

Report of the Director of People and Improvement

Improved direct communications with residents

Purpose of Report

1. Members have asked in the policy prospectus to look at a new approach to city management, involving extended public consultation arrangements, improved communications with residents (including the introduction of a monthly news-sheet), development of devolved decision making arrangements for local communities and capacity building for the voluntary sector.
2. Members gave approval in principle to a report on 24 July 2007 that concentrated on improving direct communications with the people of York by establishing a monthly council publication delivered to every household. The report investigated three different approaches to producing a new monthly publication and recommended members' approval in principle for one of those. It also sought members' approval to repeat the successful publication of an A-Z of council services delivered to every home.
3. Members agreed to the introduction of a free delivery, civic publication based on the management and distribution arrangements exemplified in Option 2b of the previous report - in principle, initially for a trial period of 10 issues, and subject to further work by officers to address the questions below. The communications case for introducing new publications has not been restated in this paper.

Questions addressed

Provide a detailed statement of the advertising budget transfers that will be implemented from Directorates to fund the publication and to ensure that savings of at least £29,000 pa accrue to the Council.

4. This question is addressed in annexe 1.

Provide further details of the steps that they propose to take to address the concerns of any residents who would prefer not to receive the new publication

5. The new publication would be designed to be an interesting and informative read. We would hope very few residents would prefer not to receive it, especially as it would be the council's primary method for communicating information of every sort, including that about refuse collection and other matters that affect every resident. However, for residents resolute about not receiving the publication it could carry the following paragraphs.

This publication contains information from the City of York Council and other organisations that you may find useful if you live or work in York. If you do not wish to receive this magazine in the future contact the Mailing Preference Service (MPS): Freepost 29 LON 20771, London W1E 0ZT, 0845 7034599 (local rate). More information is available on the MPS website www.mpsonline.org.uk.

Please remember that if you opt out of receiving the publication you may not receive important information, including job opportunities at the council and the chance to have your say on local services.

6. Should the publication be distributed by the Royal Mail, there is an opt out from the Door to Door service through its website which, could be publicised to residents for their use.
7. The publication would also be published on-line and it is feasible we could send it to residents who would prefer to read it that way. This can be done by establishing an email group and sending the document, either as pdf or a link to the council's website.

Provide further details and justification for the establishment of a full time publications assistant post

8. The staffing when the council last produced a monthly publication was two publication editors and a communications assistant who dealt with the internal publications as well (although at that time they were monthly as opposed to fortnightly as they now are). This set up allowed for production to continue during holidays, short periods of sick leave and other absences.
9. Using only one Media and Publication Officer to produce the publication (as is the existing establishment) would leave the council vulnerable to missing deadlines for the reasons outlined above. To this end a relatively junior full-time Publications Assistant has been proposed to make sure all possible gaps are filled and deadlines met. A part-time post at a more senior grade was originally mooted, but on discussion with the team it was felt this would not provide sufficient cover for illness and holidays. This member of staff would be required for all of the options in this paper that will result in a new publication.
10. The proposed Publications Assistant would also support the production of the A-Z and Streets Ahead, as well as the internal publications News and Jobs and News in Depth if possible. Work on the internal communications would also free up the Internal Communications Officer for more strategic work on areas of great internal communications pressure, such as the accommodation review and the pay and grading review.

Provide further information on the scope for increasing advertising income from other public service bodies and major companies in the City.

11. The council does not have the day-to-day experience to understand fully the advertising market in York. In other authorities that produce newspapers, advertising specialists have been employed in-house. The need to avoid doing this and to use pre-existing resources has been one of the main reasons behind seeking to work in

partnership with a local firm, who already have a full understanding of the advertising requirements of major employers and providers in the city, as well as the staff and expertise to sell advertising. The scope for external advertising is likely to be better realised working in partnership with a local firm than in competition with such firms.

Using the LGA if necessary, further explore the possibility of the publication being used to satisfy statutory public notice requirements

12. The LGA have been involved with the *Lifting the Burdens Task Force review of the department for communities and local government (CLG): housing and planning*. In February this year the report argued for the abolition of public notices altogether:

In particular, the task force recommends that CLG reconsiders the requirements on local authorities in respect of community engagement, in line with the emerging outcomes of the Lyons Review, requiring the preparation of a single strategy for community engagement rather than a number of separately developed processes. One burdensome statutory requirement this could address is the requirement for public notices, on issues such as traffic regulation orders, conservation orders and proposed planning developments, to be placed in local newspapers. Local government respondents have commented that considerable financial savings could be made if local authorities had greater freedom to use other publications, including their own newspapers and magazines.

13. The Cabinet Office has published *Making Government Communication Work from the Better Regulation Executive*. This looks specifically at the appropriate communication of statutory notices and asks whether local and central Government communication mechanisms are as effective as they could be given the changing way much of the population now seeks out and receives information. It primarily addresses the question of on-line public notices,
14. Both of these pieces of work have had the input of the LGA, but CLG has not yet responded.

