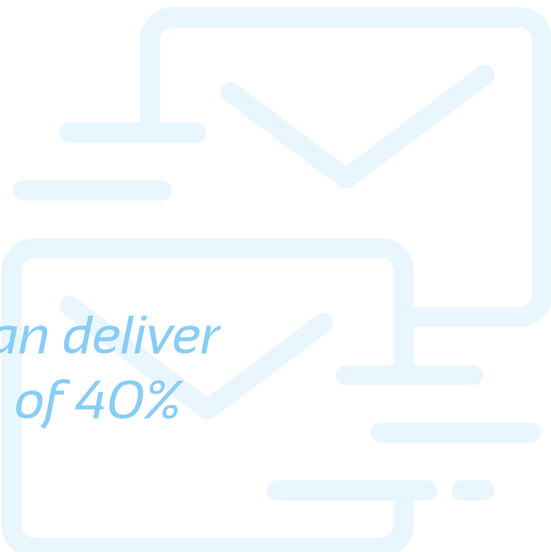
A solution for now

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.

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



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.

Business postage rates in the UK and Ireland have seen significant and consistent, double-digit price increases over the last few years, driven by rising operational costs, declining letter volumes, and the strain of the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

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.

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

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

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.

Finding the balance

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

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.

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?

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."

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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

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."

The Mail Metrics Platform – Unified Control

For many public sector organisations, 'digital transformation' in communications can feel like an abstract goal rather than a clear starting point. Teams are often working across a patchwork of legacy systems, print suppliers, and digital tools that don't fully connect. A digital transformation solution, in this context, isn't just another channel – it's a single environment that brings the entire communications landscape together, making it easier to design, deliver, and evolve services over time. This is where the Mail Metrics platform sits.

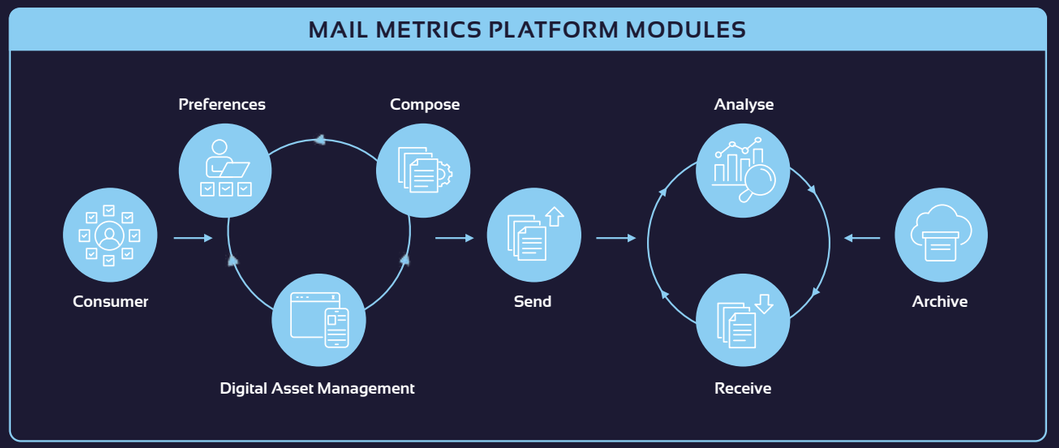
Joined-up visibility

At its core, the Mail Metrics platform brings together the creation, management, and delivery of essential communications into a single, unified environment. Rather than treating print and digital as separate streams, it allows teams to work across email, SMS, customer portals, and traditional print and post in one place. For public sector teams, this joined-up view is particularly valuable – it mirrors the reality of citizen interactions, which rarely happen through just one channel.

A key advantage is visibility. Communications teams can see what's being sent, when, and through which channel in real time. This makes it easier to manage high-volume, time-sensitive outputs – such as statutory notices or seasonal surges in correspondence – while maintaining oversight and accountability. It also supports compliance, which is critical in regulated environments where audit trails and approval processes matter. Alongside outbound messaging, the platform can also receive and archive incoming communications, helping teams capture responses and build a more complete, auditable picture of each citizen interaction over time.

