

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
16TH FEBRUARY 2010**

Report of the Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

ITEM 10 COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE REVIEW

Purpose of Report

To consider the comments and recommendations of the Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, following its consideration of a report in respect of the Communications and Consultations Team, at its meeting held on 2nd December 2009.

Policy Context

Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 7(b) sets out the procedure by which a Scrutiny Committee may comment on matters within its terms of reference.

Background

On 2nd December 2009, the Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee considered a report in respect of the Communications and Consultations Team. A copy of the comments and resolutions in respect of the matter is attached as Appendix I.

Financial Implications

Should any further action be required, then a full report setting out Financial Implications will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Risk Management

Should any further action be required, then a full report setting out Risk Management will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Key Decision: No

Background Papers: None

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APPENDIX I

COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2ND DECEMBER 2009

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONSULTATION TEAM - SERVICE REVIEW

A report of the Director of Partnerships and Customer Services was submitted (item 7 on the agenda). The report informed the Committee of how the Council was promoted in the press and other work undertaken by the team and made reference to the Service Review currently taking place for the Communications and Consultations Team. The Charnwood News Winter Edition was tabled at the meeting for the consideration of the Committee.

At the request of the Committee, the Cabinet Lead Member, Councillor Lewis attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of the item.

The Director of Partnerships and Customer Services attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of the item.

Comments by Councillor Lewis, Cabinet Lead Member, by way of an introduction to the item were made as follows:

- Members of the team had recently moved to new employment and because there was a Service Review underway those posts remained vacant.
- In respect of Charnwood News:
 1. Officers were addressing the issue of it being Loughborough centric;
 2. Copies could be included in information packs by employers in the Borough when advertising job vacancies country wide;
 3. A theme was chosen for each edition, for example the next edition would focus on Young People.
- In respect of media relations, it was important to build good relations with both the Loughborough Echo and the Leicester Mercury.

The following issues were raised and comments made by members of the Committee:

- (i) In respect of Charnwood News, the language used should be clearer and aimed at what local people were doing. It should not be party political, or focus on the work of the Council.
- (ii) There should be more information about all areas of the Borough in Charnwood News, with possibly a centre spread with details of events in villages.

- (iii) Charnwood News should be used as a vehicle to promote the work of the Council, other publications, for example the Loughborough Echo, reported the activities of residents.
- (iv) Further consideration should be given for Charnwood News to have a mixture of information from the Council to residents and a forum for residents and residents groups.
- (v) Residents could be emailed on a regular basis with a summary of press releases to make this information accessible to the public. That would provide an opportunity to reach more people.
- (vi) Twitter could be used as a means of communicating with residents.

In response to questions, S. Phipps stated:

- (a) There was a procurement process for the printing of Charnwood News. The matter went out to tender and was judged against the specifics of the Council's requirements.
- (b) There was no reading age that the language in Charnwood News was written for. It was pitched at an average level of English.
- (c) It was Council policy not to include advertising in the Charnwood News. Initially that had been tried in an attempt to offset costs. However, it had proved difficult to sell advertising space and the Cabinet had decided that the publication be advert free. However, work with partners was advertised.

Councillor Lewis suggested that if members of the Committee wished to discuss the content of Charnwood News further, he was happy to meet with them on an informal basis.

RESOLVED

1. that the use of twitter and other technology be examined as a means of communication;
2. that further consideration be given to the content of Charnwood News and the balance in content between the work of the Council and other matters of interest involving communities, groups and individuals through out the Borough;
3. that in respect of Charnwood News, further consideration be given to the style of language used;
4. that consideration be given to emailing news letters to Members and the public outlining major press releases;

5. that the Service Review in respect of the Communications and Consultations Team be submitted to the Committee for scrutiny, prior to its submission to Cabinet.

Reasons

1. Modern technology allowed for greater accessibility to Council information by many members of the public. Such technology had no costs attached to it and was successfully used by other Local Authorities and Government Departments.
2. Further consideration should be given to the content of Charnwood News, whether it should be solely a means of the Council communicating with residents in respect of promoting its services, or should include community news and publicise community events.
3. To ensure that Charnwood News was produced in a style to encourage wide readership.
4. To provide information in respect of press releases to a wide audience in a convenient manner.
5. To give the Committee the opportunity to submit comments to Cabinet, when the Cabinet considers the Service Review.