Address the following concerns raised by the Shadow Executive -

the publication must:

- **ensure that job advertising was appropriate in terms of its status, geographic catchment and inclusivity**
 - **Should have regard to any adverse economic consequences of pursuing the option (2b).**
15. Marketing and Communications will make sure that all advertising is sensitive to local concerns and fully reflects the council's obligations in the areas of equalities and sustainability. Adverts that require a response from a larger geographic area (such as those in the national or trade press) will continue to be placed in the relevant publications.
16. Advice from the council's legal and procurement teams is that it is not appropriate to bring in the external economic effects on bidders within the evaluation criteria for

awarding contracts. The council's procurement strategy ensures that all evaluations are balanced and transparent, taking into account economic and sustainable responsibility as well as value for money.

Options

There are four options

- 1 Formal decision to go ahead with YLL for one calendar year as proposed in the previous paper
- 2 Go through a full OJEU procurement now, using either the open or restricted route
- 3 Re-tender, explicitly excluding recruitment advertising
- 4 Continue with existing arrangements.

These options are discussed in detail in annexe 2.

A-Z of council services

17. The council published a successful A-Z of council services in partnership with Your Local Link in January 2007. Quotations for producing a second A-Z were gathered at the same time as the procurement process for the new publication. The outcome of this process was that YLL were prepared to do an A-Z financed entirely by advertising and at no cost to the council. The Press quotation for an A-Z was for £25,000, but this excluded distribution that the council estimates at around £12,000, making a total of £37,000.
18. Members agreed on 24 July that an updated edition of the A-Z of Council Services be published towards the end of the year. However, there is a substantial amount of work needing to be done from the council to check the document and ensure all listings are correct. In order to meet the timescales this work needs to begin by late September 2007.
19. Option 1 would allow the newly appointed Publications Assistant to do this. Should members prefer another option marketing and communications would need to employ someone specifically to do this work in order to produce an A-Z. Unfortunately there is no budget available to do this, meaning that it would be a cost pressure for the Chief Executive's directorate. We estimate this work would cost in the region of £5,000.

Implications

- **Financial**

The council's corporate management team were supportive of the cost of the publication being removed from directorate budgets using a suitable formula based on advertising spending and other relevant factors. The formula would need to be

agreed with Directors to ensure the publication is financially viable and not a financial risk.

There is no agreed formula yet and it is feasible the costs of the publication may be greater than the opportunities to take back budgets from directorates, especially as spending on recruitment advertising decreases. It is therefore possible that there would be no budget to fund a publication in years to come unless through a new corporate recruitment fund.

- **Human Resources (HR)**

The publication would be overseen by one of marketing and communications three Media and Publications Officers. It will be supported by the other two Media and Publications Officers, with the publication's overall management the responsibility off the Media and Publicity Manager and the Head of Marketing and Communications. This will require these officers to adapt the way they currently work.

The new publication would require a Publication Assistant to liaise with printers, designers and advertisers as necessary. He or she would also assist on the editorial side, writing some of the publication, sourcing photographs, chasing contributors and checking copy. This is a specialist role and therefore would need to be a proposed grade of Scale 4. This is provisional subject to confirmation by Human Resources.

- **Equalities**

Advertising to every household will increase the opportunity for council adverts to be seen by wider groups, including (as the new publication will be delivered to all households in the city) all BME households.

The publication will be printed with the existing 'language box' which goes on all council publications. This has recently been expanded to include Polish.

As with the existing Your City taped versions of the publication will be available for anyone with a visual impairment. This will cost in the region of £2,000 pa, which has been included in the costings.

- **Sustainability issues**

The publication will be printed on environmentally friendly paper and will include a request that residents recycle it when they have finished with it. As stated elsewhere in this report, provision can be made for the publication to be emailed to those residents who would prefer that (although it would be designed to be read as a printed publication). This can be done by establishing an email group and sending the document, either as pdf or a link to the council's website.

The opportunities provided for improved communication on environmental issues could potentially outweigh any concerns with paper usage. For instance, if the council is able to increase its recycling rate as a result of being able to put the arguments for recycling to more people more frequently, than that changed behaviour might outweigh the environmental impact of the extra print.

- **Legal**

As with all council publicity, the new publication and the A-Z would be governed by the council's media protocol and by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Other legal advice pertaining to the procurement process and also public notices is contained in the body of the paper.

- **Crime and Disorder**

Improved communications with the people of York through a new publication could play their part in reducing the fear of crime and other perception issues related to crime and disorder.

- **Information Technology (IT)**

There are no IT implications in this report.

- **Property**

There are no property implications in this report.

- **Other**

All other implications have been covered in the report.

Risk Management

20. The options contained in this paper include partnership arrangements with private firms. There is a risk with any commercial arrangement with the private sector that their financial health is secure.

Consultation

21. The council's Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the options outlined in this paper.

Recommendations

22. Members are asked to agree formally to option 1.

Reason: On the grounds that it is the most economic option, with the most innovative approach and the best distribution guarantees.

23. If members do not agree to the appointment of a full time Publications Assistant who would also work on an A-Z, they are asked to note that should an A-Z still be required then the approximately £5,000 needed to employ someone to do this work would be a budget pressure for the Chief Executive's directorate.

Reason: To inform Members of an in-year budget pressure.

Contact Details

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Report Approved**Date** 12/9/07**Specialist Implications Officer(s)**

Financial – Patrick Looker
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Sustainability – Philippa Beardmore

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all***All****For further information please contact the author of the report**

Background Papers: None

Annexes (confidential):

1. Budget transfer issues
2. Options 1-4
3. Proposal from the York Press
4. Proposal from Your Local Link