

Report of the Director of People and Improvement

Improved direct communications with residents

Purpose of Report

1. This report asks for Members' approval to proceed with the production of a new monthly council publication designed to improve direct communications with residents. It asks for Members to approve a preferred supplier to work in partnership with the council, following an OJEU process.

Background

2. The Executive received a report on 24 July 2007 that looked at the evidence for a link between overall satisfaction with the council and the amount of information residents received about council services. Both indicators had been falling in parallel for some years. The report proposed addressing this situation through improving direct communications with the people of York by establishing a monthly council publication delivered to every household. The report recommended members' approval in principle for working in partnership with an outside provider supplying print, design and distribution, with the council supplying the editorial content. The publication would be financed through diverting the spending on some or all of the council's local recruitment advertising into the costs of production and distribution.
3. Approaches to seek a partner were made to local providers at the time of this first report, but Members, while agreeing to the introduction of a free delivery, civic publication, asked for officers to undertake an OJEU procurement process to award a two year contract in a subsequent report in September. This second report also answered members concerns about the constraints of establishing a new publication, responding to detailed questions relating to areas such as sustainability, distribution and finance.
4. Members especially raised the issue of how the funding would be moved from recruitment to the costs of the publication. The question of how a budget for a new publication should be arrived at, based on diverted recruitment advertising spend across the council, was addressed in Autumn 2007. Advice from Finance was that a budget could not be arrived at in advance of the full costs being known and therefore the procurement should proceed without specific agreement on that issue.
5. After advice from the procurement team a specification was drafted by the Head of Marketing and Communications with procurement support in January 2008. The

OJEU notice was published Friday 8 February and six responses had at pre-qualification questionnaire stage.

6. The party leaders were consulted about the Invitation To Tender (ITT) document via email on 18 March 2008 and a revised ITT was sent to party leaders on 10 April 2008 (please see Annexe 1 for the ITT).
7. All suppliers that responded to the PQQ were invited to tender, however only two responses were received – Newsquest and Your Local Link. Tenders from these firms were opened in presence of Cllr Steve Galloway 21 May.
8. The two bidders were invited to make a presentation on 20 June of their best options to the officer panel consisting of the Head of Marketing and Communications, the Corporate Marketing Manager and the Media and Publications Officer working on the present Your City. Also in attendance at the presentations were members of the procurement team, the Leader and Leader of the Opposition.
9. Owing to the complexity of the different options presented, and the different funding models from the two bidders with differing reliance on advertising, the evaluation of the bids took some time. However a conclusion was arrived at by 30 June and a paper presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to seek a budget (as this had not been agreed pre-procurement) on July 30. CMT agreed to establish a budget at this meeting.

Options

10. These are contained in confidential annexe 2. In accordance with the evaluation criteria outlined in the ITT the recommended options are Your Local link options A and C.

Evaluation

11. The effectiveness of any new publication in reaching residents will be evaluated throughout the proposed two-year contract:
 - a mechanism for feedback will be included in the publication itself
 - a local question will be included into the new Place Survey that replaces the Residents' Opinion Survey (resop) from this year. This question will ask the old resop local indicator "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of information provided by the council", which has shown a drop in line with overall satisfaction.
 - the new publication will also be assessed through the talkabout citizen's panel and through any focus groups the council may hold in the light of the Place Survey.
12. All feedback and research will be used to evaluate the progress of the new publication and make changes as appropriate.

Implications

Financial

13. The preferred option requires a budget of £60k to produce 12 issues a year. This would give the council 96 pages of editorial a year with which to communicate directly with residents, as opposed to the 16 pages currently available. In addition the option would allow for 24 pages annually of recruitment advertising to run adverts for locally recruited jobs, especially those that will be recruited to through job pools in the future.
14. CMT have agreed to create a budget to fund this option from existing resources. This would be based on a formula where the total budget would be recouped as follows: through an editorial charge of £24k divided between the six directorates; £20k diverted recruitment spend based on the percentage each directorate spent on local advertising last year (which was £123k in total); £10k diverted from the annual budget consultation spending which would be able to be run in the new publication in future; £6k from the existing Your City budget of £11k (which excludes distribution). £5k would be kept from this budget for photography and taping.
15. In calculating the costs to directorates a flat rate of £4k per directorate has been included for the editorial in the new publication. This is so as not to disadvantage the directorates who advertise most, when the publication will represent the council corporately and strive to include all directorates equally.
16. The costs to directorates would therefore be as follows:

Directorate	Editorial charge £ 000	Recruitment advertising charge £ 000 (based on percentage of total spend last year)	Total pa £ 000
Chief Executives	4	1.4 (7%)	5.4
Neighbourhood Services	4	1.4 (7%)	5.4
City Strategy	4	2 (10%)	6
HASS	4	5.8 (29%)	9.8
LCCS	4	8 (40%)	12
Resources	4	1.4 (7%)	5.4*
Totals	24	20 (100%)	44

*the costs of the annual budget consultation are met from a Resources budget and would need to be recouped from Resources in addition to this figure

Human Resources (HR)

17. The publication would be overseen by one of marketing and communications Media and Publications Officers supported by the press office, 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.

Equalities

18. The publication will be printed with the existing 'language box' which goes on all council publications. This has recently been expanded to include Polish. The wording explaining the availability of large print versions of the publication will also be included in a minimum of 14 point type.
19. 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 which will need to be met from the remnant of the existing Your City budget.
20. Advertising to every household will increase the opportunity for council adverts to be seen by wider groups than buyers of newspapers, including (as the new publication will be delivered to all households in the city) all BME households.

Sustainability issues

21. Sustainability was a key part of the ITT and weighted as part of the evaluation model. Both bidders' approaches to sustainability are therefore contained within the evaluation.
22. The publication will include a request that residents recycle it when they have finished with it. 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 file or a link to the council's website.
23. 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

24. As with all council publicity, the new publication would be governed by the council's media protocol and by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
25. Past legal advice is that public notices could not be included in the paper, although the situation will be monitored for changes in the position.

Crime and Disorder

26. 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)

27. There are no IT implications in this report.

Property

28. There are no property implications in this report.

Other

29. All other implications have been covered in the report.

Risk Management

30. 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

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

Recommendations

32. Members are asked to proceed with either Your Local link options A or C in accordance with the evaluation criteria outlined in the ITT.

Contact Details

Authors

Matt Beer
Head of Marketing and Communications
Tel: x1071

Chief Officer responsible for the report:

Heather Rice
Director of People and Improvement

For further information please contact the author of the report

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Financial

Sian Hansom
Head of Finance
01904 551745

Human Resources

Chris Tissiman
Head of HR Services
01904 551715

Legal

Suzan Hemingway / Quentin Baker
Former Head / Head of Civic, Legal & Democratic Services
01904 551004

Background papers:

Full evaluation model

Annexes:

1. ITT - Tender for the Provision of Design, publication and distribution of a Council Newsletter
2. Options received from bidders