

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	25 NOVEMBER 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT SERVICES & ACCESS TO THOSE SERVICES
PORTFOLIO AREA:	CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County wide

Purpose

To approve the executive response.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT: The Executive's response (as detailed in Appendix A) be approved

Key Points Summary

- 1.1 A draft response has been prepared to the recommendations of the scrutiny review of the communication channels used to promote services and how to access them.
- 1.2. An external review of the communications function has also made a number of recommendations which impact on the issues identified by the scrutiny review and also have wider implications for communications function.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 The scrutiny report requires a response and action plan

Introduction and Background

- 3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a review panel to scrutinise how the council communicates information to the public on services and how to access them, principally through publications and particularly through Herefordshire Matters, to see whether this

activity is effective and achieves value for money.

- 3.2. A 35-page report (at Appendix A) was produced with 18 recommendations and presented to Overview and Scrutiny on 27 September 2010. This report presents an executive response and an action plan in support of the recommendations set out in Appendix B.
- 3.3. At roughly the same time as the scrutiny review, an external review of the communications function was undertaken by consultants Grant Riches, which made a number of recommendations to improve the organisational impact and value for money of communications across the council and the primary care trust. A summary of the recommendations is set out in Appendix C.

Key Considerations

- 4.1 The recommendations of the review, and the proposed response, are set out in detail at Appendix B and relate to:
 - Herefordshire Matters and its effectiveness and value for money as a communications tool. Based on available objective research, it is recommended that production should continue and notes that savings have already been identified and implemented
 - The need to reduce the volume and cost of literature across the council and primary care trust and ensure that material is accessible, understandable, of the right quality and correctly branded. This is being addressed by ensuring that all material will be assessed and processed by the corporate communications unit
 - How information on services and how they can be accessed is structured around the needs of residents and communities
 - The cost and effectiveness of statutory public notices, and the opportunities to reduce expenditure
 - The importance of keeping information about services on the web site up to date, relevant and accessible
 - The use of social media in addressing the information needs of younger people
 - Consideration of the use of webcasting of committee meetings, based on public demand and cost/benefits
- 4.2 In relation to the broader issues about the future role of the communications function, the recommendations of the Grant Riches report set out a clear direction for future communications.
- 4.3 In summary, increased capacity for the central communications function will: enable more focus on strategic and reputation issues, boost skills and creative flair, develop marketing led campaigns, increase income, develop the website and intranet and help build a communications culture across the council and the primary care trust.
- 4.4 Cabinet is invited to endorse this approach for the future of the communications function, which is fully aligned to the shared services programme recently approved by Cabinet.

Community Impact

- 5.1 The commitment to engage in direct, regular and accurate communications with communities

underpins the priorities set out in Herefordshire's sustainable community strategy

- 5.2 The council and primary care trust provide several hundred different services to the people of Herefordshire. How the partnership communicates details of these services, and how to access them, has to be effective and reach as many individuals, families, communities and businesses as possible. The reach of Herefordshire Matters ensures that all households have equal access to information on service provision and marketing programmes to address health inequalities or behaviours that impact health and wellbeing, can be delivered more effectively as a result of this direct communication. Herefordshire's proposals for future production of Herefordshire Matters are fully in line with the governments draft new code of recommended practice on local authority publicity.
- 5.3 The recommended structure for communications is designed to position the team to influence more effectively the overall reputation of the council and the primary care trust, as well as how we communicate and engage with employees and deliver marketing campaigns to promote increased engagement, good community cohesion and the involvement of communities in improving services cost effectively.

Financial Implications

- 6.1 The findings of the scrutiny review echo those of the Grant Riches communications review in raising the issue of the overall cost of producing a high volume of publications, newsletters, brochures, flyers and leaflets in individual service areas. Both reviews identified the need for their production to be assessed and coordinated by a single professional source.
- 6.2 There are financial savings in channelling all the design and print work through the central communications unit because the external design agencies used by some service areas are considerably more expensive than the organisation's own design unit. In many instances, the communications unit will determine that the production of literature is not necessary and that the objective could be achieved more cost effectively through other communications channels. As overall spend on these communication activities will be monitored by the central communications unit, with the help of financial services, the cost benefits will be recorded.
- 6.3 Implementation of the recommendations in the Grant Riches review will deliver savings of approximately £150,000.

Legal Implications

- 7.1 The production of published material and the webcasting of council meetings, if undertaken in the future, need to take account of the laws and risks relating to defamation, advertising standards, data protection, intellectual property and other ancillary legal implications. The council manage these risks by ensuring that legal advice is sought in respect of its principal publications before they go to press and maintain a policy of insurance against claims for defamation and similar matters.
- 7.2.1 The restructuring of communications across the council and primary care trust will be implemented in line with the standards for managing the impact of organisational change.

Risk Management

8. The risk of not implementing recommendations is that the volume and cost of literature could remain inappropriately high, although measures have already been taken through the strict management of discretionary spend and the executive response to determine that all publicity material should be managed by the central communications unit.

Consultees

9. The response to the recommendations has consulted the head of customer services, the knowledge and web services manager and the head of partnerships (who facilitated the work of the review panel). The joint management team has endorsed the proposed executive response to the scrutiny recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Report of the Scrutiny Review of Communication with the Public About Services & Access to Those Services

Appendix B: Executive Response and Action Plan

Appendix C: Summary recommendations of Grant Riches review of communications

Background Papers

- None identified.