

Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

16 September 2010

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**Communications Service – Value for Money Review - Update
Report**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Bird, Leader of the Council
 Councillor Towe, Finance & Personnel

Executive Summary:

To update Corporate Scrutiny & Performance Panel on progress made by the communications unit, following the original value for money review in April 2009.

Reason for scrutiny:

On 9 April 2009, the Corporate Scrutiny & Performance Panel received a value for money review on the Communications Service.

It resolved:

1. That, in the view of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel, the Communications Unit provides good value for money.
2. That focus is given to the quality rather than quantity of press releases; and
3. That further work is progressed to explore opportunities for the use of social media in public engagement.

The Panel agreed to include update reports on previous value for money reviews in its programme for the year.

Recommendation:

Corporate Scrutiny & Performance Panel is asked to consider the progress made by the Communications Service over the last year.

Rory Borealis – Executive Director (Resources)

8 September 2010

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1. Highlights from the past 12 months

1.1 Strategic Improvements, Income & Savings

- A consolidation of the council's marketing, communications and consultation resource has been delivered, going live on 1 April 2010. This will provide more joined-up marketing and communications activity which will deliver greater efficiency and the opportunity for further savings
- The unit has delivered savings of **£180k** of savings against corporate marketing and communications activity in 2009/10 and 2010/11 with further opportunities for efficiencies currently being assessed
- In 2009/10 the unit over-achieved on its income target and brought in **£70k** of external funding

1.2 New Developments and Activity

Social Media

- Walsall's Twitter feed has attracted **1,850** followers, making Walsall one of the **top 12** most followed local authorities with over **4,500** 'tweets' sent out since the feed was launched. A number of positive case studies exist that underline the value of this new media channel
- Launched Walsall's Facebook fan page in 2010 which is the largest in the Black Country with more than 260 people who 'like' it. Since rolled this approach out to other service areas, with support, at **£zero** cost
- Strong links built with borough Flickr group facilitating photographic events and using images with permission on the council website. New council website header image every three weeks generates links and pride with residents and uses at **£zero** cost photography worth more than **£3,000** pa. Scheme highlighted as best practice by blogs around US government as well as by UK bloggers and Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly IDeA)
- Twitter used to keep residents informed when gritters are despatched in icy conditions helping to reduce avoidable contact with officers and calls centres at **£zero** additional cost. Highlighted by Local Government Improvement and Development as well as Microsoft and SOCITM
- Organised a Walsall Museum Flickr event to allow local amateur photographers access to stores at **£zero** cost highlighted by Local Government Improvement and Development
- More than 900 page impressions for the inaugural election results published on Facebook at **£zero** cost

- Rebuttal and challenge. Twitter and Facebook used to swiftly challenge inaccurate reporting, such as the Darlaston baths screen story at **£zero** cost

Open Data

- In August 2010, Walsall was one of the first local authorities in the country (and the first Met) to publish details of its spend over £500, as per new Government requirements, and well ahead of the January 2011 deadline
- Walsall has gained national profile for delivering this and the dedicated web pages created to provide this information received over **45,000** hits in the first three days of publication
- An internal group has been established to continue to deliver work in this area and to consider the opportunities for publishing data sets from other areas of the council's spend and activity
- Walsall will host a national social media/open data event, aimed local government, web developers and bloggers, which will provide an excellent showcase for the council's work in this area and to cherry pick best practice from local government and private sector. The event will be funded entirely by external sponsorship

1.3 Media Management & Monitoring

Although just one element of the work of press office staff, demand for media management activity grows significantly year on year

- Media enquiries in 2009 – 1,820 (up **14%** on 2007)

- Press releases in 2009 – 1,220 (up **24%** on 2007)

- At the same time, actual staffing, full time equivalents (FTE's) has reduced – From **5.75 FTE** press officers, to **4.6 FTE** press officers

- Media coverage – there were a minimum of **5,719** items of press and broadcast coverage in 2009. This monitoring and evaluation is delivered in house – we not have the resources to evaluate this more fully and to include website and blog coverage.

