

# Item no

Report to: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **9 October 2007**  
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 introduction to and 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

3.2 The unit operates across the council engaging with elected members and with all services to support and publicise their activities. Its principle responsibilities are:

- protecting and enhancing the council's reputation
- improving perceptions of the District of Easington
- improving council/public involvement
- raising awareness of the council and encouraging uptake of its services.

Delivery of these involves leading the development and delivery of marketing and communication campaigns related to the council's corporate objectives and service delivery programmes.

## **4. Position Statement**

4.1 The Unit's 2006/07 service plans were hampered and affected by unexpected changes to two Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with East Durham Homes and Easington Primary Care Trust (PCT) and by the impact of the local government review.

- 4.2 Up until October 2006 the unit provided communications and marketing support to East Durham Homes (EDH) under an SLA. As part of its need to create a clearer identity, East Durham Homes terminated the SLA in September 2006 and appointed its own communications manager. The agreement was reinstated in January 2007 for three months to provide temporary support following the departure of EDH's communications manager.
- 4.3 After extensive consultation across County Durham the regional NHS Strategic Health Authority announced in 2006 that all PCTs in County Durham were to merge and on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 Easington Primary Care Trust ceased to exist. The PCT's SLA with the council ceased to exist on that date.
- 4.4 Negotiations with both organisations on new, improved SLA agreements were to allow increased resources for the communications and marketing unit to help it cope with the overwhelming volume of work being generated by these organisations. The terminations mean that the unit continues with its current resource – a manager, two communications and marketing Officers and a communications and marketing assistant.
- 4.5 The Unit's 2006/08 plans have also been significantly affected by the continuing impact of the local government review. The unit is at the forefront of the Durham Districts' communication strategy leading the campaign against the imposition of a single unitary council for County Durham, managing the preparation of the six Durham Districts' Bid and supporting documentation and providing public relations support for the Durham District Councils' Forum.
- 4.6 Although the review in particular has affected the unit's overall service plan delivery, in terms of achievements over the past year the unit has:
- increased the council's media information output raising the level of positive coverage of the council and for part of the year, that of EDH and the PCT and their activities
  - supported EDH through a difficult period of performance criticism and management changes which threatened the company's reputation
  - developed effective dialogue with council service departments and with Members
  - worked to improve the quality of marketing/communications material across all three organizations
  - supported the development and enhancement of the council's website and launch of the public kiosk information facility
  - supported the successful launch and continuing promotion of the Pride in Easington campaign
  - provided for seven months of last year a comprehensive communications and marketing service to Easington PCT that included managing the Trust's internal and external communication activities, health care reports, news letters and publicity material production and providing support for health promotion team programmes.

## **5. Slippage**

- 5.1 Due to operational issues outlined above some Service Plan initiatives are subject to delay including:

- creation of a corporate media policy offering clear guidance to Members, management and staff about the importance of good media relations and how these can be achieved
- review of the Council's Communications Strategy. The existing strategy is outdated and doesn't reflect current communication planning/activities
- review of the council's Styleguide. The council's corporate identity is well established and respected and the review is intended to ensure that the positive image of the council is maintained.

Further work on these projects will be subject to the outcome of the Local Government Review.

## **6. Communications and marketing unit activities**

### **6.1 Media**

Over half (53.2%) of survey respondents in last year's BVPI satisfaction survey reported that their main source of finding out about the council was 'information provided by the council' while 14% identified local media as their source.

Media coverage of the Council, its achievements, successes and other publicity or marketing information is monitored and recorded daily by the Communications and Marketing unit. In the year to end of March 2007 local and regional newspapers carried 1355 articles about the council and its activities – a 21% increase on the previous year. Of these 60% were positive stories – 13% were negative.

The unit prepared and distributed 165 council news releases plus, up to the end of our involvements, 52 EDH stories and around 20 PCT announcements. The local government review has generated over 20 news releases prepared and distributed by the unit on behalf of the Durham District Councils' Forum.

### **6.2 Community engagement**

When last asked in 2004 about key sources of information about the council, 70% of residents named Infopoint. Local newspapers drew only a 47% response. Infopoint remains a very important communication channel for the council and its quarterly publication and distribution is a vital ongoing task.

