

Appendix A: Executive Response and Action Plan

Recommendation No. A	That the production of Herefordshire Matters should be reviewed to assess whether there is a more effective means of communication about public services			
Executive Response	<p>Herefordshire Matters is periodically reviewed as part of the communications strategy. Recent LGA reputation studies show that direct distribution of a citizen publication to every household is an essential part of communicating service information and managing reputation. Over 90 per cent of English councils publish a periodical. The fact that Herefordshire Matters is distributed to every household in the county, and, according to successive objective studies by the council's research team, enjoys very high readership figures, indicates that the publication is an effective and direct means of communicating with residents; however, there is always room for improvement.</p> <p>Every element of the production process for Herefordshire Matters was reviewed earlier this year and steps have been taken to reduce costs further. Value for money compares very favourably with other authorities – based on a recent benchmarking with 45 other authorities.</p> <p>Consequently the executive response is that the council and primary care trust should continue to produce Herefordshire Matters, which is valued by the majority of residents, but costs will be reduced and content and design impact improved.</p>			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
The communications unit has negotiated reduced costs on every element of Herefordshire Matters production	R Blower	Done	To reduce the cost of each edition by £2,500 (14 per cent) Four issues a year to be produced.	Done
Recommendation No. 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 taken to put things right.			
Executive Response	Established communication protocols already cite that if the council discovers for itself that it may be at fault in terms of the operation or delivery of its services, or its internal processes, then it will, through the offices of the communications unit, proactively tell the public what has gone wrong and what it will do to put it right.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Continue to ensure Herefordshire Matters conforms to house style and plain language and accessibility guidelines	R Blower	Ongoing	Herefordshire Matters is viewed as easy to read by residents	Ongoing
Articles for publication will include the opportunity to admit to errors if they occur and set out the steps taken to put them right	R Blower	Ongoing	Reflected in the next readership study of Herefordshire Matters	Editorially reviewed to ensure realistic expectations are set

Recommendation No. C	That 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.			
Executive Response	The need to 'under sell and over deliver' is an important value in terms of managing organisational reputation and this will be reinforced through all communications output, including Herefordshire Matters			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
To reinforce realistic messages through all communications channels	R Blower	Ongoing	Ensure the council sets realistic deadlines and expectations for service improvements	Ongoing
Recommendation No. D	That customer services should be requested to conduct a survey on the value of Herefordshire Matters 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 to Z of services			
Executive Response	The research team, which uses objective market research methodology and principles, periodically undertakes surveys on preferences for communications on public services and how to access them. Herefordshire Matters has regularly included an A to Z of services but also a life events structure. This is planned to be undertaken again in the Spring 2011 edition.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
The research unit has already studied residents' preferences for communications channels and their effectiveness (this will be undertaken again when budget permits)	R Blower	Done	To inform the communications strategy on how residents prefer to be communicated with	Ongoing
A to Z of services and life events guide to be produced as special edition (reflecting the residents' guide produced in Sept 2009)	R Blower	Spring 2011	Information on services produced in line with customer preferences	Mapping of life events services undertaken
Web site to reflect life events mapping of services	E Pawley	Apr 2011	Easier to find and access services online	Web site will use established structure and content
Recommendation No. 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			
Executive Response	All design and commissioning of leaflets, brochures, flyers, newsletters and other publications to be channelled through the central communications unit to determine whether they are really appropriate and if so are produced to cost, quality, deadline and brand.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Policy to be communicated to all council and primary care trust service areas as part of control of discretionary spend	JMT R Blower	Nov 2011	All design work channelled through communications – overall numbers of publications rationalised considerably and discretionary spend controlled	Communication on control of discretionary spend forwarded to all service areas

Recommendation No. F	That display of leaflets and publications at the Shire Hall, Hereford, is specifically prohibited and any visitors seeking information on services are referred to Garrick House			
Executive Response	Displays of customer service information to be structured using the life events format through the customer service centres and audit to be undertaken to rationalise where leaflets and publications are displayed. The customer service strategy already identifies the need to present service information around life events. Signposting is an important strand of the customer services strategy to ensure the information needs of residents are met.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Life events structure to be agreed for displays and of customer services to review quarterly the quantity of leaflets and posters in service centres	R Beavan Pearson R Blower	Apr 2011	Customers find it easier to locate service information they need	Life events structure agreed
Publications structured by life events and posted on the website and updated by service areas	E Pawley R Blower	Apr 2011	As above	Life events structure agreed
Recommendation No. G	That the provision of personal computers in libraries and customer service centres should be reviewed and a coherent policy developed for their use			
Executive Response	The policy for public access to the use of computers in service centres to be reviewed to ascertain whether more needs to be done to promote the facility to a wider range of customers (linked to review of services)			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Sustainable communities directorate to review policy (to be refreshed if required)	G Hughes	Apr 2011	To ensure that the facility is accessed by a representative range of customers	To be started
Recommendation No. 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 should be more effective and feasible.			
Executive Response	In line with the council's drive to reduce costs, it will seek the latest clarification on statutory obligations in terms of public notices and determine whether promotion through Herefordshire Matters or via the council website will meet requirements			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Public notices to be placed when statutorily required	R Blower	Jan 2011	Volume and cost of public notices to be materially reduced	To be started
Negotiate reductions in costs of placing public notices in local media	R Blower	Jan 2011	Cost/benefit matrix guide produced for service areas	Discussions with local media underway

