

**RESPONSE TO RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S MEMBER LED REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATIONS ARRANGEMENTS**

*To:* **Cabinet**

*Date:* **17<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

*From:* **Corporate Director, Customer Service and Transformation**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **N/a** *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To respond to the report from the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member led review of the Council's Communications Arrangements**

*Recommendation:*

- a) To thank the Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its report.**
- b) To consider and agree the responses to the recommendations.**

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee have undertaken a thorough review of the current arrangements the Council uses in relation to communications. The Member led review is a welcomed development given the background to this area of work and comes 18 months after the instigation of a review of Communications at the County Council. It is therefore as a very helpful piece of work to take the Council forward. There is also recognition that there is a need to move swiftly to implement the required changes.
- 1.2 Cabinet recognises the importance of good communications in all its forms, especially in the light of the Government's Localism Act. Good and well targeted communications and community engagement means that communities can have better access to services and understand what is available to them as well as help shape council services.

## **2. RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS (THE ORIGINAL RECOMMENDATION BEING IN BOLD)**

- 2.1 **There should be much greater corporate management of the Council's communications functions. A degree of centralisation should be introduced to rectify this. 'Dotted line' management arrangements, for example, could be established between the central communications function and key service communicators to ensure that there is central oversight and involvement in key communications activities.**

### **Fully Accepted**

It is accepted that there has to be a 'hub and spoke' model to the implementation of the management of the Council's communications functions. There are already a number of examples where this model has been proved to work successfully. There is acceptance that the link between Service communications staff and the central communications team must be stronger, which would prevent duplication of effort and introduce a more co-ordinated approach to communications. Cabinet are therefore of the view that the "dotted line" arrangements suggested above are the right model to adopt, with the central Communications team having professional oversight, but that the "policy need" should be service led. This may at times require sensitive negotiation but an enhanced communications function will require this balance.

- 2.2.a **The following functions should be brought together into a single service, in order to strengthen the Council's corporate communication arrangements:**

- **Corporate Communications**
- **Website Management**
- **Community Engagement**

- **Corporate consultation activities**

**Fully Accepted**

Whilst the Member led review did not consider the work of the Community Engagement Directorate, the proposal to bring together the functions above is fully accepted. This will have implications for those elements of the Community Engagement Directorate which may not fit easily within this new combined structure, eg responsibility for the Council's Community Safety Strategy, work in Fenland or strategic oversight of work with Gypsy and Travellers, but these can be resolved. Given the Member led review's desire for a swift implementation of these proposals, Cabinet will ask the Corporate Director to introduce recommendations with a view to implementing these changes by 1 April 2013.

Whilst appreciating the constraints imposed within the terms of reference of the Member Led Review, Cabinet reserve the right to include other areas of Council activity that might benefit from being part of a new Service or Directorate that includes Communications and Community Engagement.

- b) This service should develop strong relations with the Contact Centre, potentially leading to a merger in the future once impending IT changes at the Contact Centre have been fully implemented.**

**Partially Accepted**

It is accepted that there needs to be a strong relationship between the Communications team and the Contact Centre, but we do not agree that merger is the best answer from a customer perspective. The Contact Centre is much more than an information provider. Call Handlers are the first point of contact for specific service referrals and transactions which are not part of communications functions

- 2.3 The Central Corporate Communications team should spend more time based in services that they are linked to, in order to develop communications links with service based colleagues.**

**Fully Accepted**

The key to enhancing communications in the Council is in having a stronger relationship between the Service Directorates and the Corporate centre. It is therefore accepted that the central Communications team does need to spend more time in the Directorates, but that this should be reciprocal, and that Service Communications staff should spend more time at the Centre. Once the recommendations outlined in this response have been implemented a new set of arrangements, both formal and informal, will be required which will clarify the relationship between the corporate team and their Service colleagues.

- 2.4 Finalise changes associated with communications staffing as quickly as possible, within a definite timescale that is communicated to affected staff.**

**Fully Accepted**

As indicated in the response to 2.2 a above, the changes should be implemented by April 2013. It is worth noting that the scope of the change is

now more significantly given the impact on the 20 staff in the Community Engagement Directorate in addition to the Central Communications Team and the various communications officers based in the Service Directorates. Therefore whilst not involving huge numbers of staff the consultations required will be complicated and involve people from all areas of the Council. Whilst it is accepted that there is no perfect solution, nonetheless implementing a solution is imperative.

