

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	26 th March
Subject:	Communications Plan 2009/10
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Paul Osborn, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communication and Corporate Services.
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1: Communications Plan 2009/10

1: Summary and Recommendations

This report identifies the need to extend the current one year communications contract to continue the improvement of the service.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Approve the attached Communications Plan which is subject to agreeing a contract with Westminster City Council.
2. Delegate to the Assistant Chief Executive the authority to enter into a contract.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To ensure the council continues to inform residents about its services and activities which will contribute to increasing their overall satisfaction and improving the council's reputation with key stakeholders.

2: Main Report

2.1 Introduction

The Communications Workplan will help the council meet its 2012 vision by informing residents about its improvement journey. This will be demonstrated through the three new corporate priorities –which provide the broad structure for the key communications campaigns.

The overall objective of the Communications Plan is to improve the reputation of the Council with residents and key stakeholders.

2.2 Options considered

The current contract has been in place for almost one year. A range of options were considered for the provision of communications in 2007 when a full review of the service was carried out and the results reported to Cabinet. The outcome of the review was that Cabinet agreed to let a one year contract to Westminster City Council.

Consultation was carried out on the three new corporate priorities with the Resident's Panel and Harrow Times 'Have your Say' survey. This now forms the basis for the Communications Workplan 2009/10. The draft version of this plan was unanimously agreed by the Communications Working Group – a cross party group of Councillors. The majority of Directors and Portfolio Holders have been asked for their feed back of the work done to date and the draft plan has been scrutinised through the officer led, Corporate Strategic Board.

For reviewing the contract, the council has considered a shorter and longer term options. The council is looking to sign a four year contract with a two year break clause which it could be exercise in 2011. This would provide both flexibility and a period of stability for both Harrow Council and Westminster City Council. Although the ultimate period of the contract will result from negotiations with Westminster City Council. The existing terms and conditions allow for a renewal for up to six years.

The council's main partners, the Police and Primary Care Trust, have been informed about the overall plan as well as holding more detailed discussions around specific joint campaigns.

2.3 Background

Westminster City Council were brought in from 1st October 2007 following a review of the communications function. After initially recruiting and embedding the new team, as well as drafting the 2008 Workplan, a one year contract was signed, dating from 1st May 2008.

2.4 Current situation

In consulting with Lead Officers and Councillors, December 2008, they stated that the improvement in communications was 'astonishing' and 'light years ahead of where they were'. The key outputs and outcomes are shown below.

2.5 Key achievements 2008/09

2.5.1 Internal Communications:

- Produced 6 editions of the newly launched staff newspaper 'the Arrow' and are on track to issue 12 versions of the revised CEX Newsletter.
- The team will have delivered 4 Manager's Forums and 12 Staff Forums.
- Created and event managed a brand new Staff 'CREATE' Awards to recognise and reward achievement.

- The team delivered four internal communications campaigns with one 'innov8' was commended for the Good Communications Awards.

2.5.2 Marketing:

- 15,000 free visits by young people for free swimming following a marketing promotion this summer.
- Produced seven editions of a refreshed Harrow People, which was shortlisted for CIPR Local Government Awards.
- Delivered 10 external marketing campaigns with the value for money sub-campaign being awarded 'runner up' in the Local Government Association's 'My Council' Awards.
- Launched a new public opinion research survey called the Reputation Tracker.
- Produced a combined A-Z and Council Tax Guide sent to all residents and a related version to all businesses.

2.5.3 Media:

- Doubled volumes of media coverage by focusing on key outlets that residents read, watch and listen.
- Achieved comprehensive regional and national coverage for stories ranging from 'banning' council jargon to the introduction of 'Lie Detector' technology to reduce benefit fraud.
- Increased informed rating for services and benefits by 2% and contribution to the rise in overall satisfaction by 8% (according to the November Reputation Tracker)

2.6 Why a change is needed

The Council has developed the 2009/10 Communications Workplan for the next year and now need to formally agree this in order to deliver the key objectives.

The full details are included in the appendix, however a summary of the main outputs and campaigns are outlined below:

- 12 external corporate/service campaigns (3 paid for with additional resources) and include staff engagement sections.
- 8 editions of Harrow People
- At least 2 editions of 'That' magazine
- 1 Adults magazine or a 'passport' style guide to activities
- A combined A-Z and Council Tax Guide sent to all residents
- 2 internal communications campaigns
- 6 editions of the Arrow and 12 CEX Newsletter
- 12 staff and 4 manager forums
- 2 Award ceremonies
- 3 Reputation Tracker Surveys (every four months)

- An average of 500 points per month for media scores, including one regional TV hit per week
- At least two hits in the top media targets every month.

Below is a summary of recommended campaigns by priority (each of which will have an external and internal element):

Priority	Goal	Campaign	Lead directorate	Portfolio holder
1	Behavioural and/ or perception change	Better Harrow Safer streets Clean streets	CEX Dept Environment Environment	Cllr Paul Osborn Cllr Susan Hall Cllr Susan Hall
2	Perception change	Value for Money Common sense Community cohesion Every Child Matters Adult well-being	Finance CEX Dept Community Children's Services Adults and Housing	Cllr David Ashton Cllr Paul Osborn Cllr Chris Mote Cllr Bednell/ Cllr Patel Cllr Macleod -Cullinane
3	Improve knowledge of service provision	Free swimming Recycling	Community Environment	Cllr Chris Mote Cllr Susan Hall
4	Promotion or event support	Planning Housing	Place Shaping Adults and Housing	Cllr Marilyn Ashton Cllr Macleod -Cullinane

2.7 Financial and Legal Implications

This plan can be delivered within approved budgets for 2009/10.

The existing contract allows for renewal of the contract by agreement for up to six further years. The proposed renewal complies with this and the council's Contract Procedure Rules. Therefore the council does not have to go through a full procurement exercise.

2.8 Performance Issues

The communications team will be measured against the following performance indicators. These will be regularly monitored through the Reputation Tracker and measured annually in the MORI Place Survey:

- Help improve by +5% the number of residents who are overall satisfied with the council (currently 58% in Nov 08 Reputation Tracker).
- Increase by +5% residents and staff informed about council services and benefits (currently 47% in Nov 08 Reputation Tracker 08 and 54% in staff survey 08).
- Increase by +5% the number of residents and staff who feel Harrow Council is getting better (currently 28% Nov 08 Reputation Tracker).

In order to achieve the above measures, the team will contribute to the following:

- Increase by +5% the number of residents who think the council provides good value for money.

- Improve service ratings by +5%, through campaigns that help improve service ratings or as agreed in our campaign plans.
- Increase the percentage of those who feel involved in local decision-making (from 22% to 30%).

2.9 Environmental Impact

Consideration has been given to ensuring that all publications are produced in line with recyclable materials. The corporate communications team will also, where appropriate, encourage staff not to print off publications such as the Chief Executive newsletter. The plan also seeks to promote a number of environmental projects including cleaner streets as well as recycling.

2.10 Risk Management Implications

The main risk is that the council fails to agree a contract. A separate but also significant risk is that the ongoing recession has a negative impact on resident satisfaction levels.

3. Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Sheela Thakrar	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 25/02/09		
Name: Stephen Dorrian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 23/02/09		

4. Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Tom Whiting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Divisional Director (Strategy and Improvement)
Date: 24/02/09		

5. Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Divisional Director (Environmental Services)
Date: 24/02/09		

6. Contact Details and Background Papers

Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive, 020 8424 5484

Appendix 1: Communications Workplan 2009/10 (attached)