

Efficiency, Improvement & Transformation

Review Title: Communication, Consultation and Engagement

Scope

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Select Committee: CASSI	Type of Review: Scrutiny Review
<p>1. What services are included?</p> <p>The review covers all of the council's communication, consultation & engagement with the public, staff, Members and partners.</p> <p>Corporate communications and marketing including branding and media relations and communication and marketing functions within all Services. The review specifically includes the role of the web within communications.</p> <p>Strategic and operational consultation activity, including corporate consultation activity co-ordinated through the Policy, Performance and Communications Team, the PIC network within CESC and consultation within other services. Consideration will also be given (although not a formal part of the review) to consultation activity within key partner organisations.</p> <p>Corporate Engagement activity through the Local Strategic Partnership Board, Area Boards and neighbourhood and thematic partnerships. The Community Engagement function within Democratic Services, Employee engagement activity within Resources and Community development and engagement activity within Housing.</p>	
<p>2. The Thematic Select Committee's / EIT Project Team overall aim / objectives in doing this work is:</p> <p>To communicate what we do more effectively and to improve perceptions of the council and the area.</p> <p>To identify options for future strategy, policy & service provision that will deliver efficiency savings and sustain / improve high quality outcomes for SBC residents. To make effective use of technology and transform the way we communicate, consult and engage with local communities, our staff and key stakeholders.</p>	

3. Expected duration of enquiry? What are the key milestones?

7 months

Approval of Project Plan – 18 May 2009
Initial baselining and challenge – By end August 2009
Options appraisal – 15 September 2009
Recommendations for change – Early October
Final Agreement by Select Committee – 27 October 2009
Submission to Cabinet – 26 November 2009

4. In addition to analysis and benchmarking costs, performance, assets etc, what other processes are likely to be required to inform the review? (e.g. site visits; observations; face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, co-option of expert witnesses etc).

Detailed baseline/ challenge documentation

Research into alternative practice in other local authorities, public and private sector organisations.

Visits to/discussion with Beacon authorities

Questionnaires/focus groups with staff, Cabinet members, public, stakeholders.

Key conferences.

Consultation with PR, Marketing and communication professionals.

Consultation with media providers.

5. How will key partners and/or the public be involved and at what stages?

Through questionnaires/focus groups in relation to preferred means of communication, consultation and engagement to inform development of options.

Key partners – through gathering information relating to their approaches to consultation, communication and engagement to inform potential options.

6. Please give an initial indication how transformation will enable efficiencies and improvements to be delivered by this EIT review?

Potential to deliver transformational change and efficiencies exists through:

1. Better use of new technologies for communication, consultation and engagement activities. For example social networking media and mobile technology.

2. Co-ordination and rationalisation of marketing and communication activity across the organisation could generate savings through avoidance of duplication of activity, improved efficiencies from combined procurement activity and an improved outcome from the delivery of a coherent and consistent message. It is not clear at this stage what the optimal approach should be (broadly a debate around centralised or devolved models) however whatever the outcome, we need to add creative and communications expertise and create a positive working relationship between these experts and all services.

3. Sharing of functions with other public sector providers and/or generating income by providing some services on behalf of other public sector partners, resulting in a more co-ordinated approach to consulting and engaging with local residents and an improved shared understanding of need.
4. Commissioning of aspects of consultation/engagement activity externally e.g., through the third sector, another public sector provider or the private sector.
5. Extension of communication activity into engagement through discussion. Design and functionality of our key communication tools such as the web site and Stockton News could be transformed to include aspects of consultation and engagement rather than just information giving.
6. Development of a Communications, Consultation and Engagement strategy could include development of an annual communications plan and targeted marketing campaigns linked to our key priorities, this should mitigate against emergent negative media messages, enabling us to take a more proactive approach to PR.
7. Potential to bring the co-ordination and support for the LSP and its constituent groups together within the Partnership and Engagement team to reduce potential duplication of activity and strengthen the links with engagement activity that takes place within Services.
8. Potential to transform communication, consultation and engagement through a transformation of the appearance and functionality of the Council web-sites.
9. Potential to develop and improve a Stockton Borough Council brand (not just a logo) so that people come to recognise the branding not only as the council but associate it with quality, responsiveness etc. The brand should be flexible enough to cater to different audiences but will also provide a consistent framework for all communication, consultation and engagement activity.
10. Whilst resident satisfaction with Council Services has historically been high, it is generally acknowledged that communication, consultation and engagement activity is a significant contributor to resident perceptions. It is therefore recognised that particularly at a time of change resulting from the Council-wide EIT reviews the CCE function needs to operate well to ensure that all service transformations are well founded in public consultation and engagement and are well understood if they are to avoid negative reaction and if they are to have their maximum impact.
11. The new national performance framework (CAA) places an enhanced focus on community engagement and requires a new level of area wide performance reporting. This in turn requires us to improve cross organisational communications.
12. To improve efficiency through the removal of unnecessary employee communication and to create value by enabling the workforce to contribute more effectively to development and process improvement work.
13. Potential to build up a capability to enable the council to respond more effectively to and comment on national issues.