- Tone of coverage – the majority of media coverage that the council receives is positive. The breakdown for 2009 was as follows:

- **57% positive**
- **29% neutral**
- **14% negative**

These figures are encouraging, given some of the issues the council has been faced with in this period, including Sneyd school, Darlaston baths, parking fines,

changes to waste collections, reductions in services, increases in council tax to name but a few.

This is broadly in line with the equivalent figures for 2008.

1.4 Key Campaigns

- Dozens of marketing and communications plans developed and delivered to support key council services, events and improvement projects
- Campaigns, such as 'Cracking Environmental Crime' have delivered measurable benefits and outcomes, including:
 - Flytipping reports stood at 603 to council and 28 to Walsall Housing Group (Total of 631) for the period April – June 2009 before the campaign commenced
 - This increased by **24%** as a result of the campaign leading to a total of 835 reports for the subsequent three months
 - The campaign also led to improved partnership working with whg to tackle environmental issues such as flytipping, graffiti, flyposting and littering
 - Officers now using statistical evidence now available to more effectively identify problem areas and times of year
- Effective campaign to support the change of waste collection arrangements for residents delivered positive outcomes, including far less negative media coverage than was feared

1.5 Internal Communications

- **750** staff completed an internal communications survey completed giving a far better understanding of what staff like and think about our communications messages and channels
- Re-designed **Weekly Bulletin** in response to survey feedback and staff suggestion scheme entry – it is easier to access and navigate and has an enhanced look and feel. Readership has gone up since the changes were implemented
- Recommended and organised more face-to-face briefing sessions (preferred communication method from survey results) to **Pay and Grading** Programme Board – this has led to **18 sessions** being booked between August – 2 December 2010
- Improving **Working Smarter** communications – staff awareness survey to go out from September; monthly face to face briefings from Chief Executive to Leadership team from; launch of dedicated intranet pages 9; improved Working Smarter placemat with explanation page to be sent out as all staff email from Chief Executive in order to ensure greater understanding of the programme, its scope and the intended outcomes

1.6 Consultation & Engagement Activity

Electronic Surveys

- Used Snap survey software to create **23** bespoke online and paper surveys, seven of which were for internal staff
- Production and design of agency standard questionnaires including statistical analysis. Advised on running focus groups, workshops, interviews and innovative / creative consultation approaches attracting minimum or no costs to the council
- Provided a range of consultation services with advice and guidance to support them in their consultation activities
- **3,477** individual responses have been submitted via a Snap online survey. 1,115 responses from the public and 2,362 from staff
- Survey costs delivered at just **20p** a response

Citizens' Panel Survey

- 1,191 panel members surveyed in November 2009
- **54%** response rate, **646** people responded
- Currently evaluating the use of the Citizens' Panel in particular to make it more responsive and look at opportunities to collaborate with partners and for efficiencies in using other, lower cost channels (e.g. telephone interviews)

Plasma Screens

- Delivered 86 unique campaign messages on the network of plasma screens across the borough at **£zero** cost
- Potential opportunities to see of **322,927** visitors to the First Stop Shop in the last 12 months alone

External Funding

- Secured in excess of £60k funding to support public consultation activities including raising NI4 *'Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions'*
- Part of funding used to upgrade Snap survey capability, upgrade to the councils SMS text messaging service, 15 PDA handheld devices for collecting customer feedback electronically, training in facilitating focus group discussions, e-Petitions capability and 'Photosymbols' image library for the production of easy read documents

Walsall Partnership

- Provided consultation arrangements for Neighbourhood Management. Working to develop mechanisms and structures so that partners can collaborate, share resources and maximise the use of consultation information and other intelligence

Neighbourhood Management – Darlaston Project

- Played key ‘scouting’ role in this project, gathering and presenting data for Walsall Partnership and organising a guided tour of Darlaston. Involved in developing the 4 level fix approach to neighbourhood management

