

Item no

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **15 July 2008**

Report of: **Communications and Marketing Manager**

Subject: **Service Unit Performance Reporting - Communications and Marketing**

Ward: **All**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Members on the performance of the communications and marketing unit.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 In preparing this report I have consulted with the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Engagement and Communication and with staff within the unit.

3. Background

- 3.1 The report provides an update on the progress of the unit which includes in its range of services:
- internal and external PR communications
 - communication planning and support
 - copywriting, design and photography services
 - event management
 - advertising
 - website support.

The unit operates across the council engaging with all services to support and publicise their activities and to promote the council's key corporate objectives.

4. Position statement and communications and marketing unit activities

- 4.1 The unit's 2008/09 plans have been significantly affected by the impact of the local government review (LGR).

Capacity has been reduced due to the departure of the administration officer to another post within the council. In the light of LGR and following review of the work in the unit, a replacement is not being sought. Some duties have been delegated to the unit's communications and marketing officers and where possible some tasks are being undertaken by other departments.

- 4.2 Local government review

The council's communications unit continues to publicise locally, plans for unitary governance to increase the understanding of staff, residents and other stakeholders about the transition process and the impact of organisational change.

The manager, as joint lead on the LGR programme communications and marketing workstream, has an extracurricular role coordinating the input of colleagues from Durham County and District councils to:

- publicise the transition process promoting the benefits of unitary reorganisation to internal and external audiences
- develop and manage a range of milestone projects on
 - unitary communications function proposals and a new communications strategy
 - branding proposals for the council
 - countywide website, intranet and new media proposals
 - residents newspapers and magazines and other key publications
 - media protocols
 - unitary service divisions marketing plans
 - day 1 launch plans.

4.3 District of Easington community engagement

The unit has led recruitment of four hundred residents to the council's new Community Advisory Panel providing local people from communities right across the whole district the opportunity to have a say on council services, issues affecting their daily lives and the neighbourhoods they live in.

A consultation programme has been set up and the first newsletter has been distributed to new members.

4.4 Media relations activity

Media activity and coverage is monitored daily in the unit and analysed at the year end. Last year there was a general overall increase in activity and the level of 'positive' coverage was improved.

The number of news releases issued by the communications unit was up 27% on the year. The number of media enquiries received was up over 38%. This reflects a significant growth in interest in council activities and the impact of a proactive stance on media relations.

Update on media relations Local Performance Indicators for the unit

Local indicators	Target 2007/8	Actual 2007/8
Volume of articles and positive tonality of media coverage	V 1,550 T 55%	V 1826 T 55%
Number of news releases produced annually	210	210
Media calls dealt with same day	95%	95%

There was intense media interest in the district during the year with national newspapers reporting on the new Centre for Creative Excellence film studio, the Seaton Carew ("canoe man") case and the Martin Abrahams (political cash donations) stories.

Local newspapers however – the Sunderland Echo, Peterlee Mail and Northern Echo – account for 75% of all coverage achieved.

'Pride in Easington' activities continue to boost positive local coverage of council environmental issues. 'Pride' has also stimulated increased positive

coverage in the arts, sport and East Durham Homes as well as the activities of partners, community enterprises and through the 'Pride in the Easington' annual awards, the achievements of individuals.

Media coverage of regeneration activities is significantly higher year on year.

Radio coverage of District stories was monitored last year and over 100 minutes have been broadcast mainly through Durham FM, BBC Radio Newcastle and BBC Radio Cleveland. With typical radio soundbites lasting 30 seconds this amounts to Easington receiving airtime/mention on air more than 150 times.

All council news releases are placed on the home page of the council's website. The BBC website is also monitored and we received a reasonable amount of news coverage on this national site during 2007/08 with 38 stories listed.

For the first time this year we have assessed the overall value of newspaper editorial coverage of council services, activities and events. Based on the equivalent cost of advertising space in the various publications, all coverage achieved would have cost the council an estimated £750,000.

5. Service Plan

- 5.1 The unit continues to adhere to the key principles and tasks outlined in our 2007/08 service plan and to provide full communications support for all council activities including the key priorities outlined in the council's Transitional Plan for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

We embrace new communication tasks and audiences as appropriate and apply equality and diversity principles to all of our work.

The unit also collaborates on projects with other linked organisations. We have for instance, produced in association with the LSP, a 'Welcome to the district' pack providing information and support to newcomers to our district. The pack also includes things migrant workers new to the UK need to know.

We worked closely with the Community Safety Partnership, police and other government agencies publicising successful district 'milkshake' enforcement operations that resulted in a significant number of arrests and through the related community focus, gave reassurance to law abiding residents.

6. Budget

- 6.1 Expenditure against the unit's overall 2007/08 budget of £247,760 showed a modest underspend at the end of the financial year.

7. Implications

- 7.1 Financial, Legal, Policy

All work in the unit complies with the *Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity*. There are no financial, legal or policy implications arising from this report.

- 7.2 Risk

Unit risks are detailed in the unit's Service Plan and on the Risk Register.

7.3 Communication

There are no communication implications arising from this report.

8. Corporate Implications

8.1 Corporate Plans and Priorities

Communication and marketing activities support all of the council's key corporate priorities. At a corporate level there are also overarching principle aims for the service i.e. protecting and enhancing the corporate reputation and improving perceptions of the District. These aims echo and contribute to meeting the communication core action requirements of the LGA Reputation Campaign that the council is signed up to.

8.2 Equality and Diversity Implications

All media material generated within the unit reflects the council's equality and diversity statement, policy and procedures recognising diversity in our existing and developing community.

8.3 E-Government Implications

There are no implications attached to the report.

8.4 Procurement Implications

There are no implications attached to the report.

9. Recommendation

Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the work of the communications and marketing unit and note the progress made.

Background papers/documents referred to:

Unit files
Service Plan
Communication Plans