

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 16th July 2009
Subject: Manchester City Council Communications
Report of: Communications Blueprint Summary

Summary:

This report aims to summarise initial investigations undertaken around communication process and delivery at the City Council and highlight recommendations to improve communications going forward.

Recommendations:

- To note the following core objectives to achieve more effective communications.

“Manchester City Council communications should underpin the Council vision and strategies in one or multiple ways. Communication should be accountable and demonstrate our values, have a positive impact and/or generate costs savings, to reflect our vision for a world-class city.”

- Note the communications strategy will be developed in accordance to the following principals:

1. Campaigns not individual communications tactics – less is more
2. Every communication actively supports the values, vision, spines & strategies of the CC
3. Yearly planning and budgeting
4. Commitment to research, measurement and return on investment
5. Coordination of communications
6. Continually evolving efficient communications development process
7. Commitment to nurturing communications expertise, knowledge and appreciation across the Council

- To note the action being taken to ensure that the communications challenges are tackled effectively; both by the development of a more integrated approach inline with the business planning process for next year’s budget; and to ensure that communications activity from September are strengthened and improved.

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1. Background

- 1.1 This report summaries the Communication Blueprint and highlights recommendations for consideration.
- 1.2 The focus of this work is predominantly based on external communications but will consequentially influence Internal Communications and PR activity.
- 1.3 The report acknowledges and recognised previous reports, new research and external benchmarking. Research has been conducted using independent facilitators, customer mapping, in-depth desk analysis, workshops and is underpinned by the PwC diagnostic tool, AIMS. Public sector and private benchmarking assisted in-depth analysis and shaped the evidential based recommendations for the future.

2.0 Findings

- 2.1 The City Council spends considerable sums of money informing the public of its services and on general communications related activity. Further analysis is being undertaken to confirm in more depth the source and nature of all communications activity, however initial findings show that this can be more efficient and can contribute to the Council's overall efficiency targets.
- 2.2 Return on investment for communication spend at present could also be clearer with process improvements to help track and evaluated communications issued from the City Council.
- 2.3. Process mapping on the whole, highlighted planning and budgeting issues; inter departmental communication gaps and inconsistent sign off and quality control. Not all processes in the mapping exercise were shown to be weak, but almost half showed room for improvement.
- 2.4 The volume of work the City Council communicates is high (3,966 jobs) with low average spend leading to a disparate approach – too many messages with no clear focus. The communications are also based on service objectives not corporate priorities.
- 2.5 Channel planning [the medium(s) used to deliver messages] is also a concern. There seems to be an over reliance on leafleting and booklets with poor targeting to the end customer resulting in 'passive' communications.
- 2.6 Commissioning of communications, marketing and PR takes place by a large number of officers according to the initial data from AIMS. These commissioners place orders through Mfour (the in-house creative advertising agency). The skill sets of these commissioners have yet to be determined (an audit is due to go live soon).
- 2.7 Budgets can be better managed and planned and have more efficient processes and resource development.

3.0 A New Approach

The following principals will underpin a strategic move to integrate communications going forward.

- 3.1 A strategic customer-centric, campaign approach to communications to focus messages should be developed - greater success will come from doing fewer things better to really support services e.g. an issues such as reduce teenage drinking has a positive impact on education, children's health and crime and disorder. If a focus is on 'common areas of interest', pooled resources with a commitment to change behaviour or attitudes can actually influence costs.
- 3.2 All communications will relate to the Council's corporate vision and support the values, spines and annual corporate priorities. Supported by an agreed process framework (similar to the gateway process) that provides relevant stakeholders with an opportunity for input and scrutiny. The framework will ensure corporate priorities are aligned with communication needs and will have the flexibility to handle both planned and reactive activity.
- 3.3 The communication budget should be planned annually and managed within the new framework, at the same time leaving some capacity for unforeseeable issues arising mid-year. A clear process will be followed that addresses activity throughout the year.
- 3.4 All communications will be planned, researched and implemented to provide fiscal benefits, greater reach and relevance to target audiences. Agreed KPI's will be measured and behavioural change and awareness monitored and developed for best practice.
- 3.5 Service Heads will appoint 'communication commissioners' to act on the brief to coordinate service priorities and activities, led by the Director of Communications, to ensure best practice for communications activity and to ensure activity is planned and executed in accordance with priorities delivered by the Council. Additional resourcing will be achieved at no additional cost to the Council. Proposals for achieving this will be bought forward in due course.
- 3.6 An officers project Board and regular meetings will ensure good internal communication practice.
- 3.7 Clear brand guidelines will be developed and implemented to ensure the Council brand is appropriately recognised.
- 3.8 Specific recommendations for Mfour include support for digital growth e.g. filming as well as photography services, a one contact strategy and a more integrated service across design, translations, media etc. based on a campaign model, process improvement, skills support, pricing review and transparency and a look at service improvement such as image banks.
- 3.9 Financial impacts. In line with all services, communications need to review spend and look for savings – more for less. Improved processes will drive

efficiencies and the departmental commissioning and management of budgets needs to be reviewed against business priorities. Further work is proposed in conjunction with the City Treasurer.

4.0 Wider Communications

- 4.1 Although PR and Internal Communications were out of scope they too will benefit from a clear, priority focus and will need to adapt to this strategy. If the principles of the external communication are agreed, these two areas will be developed and recommendations proposed in the near future.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The proposals described in this report are designed to provide a strong framework for developing an integrated communications strategy and delivering focus, which will not only deliver high quality outcomes capable of monitoring but also improvement in efficiencies.