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Foreword

How the Council communicates what it is doing, or plans to do, to the County residents is extremely important and this Scrutiny Review was established to see whether what we currently do is effective, clear and interesting, and in these financially straitened times, offers value for money.

It may be felt that the Review Group has over concentrated on 'Herefordshire Matters' but this magazine is a major method of communication with all Herefordshire households and one which regularly generates strong opinions from Council tax payers.

The Review Group hope that our findings and recommendations will ensure that communications with our residents can become even more effective.

As Chairman, I would also like to thank everyone who gave of their time to come and talk to the Review Group; their contributions were in some cases critical, but always helpful and illuminating. I would also like to thank the other review group members, Councillors Phil Cutter, Phil Edwards Terry James and Peter Watts for their invaluable suggestions, support and hard work.

Finally a huge vote of thanks to our two officers, Tim Brown and Julie Gethin whose help, good humour and ability to keep a group of vocal and strong minded Councillors 'on track' has been much appreciated.

Councillor PA Andrews
Chairman of the External Scrutiny Review Group

Introduction

1. In the context of developing an external focus to the work programme Members considered that improvements to various aspects of communication could be made. External communications have a bearing on the reputation of the Council and NHS Herefordshire and how they are perceived by the public, as well as having a direct impact on the ease with which customers are able to access services within the County. In this regard, the Committee's terms of reference for the review were:
 - To identify what external communication by the Council and NHS Herefordshire currently takes place to inform the public about services.
 - To establish what is already known from customers about what information they wish to receive and the effectiveness of current communications in meeting those needs. To consider what further information might need to be obtained from customers in this respect and to ask that it be obtained to inform this review.
 - To identify any areas of duplication both within each organisation and between organisations, as well as any potential savings.
 - To identify any areas of best practice.
 - To make recommendations that will improve public awareness of services and how to access them.
2. The following matters were excluded from the review: agendas and minutes, press releases, individual services such as the Communications Unit, Customer Services, Tourist Information Centres and the Library Service, consultation documents, general correspondence, job advertisements, internal communication, statutory notices, and tourist information. The Review Group has commented briefly on some aspects of these matters that have arisen as a consequence of its enquiries and also sought to ensure it was not duplicating other key pieces of work underway at the same time such as the scrutiny review of the impact of the Winter Weather and the response to it and the external review of the Communications Unit which has recently been completed.
3. The scoping statement for the review is attached at Appendix 1.

Method of Gathering Information

4. The Review Group considered relevant strategies and a range of other documentation and viewed a number of webcasts of meetings.
5. Interviews were held with a number of people to enable specific issues to be discussed in detail. A list of those interviewed is attached at appendix 2.
6. Members of the Review Group also visited several Council premises around the County to investigate what material was available to the public and how it was displayed.

Strategic Context

7. There are two key joint documents that set the strategic direction for the Council and NHS Herefordshire (the Primary Care Trust) in relation to communication with communities – the Communications Strategy and the HPS Customer Strategy.

8. The Communications Strategy sets out existing communications channels. The relevant extract from the Strategy is attached at appendix 3.
9. The Communications Unit leads on the implementation of this Strategy and its associated action plan. The Unit was the UK's first unified communications team for a local authority and primary care trust. As well as the strategy there is a single service plan, and joint communications policies, such as protocols, advertising and corporate identity guidelines, to support partnership working.
10. The Unit's role is to promote awareness, understanding and support for the vision, values and priorities of NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council among the diverse communities and stakeholders of Herefordshire, and the wider regional and national health and government audiences. Its scope of work includes:
 - Communication and marketing strategies and campaigns, often supporting change, consultation or engagement programmes
 - Media relations – including press release production, media enquiries, media monitoring and media training
 - Internal communications – including change management
 - Elected member and non-executive director communications
 - Brand management, visual identity, graphic design and print management
 - Publications – including the residents' newsletter and various corporate publications
 - Event management
 - Crisis management (working with emergency planning)
11. Herefordshire Public Services (the partnership between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire) sets out in its Customer Strategy its commitment to deliver efficient, excellent services and improved outcomes for the citizens of, and visitors to, the County.
12. The four key commitments in the Customer Strategy are:
 - Improved outcomes for local people
 - Excellence in service delivery
 - Focus on customers' experience
 - Being efficient and delivering value for money
13. The aim of accessible services is to deliver reliable, flexible and responsive services at a time and in a way that is convenient to customers. Using a "one Stop" approach the intention is to continue to develop integrated front offices for services provided by Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire. This is alongside a range of engagement methods to develop meaningful, regular and joined up engagement with all sections of Herefordshire's communities. Becoming an organisation that listens through regular, systematic and co-ordinated consultation and engagement will ensure that public services reflect what local need and want. Also, by treating customers equally and fairly and striving to become trusted by communities Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire will be able to foster a sense of place and well being in all parts of the County.
14. Both of these strategies and their overarching objectives and approaches were considered by the Review Group.

Current methods of communication and their effectiveness

HEREFORDSHIRE MATTERS AND OTHER LOCAL MEDIA

15. Herefordshire Matters (HM) is the Council's magazine for patients, service users and residents. It is delivered to every household in the county, and outlets like libraries, customer service centres, reception areas, GP surgeries, youth centres, residential homes and day care centres. Its aim is to promote public services and how to access and engage in shaping them.
16. When the review was being undertaken the magazine was published bi-monthly. The council budgets for £12,500 per edition of Herefordshire Matters and if six editions are published and distributed to over 80,000 households and locations in a year. The gross annual cost to the Council is £75,000, offset by advertising revenue of £29,100 comprising recharges to Council Departments and NHS Herefordshire amounting to £14,900 and £14,200 from other sources. The Review Group has been informed that costs have since been reviewed and, based on a quarterly publication, the net cost will be less than £50,000. The cost per page of Herefordshire Matters compares favourably with the average cost of publications by other authorities based on a benchmarking report of 45 authorities produced by Public PR.
17. It is acknowledged that if Council or PCT advertising were placed elsewhere the reach may not be as great as through advertising with Herefordshire Matters. The Review Group has been advised that Services that do advertise in Herefordshire Matters report a much better response from Herefordshire Matters than other vehicles and that it could be argued that the publication offers the best and most cost effective penetration for service areas, with the further advantage that the money comes back to the organisation.
18. The Review Group notes that the Communications Strategy identifies as a risk control measure that a policy should be secured that all advertising targeted at citizens is considered first through Herefordshire Matters. This reflects a concern over Council services advertising with unproven or small circulation publications which solicit advertising with them and the poor value for money that this represents.
19. The Audit Commission in January 2010 published findings of research into council periodicals and communication with the public. This found that over 90% of English Councils publish a periodical but almost all of these are published once a month or less frequently.
20. The Commission stated, "Communication is important to inform the public of the services that councils provide and the functions they perform. It is also important to explain to voters and council tax payers the reasons for particular policies and priorities."
21. The Commission did recommend Councils should review their editorial policies to ensure that they are politically neutral and publicly defensible. It noted that the *Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity* states that councils need to communicate fairly and objectively about controversial issues.
22. The Commission found that a range of current practice in periodicals demonstrates that councils have taken different decisions about how to balance the community leadership role of all councillors, and the role of executive members in speaking for

the council, against the risk that the periodical may be viewed as politically biased by some readers.