Recommendation No. I	That the communications strategy provides evidenced guidance on the most effective communication channels for individual stakeholder groupings.			
Executive Response	The communications strategy incorporates, with evidence provided as far as is possible, reasons for the use of communications channels. This is be informed by national research and by previous Herefordshire research into stakeholder communication preferences (this was last undertaken in 2008 and other surveys have already determined internal stakeholder communication preferences).			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Continued research on effectiveness and preferences of communications channels to be undertaken within budget constraints	R Blower	Feb 2011	The communication strategy is informed by data on channel preferences and effectiveness	To be started
Recommendation No. 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.			
Executive Response	There is generic information available through the LGA reputation study (on which our communication strategy draws) which identified the most effective communication tools and residents' preferences. However, the research team periodically undertakes surveys on preferences for communications on public services and how to access them (this will continue but will be determined by budget pressures)			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Continued research on effectiveness and preferences of communications channels to be undertaken	R Blower		The communication strategy is informed by data on channel preferences and effectiveness	To be started
Recommendation No. 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.			
Executive Response	The communications unit will periodically request details of invoices for design and print suppliers to determine that service areas adhere to the new policy that all design and print is commissioned through communications. The joint management team has agreed to centralise communications resources to ensure there is maximum control of the quality, volume and cost of design and print output.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Regular reviews of communications, design and print spend in the service areas	R Blower	Quarterly Nov 2011	To reduce overall volume and cost of publications, while improving information on services	To be started

Recommendation No. L	That consideration is given to how a more corporate approach to communication can be effectively implemented.				
Executive Response	There exists corporate guidelines on communication and these include corporate identity guidelines, publications policies, the house style for the written word and plain language guidelines, and these are being supplemented by guidelines for customer communication through letters (in line with reputation management strategy)				
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress	
A recent review of communications will result in a strengthening of the central communications resource, while reducing overall spend	R Blower	Apr 2011	To ensure the corporate communications team has the capacity to implement the new requirements of the organisation	Implementation plan being developed	
That fresh promotion of corporate guidelines for communications be implemented – taking into account the new policy for channelling all print and design through the central unit	R Blower	Dec 2010	High awareness and acceptance of the need for corporate guidelines on communications	A suite of guidelines is available but this is being reviewed in line with new policies	
Recommendation No. M	That 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.				
Executive Response	News items are placed regularly on the council's website but statements are often produced in line with local newspaper deadlines.				
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress	
The website will continue to be updated with news items at least once a week	R Blower	Ongoing	Ensure news items are posted regularly on the website	Implemented	
Recommendation No. N	Service areas should again be reminded of the need to ensure their information on the website is updated on a regular basis.				
Executive Response	Continuing improvements in website design, content and interaction will be implemented as part of the Customer Focus work stream of Rising to the Challenge				
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress	
A promotion of the need to keep service information up to date on the website to be undertaken through internal channels	R Blower E Pawley	Dec 2010	Ensure service content on the website is clear, useful and up to date	To be implemented	
Recommendation No. O	That investigations into developing the use of social media for communications about council business and services should be explored as soon as possible as a key mechanism for reaching younger people in particular				
Executive Response	Social media is used to promote some services and work on a consistent policy and set of guidelines is underway – this work is undertaken as part of the Customer Focus work stream in the Rising to the Challenge transformation programme.				

Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Clear policies to be determined to ensure the council and primary care trust are able to use social media effectively, with confidence and in ways that support reputation	R Blower E Pawley	Jan 2011	The council and the primary care trust has protocols and mechanisms in place to enable better use of social media	Draft guidelines to be produced
Herefordshire Matters to be promoted online more robustly using social media	R Blower	Feb 2011	Online visits to Herefordshire Matters pages increase due to social media marketing	Draft guidelines to be produced
Recommendation No. P	That a trial webcast of a planning committee meeting should be undertaken, subject to the costs being reasonable.			
Executive Response	The use of webcasting to be explored, taking into account the experiences of other authorities, but due to the need to focus on savings and supporting frontline services, implementation cannot be afforded in 2010/11.			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
Experiences of webcasting to be explored with other local authorities	R Blower E Pawley	Feb 2011	To determine effectiveness of webcasting in public engagement	To be implemented
Recommendation No. 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			
Executive Response	See response to Recommendation P.			
Recommendation No. R	That the systems for recording expenditure on external publications be reviewed			
Executive Response	As part of the drive to control discretionary spend, the joint management team has determined that all design and print needs to be approved by the communications unit to ensure that it is needed, and adheres to guidelines on quality, cost and branding. Often other means of communicating service information, that will be more effective and/or costs less, will be used instead			
Action	Owner	By When	Target/Success Criteria	Progress
The policy on discretionary spend to be communicated to all managers and service areas	R Blower	Nov 2011	To reduce the overall volume and cost of publications, while improving information on services	Implemented