Plans to review the design, content and frequency of Infopoint are on hold pending outcome of the local government review.

### **6.3** As well as reading about the council it is important that District of Easington residents have the opportunity to influence local decisions and services. Some already tell us what they think at council meetings, councillor Ward surgeries, at our quarterly Area Forums and via our public information kiosks. Their ideas help to shape and improve council services.

As part of the Council's community engagement approach a Community Advisory Panel is being recruited so that local people can give their views on council services, issues affecting their daily lives and the neighbourhoods they live in.

The unit is leading on the tasks of creating the 1,000 strong panel of people of all ages from communities right across the whole district to involve more residents in our work and developing a website consultation facility.

#### 6.4 E-government

The unit was responsible for two Priority Service Outcome Projects:

- G03 – Improving citizen engagement via website e-mail & SMS (Telephone texting) facilities to create better opportunity for customer and community participation and response to consultations and decisions on matters of public interest.

Delays in finalising a national project software solution frustrated the completion of this project. Its positioning as a key element within the council's broader community engagement approach has had some impact on progress but recent development work will see the project come to fruition within the next two months.

- G04 – Enriching the council's website by introducing multimedia content to broaden access to the council and its services, improve the quality of information and present it in more accessible ways for everyone
- An internet media player featuring multi-media content similar to the video content broadcast on the LSP Community TV network across the district has been added to council website facilities. This, along with other website developments like the 'Browsealoud' facility has been added to the council site enabling website content to reach a wider audience including those with low literacy levels, an aging population and those whose first language is not English.

#### 6.5 Performance indicators

There are no official Performance Indicators for the unit – only local indicators

<b>Local indicators</b>	<b>2006/7</b>	<b>Target 2007/8</b>
Volume and positive tonality of media coverage of council activities	V 1,355 T 59%	V 1,550 T 55%
Number of news releases produced annually <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council</li> <li>• East Durham Homes (actual up to June 2007)</li> </ul>	165 43	210 9
Media calls dealt with same day	95%	95%

Media enquiry targets are being met and the number of news releases being produced is on track. Tonality of media coverage is yet to be assessed.

### 7. Budget

- 7.1 The unit operates within a budget of £60,000 which has been unchanged for the past five years reflecting prudent management and continuing

success in driving down costs. The bulk of the money funds the production and distribution of Infopoint.

- 7.2 The unit also has access to a special drawdown facility of £100,000 set up three years ago. This provides funding for promotional activities that support the corporate plan and aim to raise people's perceptions of the council and improve its reputation.

Funding has been provided for instance to promote the district annual music festival, the summer activities programme for children and a council presence at the Peterlee Show and Seaham Carnival promoting a range of local services.

The drawdown balance at 1st April 2007 was £54,000.

## **8. Forward plans**

- 8.1 Managing ongoing communication activities and making progress on initiatives in the unit's annual plan is the priority. These include:
- 8.2 Reputation – according to MORI people who feel the council keeps them well-informed are much more likely to believe that they are getting value for money. The communications and marketing unit has a role in creating council publicity material that is well targeted, suitable and accessible, accurate and relevant and that reflects council values and policies. The unit will ensure that the council meets the criteria of the LGA Reputation Campaign – a programme of actions concentrating on the grassroots issues that affect all our residents - local environmental services and strong two-way communication.
- 8.3 Media Policy – The council values its relationship with the media and has built good associations over time with local journalists. Developing a clear media policy and protocols will guide and strengthen our partnerships.
- 8.4 Young People – Proposals for a programme of events and initiatives aimed at extending the Council's work around engaging with young people have been outlined. The Unit will support the promotion of these activities including the forthcoming local democracy week.

## **9. Implications**

- 9.1 Financial, Legal, Policy

There are no financial, legal or policy implications arising from this report.

- 9.2 Risk

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

- 9.3 Communication

There are no communication implications arising from this report.

## **10. Corporate Implications**

- 10.1 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.

10.2 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.

10.3 E-Government Implications

There are no implications attached to the report.

10.4 Procurement Implications

There are no implications attached to the report.

**11. Recommendations**

Members 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