23. The Commission also recommended that Councils should review the value for money of their spending on communications, including on periodicals. The Commission noted that “the financial information on council periodicals is particularly limited. The cost of periodicals is specifically described in around 10 per cent of council accounts. These accounts record average spending of £68,000 per council. A Local Government Association survey in 2009 found broadly the same figure.
24. The Government has stated that it will amend the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity to stop unfair competition by local authority newspapers. This was in response to concerns that “too many of these papers are branching into non-council content such as TV listings and sports reviews; that the councils dress up their literature as 'independent' publications; and the frequency of the free, delivered newspapers undermines commercial local newspapers”. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government said:

"The previous Government's weakening of the rules on town hall publicity not only wasted taxpayers' money and added to the wave of junk mail, but has undermined a free press.

"Councils should spend less time and money on weekly town hall Pravdas that end up in the bin, and focus more on frontline services like providing regular rubbish collections.

"In an internet age, commercial newspapers should expect over time less state advertising as more information is syndicated online for free. The flipside is our free press should not face state competition from propaganda on the rates dressed up as local reporting."

Initial indications are that Herefordshire Matters is not the type of publication that the Government is therefore seeking to curb.

25. The evidence presented to the Review Group cast some doubt on whether HM is providing information the public wants and is fulfilling its stated purpose of promoting public services and how to access and engage in shaping them. The cost could be considered high, if HM is not seen to be an effective means of letting the community know about local services.
26. It was suggested to the Group that because of the infrequency of publication the material in HM often appears outdated. One option put forward as an alternative was a more regular segment in the local newspapers containing targeted, sharp and newsworthy material. There was a view that this was more likely to be read than a separate Council publication, which as a self-standing document could be more readily discarded because people have not chosen to buy it. However, this should be balanced against the fact that readership of, for example, the Hereford Times (at approximately 36,000) is lower than current distribution of HM which goes to all households.
27. The Review Group concedes this is not an easy judgment but feels that the information gathered suggests that there is merit in further reviewing the value to the public and cost effectiveness of HM.

28. The Review Group's considerations, not just in the context of Herefordshire Matters, highlighted the importance of producing well-written targeted information with the reader firmly in mind. The impression given to the Group was that considerable effort was being expended on producing a number of pieces of information rather than taking a more selective approach. The Review Group considers that the following performance target in the Communications Strategy encourages such an approach: "Maintain press release production at 1,000 per year and maintain increased level of positive press coverage for Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire to 4,000 per year through the 2010 to 2014 period". This gives a focus to the quantity of releases and could be counter-productive and is not on its own a measure of effectiveness or value for money.
29. The Public Audit Forum has recently produced some value for money indicators for central communications functions and the production of press releases is not contained in this list.
30. If the production of HM continues, the Review Group has concerns about its predominant tone of positivity, to the extent that it may give the appearance to some of being propaganda. It considers this can have a negative impact on the Council's reputation. In particular, it urges that action should be taken to ensure that reporting is straightforward, admitting to mistakes where these have occurred and setting out the steps being taken to put things right. Reporting should be realistic and should not oversell what is expected to be achieved, thereby ensuring public expectation is not falsely raised or that scepticism continues.
31. The Review Group highlighted two specific examples in this regard. The headline in the April-June 2010 edition read, "£10 million to fix county highways". The Review Group considers this is an example of raising expectations unrealistically. The money will generate improvement but will not "fix" all the County's roads. The public perception, based on their driving experiences, is likely to be that the Council has failed to deliver on its promise despite the fact that the intention is not to fix all roads across the County in this timeframe. The effect of this is to potentially jeopardise the reputation of the Council.
32. A further example of where the Review Group thought the tone of HM had been overly positive was in connection with the change to the waste management arrangements. The impression given in HM was that everything had worked well. In fact there were a number of difficulties with the delivery of bins and the ability to meet the requests from individuals as a result of an inconsistent approach to communicating the changes in service which resulted in a large volume of complaints. The experience on the ground (confirmed by feedback received from Customer Services) was at odds with what the Council was communicating to residents. The Review Group suggested it would have been better to say that there had been some problems, which was only to be expected, and the Council had done its best to solve them.
33. The Review Group considered research into residents confidence in media sources and was somewhat sceptical of the statistics quoted for Herefordshire Matters because they are solely based on surveys conducted using the Herefordshire Voice (see below).

Confidence in media sources					
	Very confident	Fairly confident	Not confident	Base	Confident = Very + Fairly
Herefordshire Matters	33%	59%	8%	559	92%
Hereford Times	22%	70%	7%	575	93%
The Journal (Hereford, Ross or Leominster editions)	16%	73%	11%	427	89%
Ross Gazette	16%	70%	14%	90	86%
Ledbury Reporter	15%	75%	10%	81	90%
Mid Wales Journal	10%	79%	10%	29	90%
Western Daily Press	9%	84%	7%	58	93%
Worcester News	2%	83%	14%	42	86%
Birmingham Post	11%	71%	17%	35	83%
BBC Hereford & Worcester	29%	67%	4%	449	96%
Wyvern FM	17%	75%	8%	229	92%
Sunshine Radio	19%	69%	12%	90	88%

