

Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee

EIT Review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement



October 2009

Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
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Foreword

<p>PHOTO</p> <p>Councillor Mick Stoker Chair – Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee</p>	<p>PHOTO</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Lynne Apedaile Vice-Chair – Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee</p>
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Original Brief

1. What services are included?

The review covers all of the council's communication, consultation & engagement with the public, staff, Members and partners.

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.

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.

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.

2. The Thematic Select Committee's / EIT Project Team overall aim / objectives in doing this work is:

To communicate what we do more effectively and to improve perceptions of the council and the area.

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.

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, telephones 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.

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.

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement undertaken by the Committee between June and October 2009.

1.2 The review covered all of the Council's communication, consultation and engagement with the public, employees, councillors and partners.

Communications

Media Relations

1.3 The Council has included a communications service since inception with the corporate team providing PR support and advice across the council.

1.4 There are increased demands on the service as a result of financial pressures faced by the media, rapidly emerging new forms of media, increased levels of expectation from the public and requests under the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, the political problems associated with governance and probity at a national level has led to increased demands for information about public services. Developments in CAA and community empowerment policy increase pressure on the communications service to make sure that people are informed about the services provided and in order that they can be effectively involved.

1.5 The Committee heard that the delivery of a high quality media service was hampered by the lack of a clear statement of the position, role and importance of the function within the organisation. There are varying degrees of "buy-in" to the service; therefore the priority given to media related work varies across service areas. The Committee found that a clear statement of corporate intent and priority would help to resolve this issue and that this statement of intent needs to be backed up with the appointment of a senior head of communications to lead and guide the team to deliver the corporate aims.

1.6 The service can adapt to meet the new pressures from new technology and increased demand by reorganising, specialising and tightening the focus of the media team. These changes would take place as part of a wider exercise to centralize all communications activity.

Internal Communications

1.7 Internal communications activity does not exist as a discrete function. It is provided across the Council by the Corporate Team, Xentrall and individual services.

1.8 There are increased demands on the service due to the changes and pressures associated with the economic climate and the associated EIT reviews. The increased use of technology within communications has led to an increase of the volume of information being spread widely around the Council; this has serious consequences for security, the capacity of the IT systems and increases the risk that really important information is missed amongst the volume of data being transferred.

1.9 The 2008 Employee Survey included six questions about internal communications. Overall the results were positive, although there were variations across the services. Employee discussion groups held to inform the review

confirmed the positive tone but feedback suggested that whilst employees referred to many examples of good practice, it was important to ensure that there was greater consistency in the frequency and quality of communications across all services.

1.10 As part of the review all Members were given the opportunity to give their views through a telephone interview about communications. Valuable information about content areas and general suggestions about how we might improve the problem of too much information flow have been identified. There is a general level of satisfaction with the service but many areas for improvement.

1.11 The Committee found that there was a lack of clarity about who is responsible for internal communications and what the organisation wants to achieve from it. This manifests itself in lost opportunity and inefficiency as duplication of communication effort happens across the organisation. In addition, a reduction in the amount of information sent and more clarity on the storing of information would make the information that is sent more effective. The service can adapt to meet new demands through better co-ordination of all internal communication functions and a clearer identification of its aims. A saving in management time across the services could also be achieved if a more effective co-ordinated internal communications service were provided.

1.12 The Committee concluded that the Council needed to make sure that it was getting the most from its internal communications activity. The service lacks a strategic focus and consequently the organisation is missing an opportunity to support and influence staff.

Marketing

1.13 The communications service has included some elements of corporate and service marketing since inception. The marketing functions are dispersed across various service areas and consequently there is little co-ordination of activity; this is limiting the effectiveness of marketing effort. There is no clear agreement about what is an appropriate level of marketing activity for the Council. The development of a marketing strategy and guidelines would fulfil the important function of agreeing what level of activity the organisation is comfortable with.

1.14 The service can adapt to meet new demands through better planning, co-ordination of all marketing activities and a clearer identification of its aims. The service needs to consistently measure the effectiveness of all marketing activity.

