



**Leeds**  
CITY COUNCIL

Originator: Louise  
Tonkinson  
Tel: 247 8895

## Report of the Head of Communications

To: Inner West Area Committee

Date: 22 June 2006

Subject: About Leeds evaluation 2005/06

**Electoral wards affected:**

All

**Specific implications for:**

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the gap

Council function

Delegated executive function available for call in

Delegated executive function not available for Call In. Details set out in the report

## Executive Summary

This paper provides an update for Area Management on the council newspaper, specifically issues surrounding the 2005/06 evaluation (citywide and responses from residents in West Leeds), financial contributions and advertising proposals.

### 1.0 Purpose of this report

1.1 To share the results of the About Leeds evaluation exercise for 2005/06 and inform Area Management of the proposals for 2006/07.

### 2.0 Background information

2.1 The council strives to be an open and honest organisation. Making sure that the people of Leeds are informed and can give their views is fundamental to the principle of good communications.

2.2 Last year, members requested that savings be identified in publicity and promotion across the council. As a result of this, in 2005/6, the corporate budget to fund the Leeds newspaper was reduced significantly (75%). Members commented that they fully appreciated the benefits and value of producing a council newspaper on a

regular basis. To ensure that the council continues to support this effective communications tool, members agreed to a proposal to generate sufficient income in order to produce four editions of the newspaper per year and to re-launch the newspaper.

2.3 In addition to departmental support, the corporate communications team agreed to supplement the costs of the newspaper by working to source income from advertising and partner involvement as part of the Development Department's Advertising Initiative Project.

2.4 In 2005/6, no charges were made to **any** area committees for their contribution to About Leeds.

2.5 Work has been undertaken to consider and respond to the area committee's feedback in order to position About Leeds as an effective means of communication for all area committees this year.

### **3.0 Evaluation results**

3.1 An evaluation of the re-launched newspaper was carried out by the Citizen's Panel in March 2006. The main findings of this consultation exercise follow.

#### 3.2 City wide results

- About Leeds ranked top (1<sup>st</sup>) in how respondents would prefer to receive information about the council (out of 10 methods listed). Local media ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, direct mail 3<sup>rd</sup> and service newsletters 4<sup>th</sup>.
- About Leeds ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in how respondents actually received information about the council. Other council newsletters were ranked 4<sup>th</sup>.
- 85% said About Leeds was clearly written.
- 85% said About Leeds was easy to understand.
- 85% said About Leeds was good value for money.
- 86% said the council should continue to produce About Leeds.
- 58% said they used About Leeds as their main source of information about the council. This compared with 68% who obtained information from the local media.
- 56% said About Leeds was their preferred method. 55% said that the local media was their preferred method.
- 70% of respondents with disabilities said they used About Leeds as their main source of information about the council.
- 66% agreed that the council should use advertising to help cover the costs of producing the newspaper.

#### 3.3 Results specific to West Leeds

- About Leeds ranked second in how West Leeds respondents would prefer to receive information about the council – 50%. Local media ranked 1st, direct mail 3rd and service newsletters 4th.
- About Leeds ranked second in how West Leeds respondents actually received information about the council. Other area newsletters were ranked 6<sup>th</sup>.
- 86% of respondents from West Leeds said About Leeds was clearly written.
- 78% of respondents from West Leeds said the articles were relevant to them (or had no strong views)
- 90% of respondents from West Leeds said there was a good variety of articles (or had no strong views)

- 45% of respondents from West Leeds said there was enough local area information
- 49% of respondents from West Leeds said they would like to see more local area information
- 59% of respondents from West Leeds said there was enough information on area committee/forum dates
- 20% of respondents from West Leeds said there was not enough information on area committee/forum dates
- 85% of respondents from West Leeds said About Leeds was good value for money.
- 85% of respondents from West Leeds said the council should continue to produce About Leeds (7% said don't know therefore only 8% thought the paper should not continue to be produced)
- 63% of respondents from West Leeds agreed that the council should use advertising to help cover the costs of producing the newspaper
- 26% of respondents from West Leeds said they would like to see local advertisements on area pages.
- 56% of respondents from West Leeds said they obtained most of their information about the council from About Leeds.
- 28% of respondents from West Leeds said they obtained most of their information about the council from area newsletters and mailshots.