34. Herefordshire Voice is the citizens' panel for Herefordshire. It is a group of approximately 1,100 local residents who have agreed to participate regularly in consultations on a variety of topics. In order to give a reliable cross-section of local views, the panel aims to reflect the gender, age and ethnic makeup of Herefordshire as a whole, with panellists from all over the county. Herefordshire Voice is maintained to provide a basis for survey research and is generally cheaper, more convenient and more reliable than surveys sent to a random selection of residents.
35. The Review Group asked for further analysis from the Council's Research section about these findings. This concluded that whilst the composition of Herefordshire Voice does not perfectly match the profile of the county's residents, further analysis suggests:
- The statement that 92% of readers have confidence in the accuracy of the information given in Herefordshire Matters is reasonable.
 - Taking into account the age profile of the panel, the statement that 73% of residents read most or all of Herefordshire Matters is likely to be a few percentage points too high.
 - The statement that over 90% find articles interesting, useful and cover important issues is reasonable.
36. However, it is perhaps worth noting that in relation to the statement above that 92% of readers have confidence in the accuracy of the information given in Herefordshire Matters 33% were very confident and 59% fairly confident.
37. Regarding the numbers reading most or all of Herefordshire Matters, 80% of respondents to the Herefordshire Voice Survey said they normally received a copy of Herefordshire Matters. Of that group 73% said they normally read most or all of it. (In effect, taking account of those who say they do not receive the document at all, this means that 58% of respondents to the survey as a whole read most or all of Herefordshire Matters).
38. Of those who said they did receive a copy of Herefordshire Matters 35% said they read all of it, 38% said they read most of it and 24% read a few articles, with 2% not reading any of it.

39. In relation to the statement that over 90% find articles interesting, useful and cover important issues the statistics were as follows:

Views on aspects of the Herefordshire Matters magazine					
	Yes	To some extent	No	Base	Yes + to some extent
Do you find the articles interesting?	44%	51%	4%	708	96%
Is the information useful to you?	33%	60%	7%	706	93%
Are the articles easy to read?	85%	14%	2%	705	98%
Is the design clear and uncluttered?	76%	19%	5%	700	95%
Does the magazine cover important issues?	38%	55%	7%	693	93%

40. The Research Section noted that although, as mentioned above, efforts are made to ensure the panel represents a reliable cross-section of local views the Panel cannot at present claim to be perfectly representative of all residents in the County, partly because, by the very fact of agreeing to join the panel, the members are to some extent atypical, though the effect this may have cannot be determined. Based on day to day experience within the community, the Review Group remains somewhat sceptical about the survey findings. It suggests Customer Services might usefully get some direct feedback about HM through its Customer Service Centres.
41. Research conducted by MORI for the Local Government Association in 2006 found that the majority of residents (55 per cent) value a local 'A-Z of services' as the most useful form of council publicity. This is followed by the council website (40 per cent) and council tax leaflets (38 per cent). Newspapers are valued by just one in three residents (36 per cent)
42. The Review Group has considered the use of one edition of Herefordshire Matters as a resident's guide to public services replacing a more traditional A-Z of services. This was produced in September 2009 as a joint 48-page publication and delivered to every household in the county. It promoted the comprehensive range of public services, principally those provided by NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council, and how to access them. Believed to be the first publication of its type in the UK, the guide structured information about services around the needs of individual patients and service users, who require support, care or advice at key stages in their lives.
43. The Group considered the difficulty with this publication was that it did carry with it the risk of becoming outdated and consideration might be usefully given to producing the document in a way that made it possible for updates to be issued without the need to necessarily to replace the whole document.
44. Since the national evidence is that the public value an A-Z it is proposed that the recommended survey by Customer Services seeks local opinion on the value of this and other media, and the format in which the public would like to receive this information.

Recommendations

- (a) That the production of Herefordshire Matters should be reviewed to assess whether there is a more effective means of communication about public services.
- (b) That, if retained, the tone of Herefordshire Matters should be reconsidered, to ensure that reporting is straightforward, admitting to mistakes where these have occurred and setting out the steps being taken to put things right.
- (c) That, if retained, reports in Herefordshire Matters should not oversell what the Council is realistically expecting to achieve, thereby ensuring public expectation is not raised to the potential detriment of organisational reputations.
- (d) That Customer Services should be requested to conduct a survey on the value of HM and what information the public would like to receive from the Council and NHS Herefordshire through its Customer Service Centres and that this should include asking about an A-Z of services.

LEAFLETS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- 45. The Communications Strategy states that Service leaflets and publications are published as required for patients, service users and residents on public services and how to access them. Around 300 separate publications, reports, booklets, leaflets and flyers are produced each year by the communications unit in line with corporate identity guidelines and house style and are offered for translation and interpretation as required.
- 46. However, services themselves also produce a vast array of leaflets with the intention of informing the public about services and how they can access them. The Review Group was concerned that this did not represent a good use of resources and was not the most cost effective way of informing the public about services. The language of some of the material seen by the Group was impenetrable, appearing to have been written by officers for officers with no real thought given to the needs of the members of the public who would have to read it.
- 47. Visits to a range of Council offices, libraries and Customer Service Centres found a proliferation of leaflets, with no evidence of a consistent approach to version control and some leaflets with handwritten amendments on them. This did not provide confidence that the information was up to date and accurate nor a professional view of the Council and NHS Herefordshire.
- 48. The amount of material was overwhelming and confusing. It was considered unlikely that this would be helpful if a person was uncertain of what information they required. The Group understands that when someone is seeking information it is more than likely that their first step on entering a Customer Service Centre or other Council office would be to ask where they could obtain a specific piece of information and advice.
- 49. It was also of concern that there was no control over leaflets being placed on display, other than by routine monitoring in the customer service centres which was itself complicated by the sheer number of leaflets involved.

50. There was an apparent complete absence of control of the display of documentation at the Shirehall, Hereford. It is recommended that the display of leaflets and publications in this building is specifically prohibited and any visitors seeking information on services are referred to Garrick House.
51. The Review Group considers that there is scope for a huge reduction in the number of leaflets and similar publications.
52. One example of the potential for waste is the reported production of 7,000 leaflets for one particular purpose, a leaflet that was not produced by the corporate design team and was incorrectly branded, of which an estimated 4,200 were issued.
53. During the scrutiny review of GP Services in the County, a comment was made by GPs on the vast quantities of leaflets being sent out for distribution to patients.
54. The Review Group welcomed the stated intention of the Head of Customer Services to review the quantity of leaflets and posters in Customer Service Centres.
55. To ensure that accurate, up to date information on services is provided to the public, the Review Group advocates a focus instead on storing up to date material electronically and making a hard copy available on request.
56. It is accepted that it would be practical for a limited number of leaflets on key services that are commonly requested in significant numbers to continue to be produced. However it is important that policies are in place to control production and to review and ensure the currency of the information they contain.
57. Following the Group's findings on its visits to libraries that hard copies of agenda papers were rarely requested these are no longer distributed to libraries and Info Centres. An e-mail notification is sent of their publication and a hard copy of individual reports can be made available on request.
58. The use of rolling display screens at Customer Service Centres and reception areas to provide information was also something the Group considered merited further investigation.

