

Subject: Communications Strategy

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 26th January 2011

Report of: Head of People and Policy

Portfolio

Holder: Finance and Resources

Key Decision: Yes / No

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To agree the revised Communications Strategy, this has previously been considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Full Council on the 15th December 2011.
- 1.2 To agree as part of the revised Communications Strategy the cessation of the Council News Letter Rossendale Alive, with effect from 1.4.2011 in preference of other forms of external communication and engagement.
- 1.3 To agree the arrangements for the Council News Letter Rossendale Alive, for March 2011.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-
- Delivering quality services to our customers
 - Promoting the Borough
 - Providing value for money services

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendations in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- **Council Reputation** - Effective communications play an important part in maintaining the Council's reputation. Ceasing to produce the Rossendale Alive newsletter carries the risk that the Council will have less direct influence over the messages that local people receive about the Council.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Council's Communications Strategy has been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Policy and the Full Council in light of the medium term financial strategy, but also in recognition of the need to explore ways in which the Council can improve the way it communicates with its residents.
- 4.2 As part of the review, production arrangements in relation to Rossendale Alive have been reconsidered and Members have indicated cessation of the publication in preference of other forms of communication and customer engagement.
- 4.3 Cabinet had initially agreed to changes in the production of Rossendale Alive in October 2008, which included booking distribution slots 6 to 9 months in advance, distribution using a combination of Royal Mail full sector coverage delivery to 28,313 households and Direct Mail postal copies to 1,988 households. In accordance with this decision, distribution slots were booked with the Leaflet Distribution Service on 11th June 2010, up to and including the slot for the 7th March 2011. In placing the order the Council accepted Royal Mail's terms and conditions in relation to cancellation, as follows:

Less than 14 days notice - Full amount liable
 Less than 3 months notice - 50% liable

- 4.4 On the 15th December 2011, Full Council considered the adoption of a revised Communication Strategy which included the recommendation to cease production of Rossendale Alive from 1st April 2010. Members raised a number of queries in relation to the financial implications of the next Rossendale Alive due to be distributed on the 7th March 2011.
- 4.5 The following information can now be confirmed:
 Cancellation of Rossendale Alive for March 2011, would incur a 50% distribution cost of £791, the Council will save (not incur expenditure) £2,960. The total saving from the cancellation of Rossendale Alive immediately is therefore £2169.
 Continuation of the planned Rossendale Alive March 2011 Edition, which has been budgeted for will cost £2,960; this includes design, printing and distribution.

4.6 Members therefore have a number of options:

Option 1 – Cease production of the newsletter immediately.

Option 2 – Cease production of the newsletter from 1st April 2011.

Option 3 – Cease production of the newsletter immediately but utilise the distribution slot for other Council information to be distributed, for example a copy of the Council's new customer service standards, an invitation to attend neighbourhood forums or information about the Council's Neighbourhood plans. The expenditure incurred by the Council would be approximately £900 for a two sided A4 leaflet - a total of £2,482, a saving of £478.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

5.1 Financial implications are noted in para 4.6 above and compare to current budget resources.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 Council publications that use advertising have come under criticism in other local areas on the basis that they competed unfairly with other local media and took much-needed advertising away from them, although I am not aware of a successful legal challenge on this basis.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1 No Human Resources implications arising for the report at this time.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 It is four years since the previous Communications Strategy was adopted by the Council. The new strategy builds on the work that this been completed, whilst identify cost saving options for the future and recognising the growing importance of social media. The new strategy will enable the Council to build its capacity to communicate effectively.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 Members to agree arrangements for the March 2011 Edition of Rossendale Alive.

9.2 Members to agree to cease production of the Rossendale Alive newsletter with effect from 1st April 2011.

9.3 Members agree the Communications Strategy which was considered at the last Full Council.

9.4 All future minor amendments to the Communication Strategy to be delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Councillors, Council Staff, Executive Management Team, Full Council, Place Survey, Cultural Survey, Policy Overview and Scrutiny, soft feedback from consultation events and opportunities. Free Press and Lancashire Telegraph were also asked for their views.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required Yes / ~~No~~

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached
Previously considered by Full Council No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required ~~Yes~~ / No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached ~~Yes~~ / No

Contact Officer	
Name	Nick Molyneux
Position	Communications Manager
Service / Team	People and Policy
Telephone	01706 252452
Email address	Liz sandiford@rossendalebc.gov.uk

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
New Reputation Guide – Local Government Association	www.reputation.lga.gov.uk
Rossendale Culture Review - August 2009 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Borough Council Staff Survey - January 2010 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Members Questionnaire on Communications	Stubbylee Hall