## **4.0 Advertising**

- 4.1 In 2005/06, the advertising initiative project tested the interest and income generation in advertising in the newspaper. No income has been generated through the development department's advertising initiative to date however the corporate communications team have secured over £17,000 of additional income in 2005/06 to supplement the costs of production. The surplus made on this income is approximately £6,000, which has been used to fund the Citizen's Panel evaluation
- 4.2 The team has also liaised with other private sector organisations to negotiate more attractive reader competition prizes, for example Jet2 flights, win a digital camera and meet the Harlem Globetrotters to improve the publication's popularity amongst the readership. The Jet2 competition attracted over 600 entries from Leeds' residents.
- 4.3 In regard to the advertising initiative, despite no advertising being sold through this route, the council's advertising initiative manager in the Development Department has continued to actively seek advertisers. This has been done through:
- Direct mail to 1,000 Leeds based target companies – June 2005
  - Follow up telemarketing call to above 1000 target companies – July 2005.
  - Mailer to 63 companies who had shown interest – August 2005
  - Direct email to 150 companies – January 2006.
  - Direct email to 200 companies – March 2006.
- 4.4 Corporate communications have been advised by the advertising initiative manager that space cannot be sold in the newspaper without the commitment of a dedicated and experienced sales person. Conclusions of the officer report that 'selling space requires persistence in most cases to convert initial interest into sales' and a full time sales person would be required to sell space effectively.

- 4.5 Currently employing a full time advertising officer to sell space is not being considered. Corporate communications believe that the viability of the position and the product (newspaper) should be tested prior to making such a commitment.
- 4.6 A short term solution has been identified to trial an external selling agent, who would be responsible for selling a set amount of space in each edition. The council will set a level of income that must be generated in order to cover costs and make a profit. The selling agent will be responsible for negotiating sales above this cost in order to cover their fees.

## **5.0 Implications for council policy and governance**

- 5.1 Making sure that the people of Leeds are informed and can give their views is fundamental to the principle of good communications and is a key part of the council's corporate communications strategy 2005-8 and Council Plan. Both CMT and LMT have given their full support for the future of the newspaper as a key communications tool, having recommended greater department and area management involvement.

## **6.0 Legal and resource implications**

- 6.1 A review of the costs of paper, print, design and the associated procurement procedures took place, with new contracts awarded in summer 2005. This process will be repeated in 2006 to ensure a market competitiveness and best value service. Proposals to procure a selling agent over a trial period have been agreed by CMT, a contract in line with the associated procurement procedure, will be awarded as part of the above process.
- 6.2 The continuing contribution of resources from all departments, has been agreed by CMT in 2005. This contribution is essential to sustaining the future production of the newspaper. Without that support, there will be a significant shortfall in the budget, which commercial advertising could not fill alone.
- 6.3 CMT have agreed to renew their support for 2006/7 and recognize the need for relevant area management information to be included in future editions of the newspaper. This needs to be done in a consistent way, ensuring information is provided for all areas. Therefore contributions have been agreed to ensure all area information is included, without the need for specific financial contributions from area committees.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

- 7.1 Whilst commercial and partner advertising will go some way to covering the costs of four editions of the newspaper for 2006/7, it will be necessary for the corporate budget and departmental contributions to continue for 2006/07.
- 7.2 Area information from all areas of the city needs to be included in the newspaper and should be consistent in its representation. The financing of the newspaper for 2006/7 should ensure this happens.
- 7.3 A major research project into improving communications in local government, (Connecting with Communities), concluded that "Councils should ensure that local citizens are effectively consulted and communicated with so that they can significantly influence the quality and nature of services that they receive –

authorities must aim to empower local residents to do this". The council newspaper is one of the tools used to meet this expectation

## **8.0 Recommendations**

- 8.1 To note the positive results of the evaluation for the city and West Leeds and comment accordingly.
- 8.2 To acknowledge that in 2005/6, no charges were made to area committees for their contribution to About Leeds. It has been agreed that this arrangement will continue for 2006/07, with no financial contribution from area management.
- 8.3 To note the future proposals relating to advertising space within the newspaper.