Recommendations

- (e) That action is taken to achieve a significant reduction in the production of leaflets and other publications and to ensure that the material that is produced complies with corporate policies. Consideration should be given to this through the Rising to the Challenge processes recently established so there is an identified lead to action this.**
- (f) That display of leaflets and publications at the Shirehall, Hereford is specifically prohibited and any visitors seeking information on services are referred to Garrick House.**

PUBLIC ACCESS TO COMPUTERS IN LIBRARIES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRES

59. Libraries and Customer Service Centres have a number of computers available for public use (85 in libraries and 11 in the Customer Service Centres). The information provided to the Review Group suggested that provision of this facility and its management seemed to have been developed piecemeal over time.
60. In the Customer Service Centres the perception was that there were a number of regular users rather than a range of people. The facility does not therefore generally serve in the Centres as a means of access to public services.
61. The Review Group suggests that whilst a case can be made for public access to computers for general usage in libraries their availability and use in Customer Service Centres is more questionable. It considers provision in both service outlets should be reviewed.

Recommendation

(g) That the provision of PCs in libraries and Customer Services Centres should be reviewed and a coherent policy developed for their use.

STATUTORY NOTICES

62. Although not within the scope of the review, the publication of statutory notices arose during discussions.
63. Statutory Notices have to be placed in a local newspaper on a range of subjects including planning applications, licensing and public rights of way.
64. The Review Group has noted the view of the Head of Communications that the language of the statutory notices is legalistic and often does not explain what is being proposed, and the implications, in a clear, user friendly way. This can create reputational issues for the Council at a later date when the public could sometimes maintain that they have not been informed of a proposal, despite statutory notice having been given. Whilst the Council can demonstrate that it has provided statutory notice this will not entirely defuse public resentment.
65. The Head of Communications considers that articles/press releases would be a simpler, easier, and more effective method of communicating the information contained in such notices. He also considers that there is the potential for cost savings.
66. The decision on which notices should be published is taken by service areas. It is suggested that the approach to producing and publishing these notices should be reviewed in consultation with the Head of Communications. The Group considers the opportunity should also be taken to confirm whether or not there is indeed a requirement to publish in the print media several of the types of notice that are currently published as statutory notices.

Recommendation

(h) That Directors be asked to review the notices published as statutory notices in the print media, clarify whether they are statutorily required, and seek the advice of the Head of Communications as to whether some form of communication other than a notice would be more effective and feasible.

WHAT INFORMATION CUSTOMERS WISH TO RECEIVE

67. The Review Group was not able to identify any specific information, aside from Herefordshire Voice Surveys containing information relating to Herefordshire Matters, on what information customers wish to receive about services and their view on what is already being provided.
68. In the absence of such information it is felt that services can only be operating on the basis of assumptions. This does not embrace the corporate approach described in the Customer Strategy of putting the customer first in all that we do.
69. The Communication Strategy details a number of communication channels for patients and service users and identifies a range of specific stakeholder groupings. There is, however, no guidance or suggestion as to what form of communication works best for different audiences. The Strategy would benefit by including such guidance and also reflecting on the number of communication channels used and their effectiveness.

Recommendation

- (i) **That the Communications Strategy provides evidenced guidance on the most effective communication channels for individual stakeholder groupings.**
- (j) **That a survey be undertaken to establish what information the public wish to receive about council and NHS Herefordshire services, the effectiveness of current communications in meeting these needs and the preferred format and channel for this information.**

A Corporate Approach to Communication

70. The Review Group found that the role of the Communications Unit and Customer Services was clear in theory, as outlined in the Communications Strategy and the Customer Strategy. However, there was less certainty as to the authority and influence these Services commanded in practice.
71. The Communications Strategy states:

“The corporate identity guidelines require all service areas to secure the maximum corporate recognition and economies of scale. Therefore, individual service areas are no longer able to use sub-brands or alternative logos. Responsibility lies with the unified communications unit to promote and regulate the use of the brand and visual identity, with support where necessary from the joint management team.

The refreshed identity unites council and primary care trust services and presents a consistent face to our customers and partners, and it makes our services more accountable and recognisable by clearly identifying the work in which the council and the PCT is engaged.”

72. There was evidence that adherence to the corporate branding guidelines across the Council, including policies relating to translation, interpretation and alternative formats, remains patchy. Services sometimes commission external design work, contrary to corporate guidelines or carry out such work in-house. The view of the

Head of Communications was that in-house work took individuals longer than the in-house design team would take and was therefore inefficient. It was also possible that the chosen means of communication would not be the most effective.

73. The role of Customer Services in front line service delivery is also not consistently recognised across the Council. An example was given of a leaflet issued by Revenues and Benefits and delivered to Customer Service Centres (CSC) for display that incorrectly stated cash offices were closed.
74. The Customer Strategy identifies the need to improve the extent to which the Council listens to the public and use that feedback to design and commission services. The Head of Customer Services has fed back, in the context of communication pressures that arose during the severe winter weather, that it became clear that the publication of information on the Council website was not meeting customer demands or expectations. Alternative and more responsive options are available if service areas liaise with and act on the advice of Customer Services managers.
75. The dilemma for the Council is that the complete control of communications by the Central Communications Unit would appear to be unmanageable given the number of Council communications and the current size of the Communications Team.
76. The Communications Unit itself is outside the scope of this scrutiny review. The Shared Services project includes Communications and it is noted that project consultants have been commissioned to examine the service including looking at the existing team's structure, remit, skills and capacity to identify any gaps or areas for improvement for the new integrated service. This will form the basis of a separate report.
77. The Review Group concluded that compliance with corporate requirements including procurement requirements in relation to print and design clearly remained an issue to which the Council needed to give further consideration.
78. The Review Group notes that the Communications Strategy is quite lengthy. Although acknowledging that the Strategy was required to meet specific requirements for World Class Commissioning, the Review Group considers a clearer simpler message might assist in encouraging a more corporate approach.
79. Similarly the pressures on Customer Services were acknowledged in the annual report of the Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer services) to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 2 July.
80. The report noted that overall performance for customer services centres against the one stop shop bench-marking group was relatively high. However, the service does less well in relation to convenience and accessibility, how enquiries are dealt with, length of waiting time and professionalism of staff.
81. The Review Group noted that there is to be a review of Customer Services to include: Info by Phone capacity and service improvements, further front office integration at Customer Service Centres, avoidable contact levels, satisfaction levels with service quality, convenience and choice and value for money across all front office service areas.
82. A report was also made to the OSC in July on the Customer Insight Unit (CIU). The Unit was set up in January 2010 to establish a single point of contact for

Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire for all customer-instigated feedback, including complaints, comments and compliments.