Working Smarter St Matthews Pilot

- Contributed to design of a prototype assessment process for adult social care so that it is more responsive, flexible and appropriate to customer needs. The project identified £1.8m of savings in Adult Social Care

1.7 Building Schools for the Future

- Managed communication and consultation plan for Building Schools for the Future (all stakeholders and core team) – recording outcomes and contributing content to support achievement of our Building Schools for the Future Strategy for Change 1 and 2
- Managed various consultation events and produced detailed reports for Building Schools for the Future schools with community and young people – outcomes being used by Schools to support their ongoing education transformation and any future capital improvement projects (information provided can be used for non BSF improvements)
- Developed and delivered the ‘Transforming Learning in Walsall’ microsite
- Developed activity plans to support the core Building Schools for the Future teams - to help the teams run more efficiently and to schedule

1.8 Website

- New web improvement project launched which is reviewing the potential switch to a new, open source (freely available) content management system to improve the accessibility and capabilities of the council website
- Over half a dozen microsites have been developed and launched by the web team and these have delivered income back into the unit

1.9 Supporting Social Care & Inclusion

Information and Advice Strategy for adult social care

- Delivered comprehensive strategy and action plan for how social care will develop a borough wide information and advice service providing information to all residents (not just those receiving social care) about all aspects of support, information, advice (e.g., how to access leisure services, where to buy a walking stick, where to join a book club) with the aim of maintaining residents' health, independence and well-being for longer and therefore less likely to need social care services now or in the future – this service will include a signposting website, and may also include face to face 'information shops'

Personalisation easy read leaflet

- Designed an easy read public information leaflet about personalisation of adult's social care in conjunction with local people with learning disabilities (the 'Making Our Choice' group) This was one of the first easy read leaflets produced by the council's print and design unit

Re-organisation of social care and health web pages

- In response to feedback from users of the social care and health web pages, a project to review the web pages was undertaken
- New pages were created that focus less on teams and service areas and more on the different aspects of a person's life (e.g., getting out and about, keeping safe, help at home)
- The web pages, and all of our other public information, now make it clear that social care can offer information and advice to everyone, not just those people who are receiving social care services and/or social care funding

1.10 Marketing

- Co-ordinated and managed marketing communications activity for the launch of the Adult & Community College – including print, PR and an exhibition
- Developing a poster template system, which offers the opportunity for producing bespoke posters very cost-effectively. This system has been pioneered in Marketing with spin-off benefits to all services
- Delivered geo-demographic profiling of all Walsall neighbourhoods, for use by the new neighbourhood area managers to assist in the planning process
- Co-ordinated and managed the 'What's on Walsall' website(site visits are up 30% on last year, seeing 90,000 page views in the six months since February 2010)
- Managed and delivered the production and distribution of the quarterly 'What's on Walsall' leaflet, with 20,000 copies distributed to

dedicated/targeted visitor information sites across the region

- Delivered campaign for the re-launch of the new Health & Fitness programmes of Sport & Leisure. Targeted media activity utilising demographic segmentation has led to significantly increased participation on the classes
- Other campaigns have included Walsall parks fun days, Forest Arts Centre promotion and marketing activity around libraries, museums and history centres

2. Resource and legal considerations:

It is clear that the demand for marketing, communications and consultation activity continues to grow. During periods of great change this activity is even more important. The unit has made significant savings and reduced its FTE's but managed to deliver more activity than in previous years.

There are no legal considerations associated with this report.

3. Citizen impact:

Residents are able to more readily access information about council services, events and other data as a part of the enhanced number of channels being utilised and through developments under the open data project.

4. Environmental impact:

N/A

5. Performance management:

There has been a demonstrable improvement in performance, as highlighted in section 1.0.

11. Equality Implications:


N/A.

12. Consultation:

The marketing, communication and consultation team have contributed to this report

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