Modular progress

The platform's modular design is another strength. Organisations don't need to overhaul everything at once. Instead, they can start with specific components – perhaps digitising specific outbound notifications or improving inbound response handling – and expand over time. This incremental approach is often more practical in the public sector, where budgets, legacy systems, and procurement cycles can shape the pace of change.



Transformation at your pace

Where Mail Metrics becomes particularly useful is in enabling the transition from print to digital. Rather than forcing a sudden switch, it supports a blended strategy. This is also where meaningful cost efficiencies begin to emerge. Print and post remain essential for certain audiences, but they carry significant production and delivery costs. By gradually shifting suitable communications to digital channels, organisations can reduce spend while also improving speed and responsiveness. Over time, this helps balance budgets without compromising accessibility or service quality.

In this way, the platform doesn't just manage communications – it helps reshape and optimise them. It provides a practical bridge between traditional print processes and a more responsive, cost-efficient, digital by default future, aligned with the evolving expectations placed on public services.

Mail Metrics

Climate emergency, net zero and the role of communications management

Over 300 principal authorities across the UK having now declared a climate emergency. The vast majority of these first and second-tier councils have established ambitious targets to make their own operations and estates carbon neutral or net zero 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.

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.

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.

Migrating printed communications to digital channels is an obvious play here, enabling councils to gradually reduce and eliminate this power-hungry legacy set-up.

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

* Source: https://www.local.gov.uk/delivering-local-net-zero

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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 subcontracted 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.

Digital transformation is a critical element of any discussions around communication management efficiency and greener operational outcomes.

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 oversimplification, 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 prevetted 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 Government Commercial Agency (GCA) has framework RM6280 titled 'Postal Services & Solutions'.

Within this framework are 8 different lots, each covering a different service, So, for example, Lot 2 covers 'Collection And Delivery Of Letters, Large Letters, And Parcels UK', 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:

Government Commercial Agency (GCA)

In particular:
Framework RM6280 'Postal Services & 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

Government Commercial Agency (GCA)

In particular:
Framework RM1557.15
G-Cloud 15

Lot 2b:
Software as a Service (SaaS).

Government Commercial Agency (GCA)

In particular:
Framework RM6297

Lot 2: Print and Digital Communications

NEPO

In particular:
NEPO504 Election and Electoral Registration Print

Election & Electoral Registration Print offers North East member authorities an effective route to market for the provision of their election and electoral registration printing requirements.

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.

"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.

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Supplier excellence: What to look for

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

Security Management

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

Quality Management

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

Environment Management

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

Health & Safety

- ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Management Systems

Business Continuity

- ISO 22301 – Business Continuity Management

Electoral Services

- Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) membership

Revenues and Benefits

- Institute of Revenue and Ratings Valuation (IRRV) involvement

The offsite advantage

This is a critical time for strategic communications management planning. The legacy model of onsite, manual handling of print and post has never looked more unwieldy and out-of-date. Constant postal increases leave councils unable to confidently plot the future, with budgeting at the mercy of these price-rises, despite best intentions around postal optimisation.

Certainly, huge strides are being made in reversing this model, aligned with 'Digital by Default' commentary and directives. But any process change can be daunting, particularly as technology moves on apace and citizen expectations rise in line with the service they receive from nimble digital-first brands in the private sector.

The good news is that transformation to a more agile, cost-efficient and future-proof operation can take place without disruption and at a pace that suits.

Our own Mail Metrics platform is helping councils to make this move with confidence. Physical and digital communications are managed within one platform, bringing transparency, control, and the insight required to drive efficiencies and forward plan.

This guide is intended as a handy one-stop-shop of essential information relating to communications management. We hope it provides some useful insight as you consider the next stage of your communication management evolution.

Find out more...

Talk with our friendly team to learn more about the options that are available to you and discover what your implementation process could look like.

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