83. Before January 2010 complaints and feedback were managed locally by services across Herefordshire Council. This resulted in differences in the way complaints were managed and inconsistent quality of processing. Because there was no unified, standardised system for dealing with complaints, it was impossible to acquire an overview across the Council. A major advantage of the CIU and the adoption of a standard process means there is a single administrative system used to manage the feedback coming into the Council and NHS Herefordshire. This enables the Council to develop a picture of overall levels of feedback and identify trends. The Committee noted the plans to develop the Unit's role and supported its continued development.

Recommendation

- (k) That the Director of Resources be requested to review the procurement of design and printing services by Directorates and conduct a spot check on the use of cost codes.**
- (l) That consideration is given to how a more corporate approach to communication can be effectively implemented.**

AREAS OF BEST PRACTICE/POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

WEBSITE

84. SOCITM has data that 70% of all interactions with Councils are via the web.
85. The Review Group was informed that a web strategy was shortly to be submitted to the Joint Management Team. It is understood that this has yet to be considered. However, several web projects in support of the Customer Strategy and draft web strategy have been included in the ICT Strategy programme of work for 2009/10. The Group was informed of a number of developments supporting community engagement. These are summarised in appendix 4.
86. The overall classification of the Council's website in Better Connected 2010 (a review of 433 local authority sites conducted by SOCITM during November and December 2009 and published in March 2010) is 3 stars (out of a possible 4 stars). This placed the Council in the top quartile for English Unitary Councils.
87. Independent performance data provided by Sitemorse rates all local authority websites monthly against a range of criteria. The Council has been cited for best practice for this year (Better Connected 2010) and the last two years.
88. The Review Group noted in particular that 36% of visitors to the website were not satisfied with value of information they found. This figure is comparable with benchmark group of over 120 local authorities.
89. In addition information from the SOCITM survey asks an "alternative service channels question". This is designed to allow Councils to estimate the cost of not being able to satisfy an enquiry through the web service channel. It shows that if a question can't be answered via the website the next preferred choices are

telephone, then email, then post. But there is a worryingly large portion who if they can't get an answer via the website say they will access information in 'no other way', or say they 'Don't know' how they would do so. This gap in knowledge is particularly marked in particular age groups. The following sample is taken from January-March 2009.

% by Age range	17 and under	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-64	65-79	80 and over
By telephone	17	29	57	47	53	44	44	39
By post	4	2	3	1	1	1	5	15
In person	12	13	10	9	7	21	8	8
By email	21	28	23	24	19	19	21	23
In no other way	21	12	2	10	12	13	15	0
Other	4	2	1	2	4	1	1	0
Don't know	21	14	4	6	3	1	5	15
Not answered question	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0

90. The cost differential between the three main channels of communication is huge, as illustrated by the latest figures from the *Channel value benchmarking service*.

- Face to face **£8.23** per visit
- Phone **£3.21** per call
- Web **£0.39** per visitor

Source: Socitm *Insight* (December 2009)

Socitm states "For fractions of a pound, a typical website visit is much, much cheaper than a typical phone call, which in turn is much cheaper than a typical face to-face transaction. Sometimes overlooked when these figures have been presented before is the point that the higher the volume of web visits, the lower the unit cost is likely to be. With good back office processes, the website can handle major increases in traffic without incurring extra costs, whereas the phone or face to face will incur extra costs, unlike the other main channels. "

91. The Review Group noted in particular the intention to build up user based research to make the use of the website more customer friendly. The view was expressed that the website structure did not necessarily reflect how users accessed the website. There was a distinction between a function based approach and the way professionals might structure information. It was noted some Councils had moved to a blank homepage like the Google front page with just a search facility. There could be an option to couple this with a "classic" homepage view which the user could opt to use. Lancashire County Council is an example of this approach.

92. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commented several times on the importance of keeping information up to date and removing out of date material and reiterated this point in its Scrutiny Review of the Winter Weather December 2009-10 and the response to it. That review also highlighted a number of issues in relation to updating Council web pages and how information was structured, in particular the need to distinguish between news and other important information.

93. One issue brought to the Group's attention was that Council news was often but not always published immediately to the website. Reasons for this included a concern that it would undermine the local press, the local media being part of the fabric of

local society, and that if, having been on the Council's website the news was considered old news it would not be printed. A judgment was made on a case by case basis by the Communications Unit. The Review Group considers that news items should be placed on the Council website to ensure currency and not held back to fit in with print media publication dates.

94. An example of how the Council could improve the currency of information is by developing the existing provision by the web team of a Twitter feed of news (from the articles published by the Communications Unit on the website) which is followed by 96 local businesses, members of the public and other interested parties such as Sunshine Radio, the Herefordshire Times and CommunityFirst. So for example if news articles are posted on the website the Hereford Times will pick it up from Twitter: <http://twitter.com/myherefordshire/>

Recommendation

(m) The Review Group considers that news items should be placed on the Council website to ensure currency and not held back to fit in with print media publication dates.

(n) Service areas should again be reminded of the need to ensure their information on the web site is updated on a regular basis.

SOCIAL MEDIA

95. The Review Group considered user engagement and the use of social media. The Group was advised that failure to engage through these means was potentially damaging to the Council's reputation. The Council could be seen to be imposing its own preferred way of consultation on users and not engaging with the way in which they wanted to be consulted, for example through online discussions. There appears to be a public expectation that these facilities would be available.
96. The Review Group recognises that younger people are less inclined to rely on print media for information and communication. It encourages exploring the use of social media for communicating about Council business and services, in particular to this audience.

Recommendation

(o) That investigations into developing the use of social media for communicating about Council business and services should be explored as soon as possible, as a key mechanism for reaching younger people in particular.

WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

97. The Review Group has viewed a number of Council websites broadcasting Council meetings. Whilst viewing figures ranged from 0, to almost 7,000 for the planning permission for a new stadium for Bristol City FC, it was noticeable that the general pattern was that significantly more people viewed the archive of the meeting rather than viewing it live. (The webcast of the planning application referred to above was an exception to this with 80% viewing that particular webcast live.

