

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	19 th July 2007
Subject:	Improving the Council's Communication
Key Decision: (Executive-side only)	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Director of People, Performance and Policy
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Paul Osborn, Strategy and Business Support
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 - Service Specification for Communications

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report responds to the communications review presented to May cabinet and makes proposals for the future of the communications function within the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That Cabinet:

- (1) Agree the service specification for the communication function attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) Agree to vire the value of budgets identified in paragraph 2.8 into the corporate communications service.
- (3) Agree that the Corporate Director for Strategy and Business Support award a one year contract for communications in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support within the identified budget.
- (4) Agree that the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Business Support make any appropriate changes to the specification before the contract is let

- (5) Agrees to disband the Publications Panel with immediate effect
- (6) Agrees to set up an informal Communications Working Group with the same membership as the Publications Panel

REASON: To take urgent action to improve service capacity and performance.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

- 2.1 At the May meeting of Cabinet a review of the Council's communication service was presented. This review found that the Council was performing poorly in this area compared to other London authorities and has a low level of capacity in the communications team. It recommended drawing together resources which are dispersed across the Council into a new refocused corporate team. All the key recommendations of the review have been addressed in a new service specification for communications attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 This specification has been consulted on with staff, trade unions and the Publications Panel. Following the consultation the Portfolio Holder has agreed to seek external validation of the service specification and to defer any future publications of Harrow People until a new contractor has been appointed and prepared a business case. Furthermore the Panel recommended that all printing by the council for external audiences should be approved by the Communications Team. This requirement will be incorporated into the protocols to be developed by the new contractor.
- 2.3 In addition the review advised the Council to reconsider its vision. This recommendation has already been addressed through the Council's new corporate plan which was presented to June cabinet and is due to be considered at July Council.
- 2.4 The report recommends the disbanding of the Publications Panel and the setting up of a Communications working group. This recommendation has the full support and is commended by the Publications Panel.

The reason for this recommendation is to allow the members to have a broader role in the changing communications environment.

- 2.5 The council needs to make urgent progress to improve communications performance as strong communications support a number of key priorities and performance indicators. The service specification is designed to achieve this by:
 - building on the current permanent staff in the team.
 - bringing in additional capacity quickly from a specialist agency
 - letting a one year contract for the external support which allows evaluation of its effectiveness before the council decide on a longer term model of provision.
- 2.6 The communications function is not covered by EU regulations and the council will therefore select 4 organisations to bid for the contract in

accordance with council standing orders. These organisations will be evaluated against the councils specification.

- 2.7 One of the criteria for the successful organisation is that it can begin supporting the Council quickly. It is hoped to complete the tender process and have a contractor in place before the end of September 2007.
- 2.8 The existing budget for the corporate communications team is approximately £320,000. Following the review carried out by Westminster, a further exercise has been conducted to identify any communications budgets held by Directorates which can be centralised to increase this provision. Currently just over £650k has been identified across the council which will be vired into the new corporate service (£130k external printing, £485k brochures and publications, £50k urban living publicity). Further work is taking place to identify which existing commitments from these budgets still need to be delivered. When this is determined the service specification will be adapted accordingly. Any scope for savings from these budgets will also be determined through this exercise. The total provision for communications will also be considered as part of the development of the new medium term financial strategy.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Name: Myfanwy Barrett	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 28 June 2007		
Name: Jill Travers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 29 June 2007		

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Paul Najsarek, Director of People, Performance and Policy

Background Papers: Communications Review report to May 2007 Cabinet.

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES/ NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES / NO
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	