

Item 6

REPORT TO CABINET

11 NOVEMBER 2004

JOINT REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

Welfare and Communications Portfolio

EXTERNAL/EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report summarises the details of the proposed External and Employee Communications Strategies attached at Appendix 1 and 2 for consideration by Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 The proposed strategies at Appendix 1 and 2 are considered and approved by Cabinet.
- 2.2 The Employee Communications Strategy be reported to the recognised Trade Unions via the Joint Consultative Group.
- 2.3 The External Communications Strategy and the Employee Communications Strategy be reported to the Performance Improvement Group and Cabinet.
- 2.4 The current secondment arrangement in respect of AN economic Development Officer be extended until further notice and the Head of Strategy and Regeneration considers any resulting implications for SBBS.
- 2.5 Additional funding of £11,000 be met from contingencies to fund the customer and staff surveys, staff and elected member training and the production of guides and publicity material as identified in the action plans.
- 2.6 The proposed employee recognition schemes be the subject of a separate report to Management Team.

3. DETAIL

Background Information

- 3.1 Recent external assessments of the Council (IDeA Fit for Purpose Assessment, SOLACE Peer Challenge, Investors in People Reassessment, CPA) have all identified communications as an issue in need of improvement. In addition, the internal Best Value Reviews of Consultation and Community Involvement and Human Resources also identified this as an area in need of improvement. The issues raised can be broadly categorised into:

- External Communication with Stakeholders
- Internal Communication with Employees

External Communications Strategy

- 3.2 The proposed strategy at Appendix 1 was prepared by Democratic Services in consultation with key officers and the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications. The strategy is externally focused in order to ensure that effective communication takes place between the Council and all its stakeholders and will underpin the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan. It addresses the findings of the CPA report, which highlighted communication with the community as a weakness.
- 3.3 Effective external communication is essential if the Council is to fully engage with all stakeholders and the overall aim of the strategy is to:
- Manage external communications in a timely manner in order to promote the Council's key ambitions and enhance its reputation as a provider of high quality services.
- 3.4 To achieve the overall aim the strategy identifies the following three key objectives, each supported by an action plan:
- Develop a sense of corporate identity and the consistent application of key messages
 - Raise public awareness of the Council's role as a provider of services
 - Determine the most cost-effective communications channels for providing access and service to each customer group
- 3.5 The Democratic Services section will be responsible for implementing the External Communications Strategy. This will be achieved through the action plan which will be monitored on a six monthly basis by the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications via the Performance Improvement Group and Scrutiny Committee 1. Success of the strategy will be tested via an annual survey issued to a cross section of stakeholders.

Employee Communications Strategy

- 3.6 The proposed strategy at Appendix 2 was prepared by the Human Resources Section in full consultation with the corporate and departmental Investors in People working groups and the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications. It addresses the findings of the various external assessments, the annual staff survey and the requirements of the forthcoming Information and Consultation Directive (April 2005), and will underpin the Corporate Plan, Workforce Plan and Human Resources Strategy.
- 3.7 Effective internal communication is critical to improved performance management and successful change management and the overarching aims of the strategy are to:
- Ensure a commitment to two-way communication with all staff, particularly those at the frontline.
 - Develop and maintain a culture of effective communication

- 3.8 The strategy introduces a two-way corporate communication framework that builds on existing performance management arrangements and other existing positive aspects of internal communication. These should become an integral part of the management arrangements in each department.
- 3.9 Clarification of specific communications duties and responsibilities of managers and other officers are clearly set out in the strategy together with a quick reference guide.
- 3.10 Both the IDeA Fit for Purpose Assessment and the liP reassessment identified that the Council needs to consider ways of ensuring staff at all levels feel valued, and that, in particular the Chief Executive Officer and Directors should consider their involvement in praising achievement. This has been addressed by the proposed 'Going the Extra Mile' Scheme'(GEM) and 'Long Service Awards,' which will be the subject of a separate Management Team report.
- 3.11 The Human Resources section will be responsible for implementing the Employee Communications Strategy. This will be achieved through the action plan, which will be integrated into the HR Strategy Action Plan. In accordance with the approved monitoring arrangements for the HR Strategy, progress will be monitored on a six monthly basis by the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications via the Performance Improvement Group and Scrutiny Committee 1. Success of the strategy will be tested via the annual staff satisfaction survey.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Resource implications are clearly identified in the action plans contained within the proposed strategies at Appendix 1 and 2 of this report. Both action plans identify a significant contribution from current staff based in the Democratic Services and Human Resources sections. Both sections are already committed to existing priorities and do not have sufficient spare capacity to effectively progress these actions.
- 4.2 To address this it is proposed that the existing secondment arrangement in respect of an Economic Development Officer be extended until further notice. This will cost an additional £5361(per annum).
- 4.3 The External Communications Strategy identifies training requirements for both officers and elected members, production of a number of guides and an externally facilitated survey, at a total cost of £8,000, for which there is currently no budgetary provision. The cost associated with the Plain English campaign can be met from existing budgets.

The Employee Communications Strategy identifies a requirement for a reference guide and an externally facilitated staff satisfaction survey at an approximate total cost of £3000 for which there is no current budgetary provision.

5. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Both strategies have been assessed by the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment Team and are in line with the Council's corporate Equalities Policies.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The External Communication Strategy was prepared in consultation with key officers and the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications.
- 6.2 The Employee Communications Strategy was prepared in full consultation with the corporate and departmental Investors in People working groups and the Lead Member for Welfare and Communications. Following discussion at Management Team the proposed strategy will be taken to the Joint Consultative Group for formal approval by the recognised Trade Unions.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Following Cabinet's consideration, this report will be subject to normal Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements.

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - External Communication Strategy
Appendix 2 - Employee Communication Strategy

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Ward(s) Contents are not ward specific.

Key Decision Validation Will involve expenditure which exceeds current budget. Will not directly impact on more than two wards in the Borough.

Background Papers

Corporate Human Resources Strategy
Investors in People Assessment Report – October 2003
Staff Satisfaction Survey 2002
Comprehensive Performance Assessment Final Report March 2004
IDeA Fit for Purpose Assessment

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Council's Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Council's S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>