98. The benefits of webcasting set out in a report by the Improvement and Development Agency based on a survey of local authorities included:
- Makes authorities more accessible,
 - PR value
 - Councillors can see themselves,
 - Reduces the impact of distance,
 - Meets the expectations from the public (esp. younger generation),
 - Drives use of broadband,
 - Improves communications,
 - Reduces costs
 - Interactivity/public participation,
 - Consistency of delivery,
 - Social inclusion.
99. The Review Group considers that in a rural County where the Council holds meetings during normal working hours, webcasting does offer a means of improving access to the Council's decision making structures that merits further exploration. It considers that a trial webcast of a Planning Committee meeting would be particularly appropriate, given the pressures that have been experienced on occasion in accommodating all those wishing to attend certain meetings and the associated transport implications.
100. The Group understands that a firm might be prepared to webcast one meeting as a pilot. It recognises that given the financial pressures the cost of a trial needs to be assessed before deciding whether to proceed.
101. In any event the Committee considers a report should be submitted to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out an analysis of the pros and cons of webcasting Council meetings and its feasibility

Recommendation

- (p) That a trial webcast of a Planning Committee meeting should be undertaken, subject to the costs being reasonable.**
- (q) A report be submitted to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out an analysis of the pros and cons of webcasting Council meetings and its financial feasibility.**

EXPENDITURE ON COMMUNICATIONS

102. The Review Group sought to clarify the Council's expenditure on external communication informing the public about council services.
103. The annual accounts published by all Council were required to contain a figure on publicity expenditure (until 2009/10). (Publicity is defined as "any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public"). The figure included in the Council's 2008-09 accounts was £502,000. Although not necessarily comparable, the following are recorded for different local authorities - West Berkshire £378,000, Bath and North East Somerset £878,000, East Riding £1.928 m

104. An analysis of expenditure on promotion and advertising activity over all directorates covering the aspects in the scoping statement for the review produced the broadly similar figure of £484,000 (once the cost of the website including the web team and all operational costs is excluded) compared to 2008/09
105. The Review Group subsequently requested further information on expenditure on consultation and other promotional events. This showed expenditure on public consultation in 2008-09 of £589,900 and on general promotion of £482,700. This is in addition to the figure of £484,000 above.
106. The Review Group also noted the following costs:
- Website including the web team and all operational costs £449,101. (This cost covers the intranet and web-based applications/services support (internal and external) e.g. Academy plus additional websites hosted and/or managed by Herefordshire Council or content feeds connections provided e.g. WM jobs, Local Directgov, English Heritage Gateway.
 - Communications Team (including Herefordshire Matters) £597,309 (nb this includes staff costs, advertising and publicity, office expenses related directly to the team and central recharges).
 - INFO Service £1,580,927.
107. The Review Group noted that the breakdown of information on costs was not easy to produce and that the knowledge of costs incurred on external communication was limited and incomplete. As mentioned earlier, the integrity of this information is dependent on accurate and consistent coding and this has given some cause for concern, particularly when allied with information provided to the Group about expenditure on the procurement of print and design.
108. It is noted that this is not the first occasion on which it has proved difficult for the financial systems to deliver the financial information sought for a scrutiny review. It is acknowledged that this might in part be because in a cross service review anomalies may more readily arise but the Group does consider that in reviewing the systems for recording expenditure on external communication, as recommended below, this wider concern should be borne in mind.
109. The Director of Resources has commented that the Executive's response to the views expressed by the Review Group can be taken into account in the design and implementation of the new financial system.

Recommendation

(r) That the systems for recording expenditure on external communication should be reviewed.

Next Steps

110. Subject to approval by the Committee this report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.
111. The Committee expects that within two months of receipt of the report Cabinet will consider the report and recommendations and respond to the Committee indicating what action Cabinet proposes to take, together with an action plan.

Summary of Recommendations

- (a) That the production of Herefordshire Matters should be reviewed to assess whether there is a more effective means of communication about public services.
- (b) That, if retained, the tone of Herefordshire Matters should be reconsidered, to ensure that reporting is straightforward, admitting to mistakes where these have occurred and setting out the steps being taken to put things right.
- (c) that, if retained, reports in Herefordshire Matters should not oversell what the Council is realistically expecting to achieve, thereby ensuring public expectation is not raised to the potential detriment of organisational reputations.
- (d) That Customer Services should be requested to conduct a survey on the value of HM and what information the public would like to receive from the Council and NHS Herefordshire through its Customer Service Centres and that this should include asking about an A-Z of services.
- (e) That action be taken to achieve a significant reduction in the production of leaflets and other publications and to ensure that the material that is produced complies with corporate policies.
- (f) That display of leaflets and publications at the Shirehall, Hereford is specifically prohibited and any visitors seeking information on services are referred to Garrick House.
- (g) That the provision of PCs in libraries and Customer Services Centres should be reviewed and a coherent policy developed for their use.
- (h) That Directors be asked to review the notices published as statutory notices in the print media, clarify whether they are statutorily required, and seek the advice of the Head of Communications as to whether some form of communication other than a notice would be more effective and feasible.
- (i) That the Communications Strategy provides evidenced guidance on the most effective communication channels for individual stakeholder groupings.
- (j) That a survey be undertaken to establish what information the public wish to receive about council and NHS Herefordshire services, the effectiveness of current communications in meeting these needs and the preferred format and channel for this information.
- (k) That the Director of Resources be requested to review the procurement of design and printing services by Directorates and conduct a spot check on the use of cost codes.
- (l) That consideration is given to how a more corporate approach to communication can be effectively implemented.
- (m) The Review Group considers that news items should be placed on the Council website to ensure currency and not held back to fit in with print media publication dates.

- (n) Service areas should again be reminded of the need to ensure their information on the web site is updated on a regular basis.**
- (o) That investigations into developing the use of social media for communicating about Council business and services should be explored as soon as possible, as a key mechanism for reaching younger people in particular.**
- (p) That a trial webcast of a Planning Committee meeting should be undertaken, subject to the costs being reasonable.**
- (q) A report be submitted to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out an analysis of the pros and cons of webcasting Council meetings and its financial feasibility.**
- (r) That the systems for recording expenditure on external communication should be reviewed.**

APPENDIX 1
Scoping Statement

TITLE OF REVIEW:	A review of the effectiveness of communication by the Council and NHS Herefordshire with the public about services and access to those services.
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee

SCOPING

Reason for Enquiry
Members considered, in the context of developing an external focus to the work programme, that improvements to various aspects of Communication could be made. External communications have a bearing on the reputation of the Council and how the Council is perceived by the public, as well as having a direct impact on the ease with which customers are able to access services within the County.

