

Appendix B

Review of communications: recommendations

1. A review of the central communications function was undertaken in August 2010 by communication consultants Grant Riches. This was done at roughly the same time as the scrutiny panel review of how the council communicates information on services and how to access them. The findings were that:
2. The communications team is:
 - Hard working and generally doing the right things
 - Small when compared to similar local authorities and is over stretched
 - Implementing too many detailed strategies
 - Not impacting sufficiently at strategic level
 - Providing good internal communications but struggles to meet demands
 - Lacking in marketing and e-communications resource
 - Needs to meet increasing expectations of senior people
3. The communications team needs to be:
 - Evident at 'top table' to give advice and influence reputation
 - Focused on relationship management and building a communications culture
 - Enhanced to provide more capacity, skills and influence
 - Delivering a handful of influential campaigns
 - Generating increased income to supplement savings
4. Two important functions are missing:
 - Marketing resource to lead creative campaigns
 - Web and e-communications resource to ensure web and intranet are effective communication and engagement tools that support the organisation
5. In the current financial environment, the review found that maintaining other communications resources in other service areas was not viable and that significant savings could be made overall and invest in strengthening the corporate communications team to better deliver corporate priorities and major change programmes.

6. The review identified a number of posts outside of the corporate communications team that were engaged in media relations, communications, information, marketing, design or web development.
7. These posts are, to varying degrees, supported by their own budgets for design and print, advertising and other communications and marketing activity. The key recommendation of the review was to transfer the budgets associated with posts and activity in the service areas to create an improved corporate communications and marketing structure and resource

New structure for communications and marketing

8. The proposed new structure for a central communications and marketing team will deliver the following benefits:
 - Free up the head of communications to concentrate on strategic and reputational issues at senior level, provide high level advice, build effective relationships across the organisations, lead the communications and marketing strategy and develop the team
 - Boost the skills and creative flair of the central team, including marketing, new media and social marketing – building confidence across service areas
 - Create more management capacity to raise Herefordshire's national profile
 - Upgrade communication channels and develop marketing-led campaigns
 - Ensure team is able to devote time to working with directorate management teams and cabinet members, and build a communications culture across the organisations
 - Enable all design work to be channelled through the central team in order to control costs, quality and brand identity to support reputation (a communication to this effect went to all service areas in November 2010)
 - Increase income for advertising, sponsorship and design
 - Development of the websites and intranet to promote priorities and deliver improved communication and engagement
9. Although this will result in an increase in capacity and skills base of the corporate communications and marketing team it will reduce costs overall (and still result in a much smaller team than other benchmarked local authorities).
10. A recent benchmarking of around 40 other local authorities showed that Herefordshire is well into the top quartile in terms of productivity and output, whilst in the bottom quartile in terms of cost, indicating that the communications unit provides a value for money service.
11. Another key recommendation was to reduce the frequency of Herefordshire Matters to four issues a year. Also a DCLG consultation into local government publicity currently proposes that distribution of council magazines should be no more frequent than quarterly.
12. In parallel, the communications unit had reviewed every element in the production of Herefordshire Matters. The unit negotiated a new arrangement for Royal Mail to distribute to every household at the reduced cost of around £1,000 an edition, and a review of printing has reduced costs further by a further £1,000 per edition. Design and origination costs are also reduced down. Benchmarking with other local authorities demonstrated that the cost of producing Herefordshire Matters was very favourable, using all comparison criteria.

13. Importantly the executive response is to maintain Herefordshire Matters as a citizen publication delivered to every household, while further improving its focus, relevance and cost effectiveness.
14. The joint management team approved the recommendations to create an improved corporate communications and marketing resource, with the capacity to oversee the production of all published material to determine whether it is needed, and if so, to ensure that material is produced cost effectively, to deadline, quality and brand.
15. Summary of staff savings

Current staffing costs

Central communications team	£256,000
Other communication posts in the organisations	£165,000 (estimated)
Total	£421,000
Recommended central communications structure	£323,000
Potential staff saving	£98,000 (estimated)
Other savings from non-staff recommendations	£50,000 (estimated)