

**Runnymede Borough Council
Communications Member Working Group**

Agreed Action Notes of meeting held on Tuesday 19 September 2006

Present:		Apologies:	
Councillors:	RBC staff:	Councillors:	RBC staff:
Peter Waddell	Tim Williams	None	None
Elaine Gill	Toni Noble		
John Furey	Catherine Field		
Jeff Haas	Attendee:		
Howard Butterfield	Cherith Simmons		

Item	Action by:
1. Notification of changes	
TW explained the background to the topic and councillors' work in a previous group. Members wanted to continue the momentum with a communications member working group. TW pointed out there is a limited communications resource and so it is important to make it count.	
2. Election of Chairman	
JF proposed HB as chairman. PW seconded this. Howard Butterfield was appointed as Chairman of the Communications Review Group.	
3. Apologies for absence	
No apologies.	
4. Communications Objective	
TN summarised the Communications Programme report, which was considered by Corporate Management Committee in March 06 and the decisions that came out of that meeting. One area for consideration by this group is the reworking of the communications objectives. The objectives as suggested in the March report are as follows: <i>The underlying principles of the council's communications strategy should be to inform, to listen and to involve residents and other stakeholders with regard to its services.</i> <i>Developing the Communications Strategy implemented in 2003, the council should be working to provide a 'best fit' of communications to the requirement and interest of residents, along with satisfying statutory requirements.</i> A detailed discussion followed. A number of key points were made, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of including engagement with residents through consultation; • The need for the objective to refer to internal as well as external communications; • The need for internal communications to have a 'harmony of 	

<p>delivery' to help staff be clear on the work being done by the council particularly the new civic offices;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for the objective to be measurable. Measurement against the objective will be through further consultation with residents every three years. <p>PW explained that the objective should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising awareness and understanding of our work; • combating prejudices; • giving feedback; • and informing residents so they know how to access services. <p>PW suggested the following wording for internal communications: 'maintain and improve staff communication awareness and involvement'. He explained that this would provide a measurement through the regular staff survey.</p> <p>TN and TW to work on an objective and TN to circulate a draft and ask for comments.</p>	<p>TN/TW</p>
<p>5. Magazine frequency</p>	
<p>TN explained her experience of other local authorities where magazines were produced regularly and were a good way to communicate with staff, particularly as a significant amount live in the borough. TN also clarified that the information gathered for the magazine would inform press releases and information from the press releases could be used as a source of some of the content of the magazine.</p> <p>In order to make the decision TW suggested looking at what other authorities do and the resource implications.</p> <p>TN presented a summary of magazines within Surrey to all. TN explained editorial support was built into costs, as copywriting in some authorities is an additional post.</p> <p>TN pointed out that best practice from the MORI/LGA 'Reputation of Local Government' project shows that councils should aim to produce four magazines a year. TN explained that the magazine and distribution three times a year is cost neutral, funded from services' communications budgets. The cost was calculated to be £39k for 3 editions, which included distribution costs.</p> <p>TN suggested the length should be 12 –16 sides, three times a year was sufficient and any more than this would be difficult to maintain. This frequency was enough to impact on satisfaction with communications and this would be measured through the programmed communications survey.</p> <p>A detailed discussion followed. A number of key points were made, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to look at what information could more effectively be 	

<p>communicated through the newsletter;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to review funding through advertising once the magazine is established; • That the back page should be used to communicate key messages relevant to all residents, such as reinforcement of how to access services and recycling and refuse collection services. • The need to make the information relevant to every group in the borough; • The need to explain that it is budget neutral using existing resources allocated for communications. <p>HB confirmed that all agreed to 3 editions a year and 12-16 sides.</p> <p>TN suggested publications could tie in with school terms. All agreed to this.</p>	
<p>6. Communications work programme update</p>	
<p>TN presented the work programme update to the group and summarised:</p> <p>Strategic Plan summary on the intranet and staff briefing to be arranged for November to present this to staff.</p> <p>TN mentioned that from October new residents will receive a pre-paid card to request further information about council services.</p> <p>CS requested that ward and relevant councillor was included in the pack. TN to action this.</p> <p>Plain English guidelines produced and available for all staff. Audit of standard letters currently taking place. TN to distribute if required.</p> <p>Alternative forms of communication guidelines produced in draft form and consultation with relevant officers is currently taking place. TN circulated draft guidelines. All corporate publications now have a paragraph offering the information in other formats.</p>	<p></p> <p>TN</p> <p></p> <p>TN</p> <p></p> <p>TN</p> <p></p> <p>TN</p>
<p>JF suggested a text service for residents' queries over new civic offices. PW explained that the text messages can be read like an email and so would not be too time consuming to reply to. TN to look into this.</p>	<p>TN</p>
<p>TN explained the draft customer care policy was based on research on other local authorities and consultation will take place with directors and service managers. PW advised TN to look at the ICS website which could help with customer care guidelines. JF suggested, as these currently based on current civic offices, TN needed to ensure that this was appropriate to arrangements in the new offices.</p> <p>JF agreed and suggested a trial period for 12 months for approach, to see if it works.</p>	<p>TN</p>
<p>The group discussed a way of evaluating the council's website. JH suggested using residents' panel for user testing.</p>	<p>TN</p>

<p>PW suggested online surveys to be used for consultation, as now low in cost.</p> <p>IT working group have been discussing issue of why people do not use the website and what those who are using it think of it.</p> <p>HB to discuss website and the role of the IT Working Group/Communications Review Group with Cllr Niall Thewlis</p>	<p>HB</p>
<p>TN updated the group on progress on consultation actions. An audit of consultation has taken place and actions are included in the revised work programme.</p> <p>Procedures for using the residents' panel have been produced along with a draft protocol for consultation – this was circulated to the group.</p> <p>TN highlighted that the results of the audit showed there were no major consultations planned for this financial year.</p> <p>JF requested consultations planned to be a standing item for future meetings.</p>	<p>TN</p>
<p>7. PR approach for the new civic offices</p>	
<p>TN summarised the discussion held at the new civic offices communications working group. There was a duty to inform all residents, as it was public money being spent the joint provision of services planned.</p> <p>JH suggested waiting until the work was near completion for PR. TW suggested focus communications Summer 07 onwards when it is more relevant to the public so they could relate to it. JH suggested that the joining-up of public services be emphasised in all communications.</p> <p>TN mentioned a regular briefing note, cascaded to all staff through meetings, would be introduced.</p> <p>PW suggested briefing key stakeholders and community groups nearer to the time.</p> <p>TN to send newsletter to all councillors and TW to provide a cover note.</p> <p>HB requested this to be included as an item for every meeting of this group in the future.</p> <p>TN summarised the internal communications mechanisms for the new civic offices.</p>	<p>TN</p> <p>TN/TW</p> <p>TN</p>
<p>8. AOB</p>	
<p>TW requested branding should be added to the next meeting's agenda. TW raised question to what extent members would agree to standardisation of the corporate theme and logo.</p> <p>JH suggested this group could make initial decision and then allow</p>	

others to provide comment. The comments can then be used to make any necessary changes. All agreed to this suggestion	
TN and TW to provide a board with examples of what is currently in use for next meeting.	TN
TN to produce a timetable of 3 meetings over the next 6 months and circulate to the group.	
	TN
CS requested that ward members are included in press activities for Addlestone Leisure Centre. TN and TW agreed that this would happen.	
	TN