Links to the Community Strategy
The review contributes to the following objectives contained in the Herefordshire Community Strategy, including the Council’s Corporate Plan and other key plans or strategies: Organisational improvement and greater efficiency including better value for money by working in partnership with the Primary Care Trust and other local organisations

Summary of Review and Terms of Reference
Summary
This review is to consider the effectiveness of communication by the Council and NHS Herefordshire with the public about services and access to those services.
Terms of Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify what external communication by the Council and NHS Herefordshire currently takes place to inform the public about services. • To establish what is already known from customers about what information they wish to receive and the effectiveness of current communications in meeting those needs. To consider what further information might need to be obtained from customers on this respect and to ask that it be obtained to inform this review • To identify any areas of duplication both within each organisation and between organisations, as well as any potential savings. • To identify any areas of best practice • To make recommendations that will improve public awareness of services and how to access them.

What will NOT be included

Agendas and Minutes

Press Releases

Individual services such as the Communications Unit, Info Service, Tourist Information Centres or the Library Service.

Consultation documents

General Correspondence

Job Advertisements

Internal Communication

Statutory Notices

Tourist Information

Potential outcomes

- Improved public awareness of services and how to access them
- Efficiency savings
- A consistent approach to communication with the public
- Improved quality of communication to seek to ensure equality of access

Cabinet Member (s)

Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources)

A PCT Board Member

Key Stakeholders/Consultees

Directorates

PCT Readers Panel

Service User Groups

Public

Voluntary Sector Assembly

Chamber of Commerce

Schools

Local Medical Council

Potential Witnesses

Deputy Chief Executive (To set the policy context)
Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources)
PCT Board Member
Head of Communications
PCT Board Secretary
Heads of Service (as appropriate depending on review of publications issued).
Joint Director of ICT
Diversity Officer
Info in Herefordshire Manager
(Officer from another authority to provide peer review)
Head of Customer Services
Young Peoples Groups

Research Required

Compilation of publications over past 12 Months
Comparative information
Herefordshire Voice
Survey Information (eg SOCITM)
Potential to commission Focus Groups (eg older people/younger people and also test ease of use of website)
MORI
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Local Government Association (including Improvement and Development Agency)
Office of Public Management
Costs

Potential Visits

(Checklist for visits to be prepared)
Info in Herefordshire Offices
Main Council Offices
PCT Reception
GP Surgeries
Libraries

Publicity Requirements

Launch of Review

During Review

Publication of the Review and its recommendations

Herefordshire Matters

Timetable

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
Confirm approach, programme of consultation/research/provisional witnesses/meeting dates (and proposed topic)	First meeting of the Review Group. December 2009
Collect current available data	Mid January 2010
Collect outstanding data	End January 2010
Analysis of data	1 st week Feb
Final confirmation of interviews of witnesses	1 st week Feb
Carry out programme of interviews	March
Agree programme of site visits	1 st week Feb
Undertake site visits as appropriate	February
Present interim report to relevant scrutiny Committee, if appropriate.	tbc
Final analysis of data and witness evidence	
Prepare options/recommendations	End April 2009
Present Final report to Relevant Scrutiny Committee	Mid June 2010
Present options/recommendations to Cabinet (or Cabinet member (s))	June 2010
Cabinet/Cabinet Member (s) response	September 2010
Implementation of agreed recommendations	TBC

Members	Support Officers
Councillors: Councillor PA Andrews (Chairman of Review Group) Additional members of the Review Group Councillors PGH Cutter, PJ Edwards, TM James and PJ Watts	Lead Support Officer, J Gethin – Head of Partnership Support Democratic Services Representative, T Brown

APPENDIX 2

List of Interviewees	
Richard Beavan-Pearson	Head of Customer Services
Graham Biggs	President of Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce
Robert Blower	Head of Communications
Greg Evans	Management Accounting Manager
Zack Pandor	Joint Director of ICT
Ellen Pawley	Knowledge and Web Services Manager
Fiona Phillips	Editor of the Hereford Times

EXTRACT FROM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

9 Communication Channels

- 9.1 Across the partnership there are a large number of established communication channels reaching a variety of audiences and stakeholders. Many of these channels are formal, monitored and evaluated (most of our publications for example) while others might be informal and unstructured (such as word of mouth (usually positive) or rumour or gossip (usually less so)).
- 9.2 Identifying the various channels, which audiences they reach, to what frequency and to what reason or benefit, helps us to determine how effectively we reach our key stakeholders. Having identified key stakeholders, it was clear that investment was needed in strengthening existing channels or developing new ones to help us become more effective in delivering key messages to stakeholder groups.

Patients and Service Users

- 9.3 Herefordshire Matters – a bi-monthly magazine for patients, service users and residents is delivered to every household in the county, and outlets like libraries, info centres, reception areas, GP surgeries, youth centres, residential homes and day care centres. Its aim is to promote public services and how to access and engage in shaping them.
- 92 per cent of readers have confidence in the accuracy of the information given
 - 73 per cent of residents read all or most of it, 24 per cent read a few articles and 2 per cent do not read any at all
 - Over 90 per cent find articles interesting, useful and covering important issues
 - Readership levels are high for a public services publication and exceed those of mainstream local press
 - Pagination has increased from 16 to 24 pages in 2009
 - A regular public health column, written by the director for public health addresses the key health issues, promotes behaviour change and signposts readers to other local services
 - More emphasis has been placed on human interest stories but linked to hard-hitting statistics or social marketing messages
 - Further emphasis on reducing costs and improving distribution will be made during 2010
- 9.4 Press releases - are produced by the integrated communications unit for local, regional, national and professional media as appropriate.
- Around 1000 press releases on public services are researched, packaged and placed each year
 - Over 95 per cent of all press releases are used by the media
 - Around 4,000 press items are recorded each year and made available to all employees
 - Over 90 per cent of press coverage is positive or neutral
 - In 2010, press release production and evaluation will be refreshed to demonstrate support for key messages, resident priorities and social marketing campaigns
 - Local media support is negotiated for campaigns to improve quality of life and inequalities – such as public health priorities, environmental improvement and recycling, regeneration or road safety

