
Report of the head of communications

Scrutiny Board (central and corporate functions)

Date: 4 October 2010

Subject: One council communications project

Electoral Wards Affected:

All

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To outline the 'one council communications' project, which is reviewing the current arrangement of communications functions at Leeds City Council and making recommendations for change.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Historically Leeds City Council has operated a decentralised approach to communications in that communications, PR and marketing functions have not been led by one single head of service.
- 2.2 Instead, a small 'corporate' communications team was established to lead on issues such as internal communications, the council's website, publications, a press and media relations service and most recently consultation and engagement responsibility and brand and reputation management.
- 2.3 At the same time directorates have been able to resource their own communications functions as they considered appropriate. For instance, in city development marketing teams were established in order to support the directorate's revenue generating activities particularly around the sport, leisure, culture and business and enterprise agendas. City development also retains a media relations function in order to generate coverage to support its marketing and campaign work. The council's 'creative arm' (graphic design staff) also resides under city development.

- 2.4 Other directorates have created their own communications support, but there has been no consistent approach. Job grades, descriptions, the size of the team and reporting structures vary wildly. In many cases, communications has been aligned alongside or within the directorates' performance and management functions.
- 2.5 As a consequence, a coherent and co-ordinated approach to communications does not exist and the council's communications professionals do not work together in a planned way to support the authority's overall priorities and outcomes.
- 2.6 Several attempts have been made to create a proper network for closer working, through the communications sub-board and more recently the communications group, but to date this has limited success. This is, in part, due to the need for those communication resources to support their directorate priorities rather than their time being prioritised across the wider the council.
- 2.7 During 2009 an audit of the council's communications functions was carried out. This highlighted many of the issues above. More recently, at the beginning of 2010, as part of the DECATS project, data was captured around the 'process' of PR, marketing and communications. It identified that the level of resource involved in PR, marketing and communications across the council. A subsequent workshop to look at opportunities for improvement and change suggested that there was an appetite for better co-ordination of PR, marketing and communication activities.
- 2.9 Now, against a background of decreasing resources in the public sector, it has been decided to look at the council's communications resource with a view to establishing a new corporately led arrangement that is more efficient. The review is now taking forward a proposition that a 'core' team of professionals would be established to provide support across the authority on matters such as internal communications, PR, reputation and brand management, publications, marketing and web, e-communications and social media. Support would continue to be provided to the directorates. Members of staff assigned to a directorate would have a professional line of responsibility, and report to a head of communications. Under this new proposed arrangement, future communications, where appropriate, would be campaign based, supporting the council's overall priorities and outcomes.
- 2.10 It is intended that the new working arrangements would be constructed to enable efficiencies to be delivered in response to public sector budget cuts between 2011/12 and 2014/15.

3.0 Background Papers

- 3.1 A copy of the project initiation document is attached as appendix one.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 Board members are asked to note the contents of the report and are invited to offer comment as appropriate.