
Report of the Head of Communications

Scrutiny Board (Corporate and Central)

Date: 7 February 2011

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 update the board on the progress of the 'one council communications' project, which is seeking to develop a new approach to the delivery of communications, marketing and PR functions at Leeds City Council.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 As previously reported to the board, historically Leeds City Council has operated a decentralised approach to communications in that communications, PR and marketing functions have not been led by a professional responsible for communications and marketing.
- 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 has 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, being closely associated with planning related activity.

- 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 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 with limited success.
- 2.7 During 2009 an audit of the council's communications functions was carried out. This highlighted many of the issues above. Several options for change were developed, including suggestions for two potential new council wide communication structures.
- 2.8 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 the level of resource involved in PR, marketing and communications across the council. From the DECATS analysis, we have identified 64.6 FTE posts that are currently deemed to be in scope of the project. The working intention is to seek to reduce this by approximately 25%.
- 2.9 Now, against a background of public sector budget reductions, it has been decided to look at the council's communications resource with a view to establishing a new corporately led arrangement. 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 senior officer who will be the professional lead for communications and marketing. Future communications where appropriate would be campaign based, supporting the council's overall priorities and outcomes.
- 2.10 The new working arrangements would be constructed to enable efficiencies to be delivered between 2011/12 and 2014/15, with the intention of maximising the delivery of efficiencies in 2011/12.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 Since members last considered the one council communications project in October 2010, a 'communications needs' assessment has been carried out in order that the requirements of each directorate are better understood. There are a few 'gaps' from this process, which require further investigation and clarification.
- 3.2 A list of staff in scope of the project has been drawn up and formal discussions with them are due to begin this month. Trade union colleagues were given an update on the project last month.
- 3.3 'Benchmarking' with other councils has taken place. Authorities from across the country have been kind enough to share their experiences and information about restructures that have taken place.

3.4 A 'model' for communications has been developed (attached as appendix 1).

3.5 A set of 'design principles' have been developed (attached as appendix 2).

4.0 Next steps

4.1 Consultation and discussion with staff will take place in order that their views about how the new communications model might be structured in future can be properly considered.

4.2 As highlighted earlier, 'gaps' in the communication needs assessment, where further detail about specific service needs is required, will be obtained.

4.3 A formal, future, staffing structure will be agreed and the allocation of roles and responsibilities will take accordingly.

5.0 Background Papers

5.1 There are no relevant, new background papers. Copies of the project initiation document were circulated to board members in October 2010.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Board members are asked to review the model (appendix 1) and the proposed design principles (appendix 2) and offer comment, or ask questions as appropriate.