- 9.5 Service leaflets and publications - are published as required for patients, service users and residents on public services and how to access them.
- Around 300 separate publications, reports, booklets, leaflets and flyers and produced each year by the communications unit in line with corporate identity guidelines and house style and are offered for translation and interpretation as required.
 - The council tax leaflet is produced annually each spring and mailed to every household, providing a report on how revenue and capital is spent and an overview of public services available
 - The primary care trust pocket guide to services is produced annually and mailed to every household, although most recently this has been expanded and presented in the new 'life events' structure in an integrated way with council and other partner services and delivered to every household as part of a comprehensive residents guide.
- 9.6 Guide to Public Services – was produced in September 2009 as a joint 48-page publication and delivered to every household in the county. It promoted the comprehensive range of public services, principally those provided by NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council, and how to access them. Believed to be the first publication of its type in the UK, the guide structured information about services around the needs of individual patients and service users, who require support, care or advice at key stages in their lives.
- The 'life events' structure enabled the primary care trust and the council to demonstrate more effectively the benefits of integration
 - The structure will be replicated on the new joint web site under development by ICT, providing an alternative but complimentary means of accessing information
 - The structure will also inform the presentation of advice, information and publications in public-facing services, such as the info shops located in every major settlement in the county
- 9.7 Annual review and report – two separate statutory reports are required and produced for NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council in order to inform stakeholders on the respective financial performance for each organisation. However, the publications are written and designed to be used as companion documents and promote jointly the progress on the shared vision, values and priorities for the enhanced partnership.
- A combined annual summary will be produced in 2010 to promote the public services partnership and its benefits for patients, service users and residents (this may be further integrated with the guide to public services and how to access them.
- 9.8 NHS Herefordshire Service Leaflet – is produced annually as a guide to local healthcare services for patients and is circulated to every household with the residents' publication Herefordshire Matters, although there is an opportunity in 2010 to integrate the contents of the leaflet within the Residents' Guide to public services and how to access them.
- 9.9 Council tax leaflet – is a statutory leaflet produced annually and communicates the council tax rate set and agreed by the council and provides a summary of performance and how the council tax is spent. The mail out to every household reports on the partnership working with the primary care trust and provides a further opportunity to cost-effectively distribute health or social care related information to residents.
- 9.10 Web sites – the NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council web sites are regularly updated with news releases and other information by the communications unit, although

unusually the development of the design, structure and content of the web site is undertaken by a separate knowledge management team within ICT.

- Around 600 press releases are posted on the NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council web sites
- The communications unit is working with the knowledge management team to combine 'landing pages' to promote a single internet entry point for NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Council services
- The communications unit has developed a comprehensive and integrated 'life events' structure for public services and how to access them for Herefordshire and this is forming the basis for online information that is arranged around what makes sense for patients and customers, rather than in terms of organisational structure

- 9.11 AGM and Exhibition – the NHS Herefordshire AGM is an opportunity to engage the public and other partners in sharing information on strategy and progress and this also entails a major display and exhibition, bringing together service areas on a key theme. During 2009, the theme was prevention and treatment of stroke and a new theme will be agreed for the 2010 event.
- 9.12 Annual Public Health Conference – was established in 2009 to focus on public health issues and engage patients, service users and employees in discussing the public health challenges for Herefordshire and performance of the public services partnership. This event also provides a strategic opportunity to feed back the results of key engagement programmes and publicise them.
- 9.13 Consultation – a large number of consultation programmes are initiated each year and are designed to engage stakeholders in shaping place, services or change. Each is supported by communication plans in line with the agreed principles for the council and the primary care trust.
- 9.14 Community forums - or partners and community together (PACT) meetings, are undertaken quarterly, with partner representatives, across several rural areas and are designed to engage communities on issues of local relevance and are regularly used as part of consultation programmes
- 9.15 Community events – a wide range of community events, consultations and displays are organised and promoted to create opportunities to present campaigns and engage in dialogue
- 9.16 Reception areas - new professional display units have been installed and populated with information to keep staff and visitors informed on progress across the primary care trust and council partnership
- 9.17 Photo library - the communications unit has built up an extensive photo and image library for use by the primary care trust, the council and potentially other agencies in the county. This is managed within the small design unit
- 9.18 Freedom of information - the communications unit works closely with the Freedom of Information teams within the council and the primary care trust to help ensure effective media management of issues.

ICT MEASURES SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- We have a Twitter feed reposting council news articles - <http://twitter.com/myherefordshire>
- We have a Facebook account, MySpace pages, YouTube channel, Flickr presence but these are not really used or pushed as much as they should be (see the Better Connected 2010 Severe Weather survey comments for Herefordshire - Appendix).
- We have begun a 12 month pilot using iNovem Collaborate (collaborative working software) running under <http://communities.herefordshire.gov.uk/connect.ti> which allows us to work more closely with the public and interested partners, incorporating blogs, polls, forums etc..
- We have iNovem e-Consult running under <http://consult.herefordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti> which allows members of the public to respond to online consultations.
- We are shortly implementing GovDelivery (<http://www.govdelivery.com/>) which will then facilitate all our online external communication channels (RSS, email subscribing). We will need to provide 25 information channels available for syndication such as focused news, events and updates but will also provide national feeds such as the severe weather alerts.
- e-Petitions have to be live on our websites by Dec 2010 and we are currently looking at options - the modern.gov e-petitions is looking promising as it is free but we have also considered options such as Citizenscape.
- You can see a list and links to all the subsites we manage here: http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council_gov_democracy/council/42045.asp
- We will be replacing our current Content Management System – this is planned in this financial year. A key requirement is to provide closer integration with social media networks and allow us to push more content through those channels. It must also support the management of user-generated content which will support 'hyperlocal sites' – community owned and issue or geographic focused local sites. We are actively seeking to implement an open source solution if fit-for-purpose.
- We will develop both iPhone apps, similar to the ones already in place by Warwickshire, Bristol/Avon and Brighton, taking services such as news, events, what's in my area, emergency broadcasts etc. to the users and widgets to help make it easy to consume open data sets (in line with the Government strategy regarding re-use of Public Sector information). Establishing a robust GIS public platform will add considerable value to these.
- The web strategy will aim to expand the number of digital service channels to include DigitalTV and mobile channels where a business case can show benefits for delivering business objectives outlined in the Customer Strategy for example. . It is very closely tied with the Customer Strategy and supporting web projects have been included in the 2009/2010 ICT Strategy programme of work.
- We will be including syndicated content branded as our own e.g. from NHS Choices. We have already done this for Trading Standards data.
- The SMS working group is developing a business case for a corporate SMS solution.