#### Secondary Recommendations

**2.5 Monitor the effectiveness of staff communications between the Council and Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) and associated costs.**

**Fully Accepted**

Specifically with regard to our relationship with CCS, there is already a Communications Partnership Group in existence, with membership from both CCS and the County Council. This Group has a role in delivering this recommendation. Equally, whilst accepting the tenor of the Member led review and the reasoning behind it, this recommendation needs to be seen within the broader context of the Council's relationship with the Public Health and the Health and Well Being Board

**2.6 The Council has discontinued its employee survey. Alternative methods such as focus groups and 'pulse surveys' are being used instead, or are being planned for use, in some service areas. Members welcome and support these developments but recommend that a review should be conducted to ensure that there are effective mechanisms for gathering and responding to employee views across the Council.**

**Fully Accepted**

This recommendation is fully accepted. However rather than review the existing mechanisms we would recommend the immediate implementation of more effective mechanisms for engaging with employees of the Council, and that this should be undertaken in conjunction with colleagues from LGSS.

**2.7 The Council should re-examine whether corporate schemes designed to promote staff health and wellbeing can be reintroduced within the resources available.**

**Fully Accepted**

This should be considered with 2.6 above and undertaken in conjunction with colleagues from Public Health and LGSS.

**2.8 The Council should seek to rejuvenate its corporate staff recognition scheme. One method of achieving this would be through involving Cabinet Members in the selection process and in presenting awards to winning staff working within services associated with their Portfolios.**

**Fully Accepted**

There are already in place Directorate based recognition schemes. It is agreed that greater Member involvement would be welcome and that greater publicity of staff achievements should be promoted. This will be considered with 2.6 above as part of a broader review of Internal Communications.

- 2.9 **It would be desirable to reintroduce 'Countywide' and to retain 'Daily Briefing', if possible within the resources available. However, these communication methods should be reviewed, in consultation with employees, to ensure that they remain relevant and useful.**

**Partially Accepted**

Daily Briefing remains a widely used tool to keep staff up to date on current issues. That is not to say that both its content and design could not be reviewed. With regard to Countywide, rather than simply reintroduce the magazine it would be wise to consult with staff as to the type of internal communications they would welcome both in terms of access and content. We would consider this with 2.6 and 2.8 above as part of a broader review of Internal Communications.

- 2.10 **SMT minutes, with redactions if necessary, should be published for internal circulation on a trial basis.**

**Fully Accepted**

- 2.11 **The Council should seek to advertise Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) in ways that are proportionate and offer value for money. This should include:**

- a) **Focussed, minimalistic advertising in newspapers, referring to the Council website where possible**
- b) **Sole advertising on the Council's website (as the default position), if and when regulations are relaxed to allow this**

**Fully Accepted**

We would look to implement through best practice and through use of new innovations e.g. Shape Your Place.

- 2.12 **An action plan should be produced to implement accepted recommendations, for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in approximately six months time.**

**Fully Accepted**

The Corporate Director for Customer service and Transformation in conjunction with the Deputy Leader of the County Council will be responsible for developing and implementing an Action Plan.

### **3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING**

#### **3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

Although good Community Engagement and Communications are vital to delivery there are no significant implications for this priority.

#### **3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

Although good Community Engagement and Communications are vital to delivery there are no significant implications for this priority.

### **3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

Although good Community Engagement and Communications are vital to delivery there are no significant implications for this priority.

### **3.4 Ways of working**

There are significant implications for this priority. The development of effective Communications Strategy will have significant implications for the Council as a whole given the high profile and priority given to communications. Therefore any changes will have significant implications for the Service Directorates. However there is an imperative to make changes swiftly and to implement a new enhanced approach to communications.

## **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Resource and Performance Implications**

Communications are a vital ingredient of the Council's work. Cabinet would therefore wish to continue to have oversight of this area of activity.

### **4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

Good communications are vital in helping to promote and help people access services as well helping shape them. They help residents play their part in the democratic process. Indeed, especially in crisis management, good communications are vital to help reduce risk for the public.. One of the strengths of the Communications Team has been their ability to manage difficult situations effectively. It is therefore vital in this communications review nothing is done to reduce their effectiveness.

### **4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

Although good Community Engagement and Communications are vital to delivery there are no significant implications for this priority.

### **4.4 Engagement and Consultation**

Clearly there are significant implications as a result of the proposals made by the Member led review. The Community Engagement Directorate has been included in the proposals without a review of their work having been undertaken. Whilst the principle of bringing Community Engagement with Communications together, it is accepted that further work will be necessary to ensure that there is no diminution of the corporate engagement work currently underway.

### **4.5 Health Implications**

There are no specific implications.

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Source Documents	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee minutes and reports (29<sup>th</sup> September 2010 and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010)  <a href="http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=42">http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=42</a></li> <li>Resources and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes and reports (12<sup>th</sup> December 2011)  <a href="http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=49">http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=49</a></li> <li>Other sources are referenced throughout the report</li> </ul>	<p>Rob Jakeman</p>