1.15 The Committee acknowledged the need to co-ordinate marketing activity across the Council in order to improve the service by providing an overall marketing strategy. This co-ordination will also lead to savings from more efficient procurement activity. The Committee were also aware of the need to treat the website as a corporate asset and manage it corporately to ensure that the quality and coverage of its content is even across the organisation.

1.16 The link between the public understanding of the Council and their satisfaction with the service is well documented. Therefore it is not enough just to deliver good services, the communication and marketing of these services must be excellent too. The LG Communications Chief executives Challenge report April 2008, identifies that “feeling informed remains the single most significant attribute for predicting resident satisfaction with councils. The more informed people feel, the more satisfied they are with their council.”

Branding

1.17 Branding activity does not exist as a discrete function. The branding of the Council itself is covered by a corporate ID manual and a writing style guide. The promotion of the brand has not been actively pursued by the Council.

1.18 The Committee felt that the promotion of Stockton as a good place to invest, live, work, study and visit is even more important in a time of economic contraction. The increased importance of total place assessment requires an underlying investment in promotion of Stockton as a place. The presentation of a positive image for Stockton as a Borough will feed through in general feelings of wellbeing about the area.

1.19 The Committee found that there is a lack of clarity about what the Council brand is and to what extent the organisation wishes to promote it. A clear overall aim will then allow for an appropriate strategy to be developed. It is essential that the Council provides overall leadership in shaping the place and setting a vision for the Borough.

1.20 The Committee concluded that the Council needs to co-ordinate branding and promotional work with other communication activities. The Committee felt that this should not necessarily commit the Council to additional expenditure but rather it should ensure that any existing spend is directed to a consistent, corporate message and this may even lead to further efficiencies. The Committee concluded that the focus on branding activity, in the first instance, should be about developing the Council brand although it would be important to work with key partners and organisations.

Consultation

1.21 Consultation activity is carried out by 1.5 staff in the Corporate Policy, Performance and Partnerships service. Additional specialist advice and support is provided on consultation activity by the engagement and diversity teams. Other consultation mechanisms are supported by the Children, Education and Social Care Department.

1.22 There has been a growth in the demand for consultation services in line with the national agenda to increase the role of the community in public services. There is also a statutory requirement to consult for some services. The service performs well but is struggling to meet demands.

1.23 The Committee found that although all services within the Council are potential customers, there is no comprehensive measure of demand. There is evidence that consultation activity is taking place across the services without corporate involvement and there are capacity issues in the corporate team. In addition, although the Viewpoint Survey mechanism is well used and respected, there is evidence that the service is not well enough marketed and capacity issues need to be addressed before the service is marketed internally or externally.

1.24 The Committee acknowledged the importance of the service which was a key tool in the development of key policies and in the assessment of performance. It was also recognised that the requirement to consult users is likely to continue to increase in line with the national agenda and therefore the service, currently at minimal levels,

needs to grow to meet demand. The Committee noted that there was scope to enter in joint arrangements with other public service providers and market the service externally which could deliver efficiencies or increased capacity.

Engagement

Community Engagement

1.25 The service is provided through a range of teams across the Council and through funding to third sector organisations to carry out community engagement work in the Borough.

1.26 Whilst there is evidence that the service performs well, the 2008 Place Survey indicates that there are indications that engagement levels could be improved. The demand for services is also likely to grow, partly as a result of the economic downturn and partly as a result of the increasing profile achieved by the success of the service.

1.27 The Committee noted that the 2010/11 budgets already indicate significant reductions in spend and therefore the service needs to change to tackle the issues associated with the reduction in funding available. The Council needed to make decisions about the weighting of funding between internal and external delivery of community engagement activity.

1.28 The Committee concluded that organising internal engagement activities in one function would deliver operational efficiencies and ensure an overarching strategic approach to engagement so that initiatives are co-ordinated across the Council and its partners.

Employee Engagement

1.29 The Organisational Development Team of 15 within Human Resources undertake employee engagement activity as well as other roles within their wider remit to deliver health and wellbeing, policy development, file management and training and development. The main method of consultation is through the biennial employee survey which illustrates high levels of satisfaction with the Council as an employer. There is one question on employee engagement which indicated that 72.1% of employees felt they were encouraged to make suggestions to improve the way things are done at work. In addition, there are a range of formal and informal mechanisms to engage staff including employee forums, team meetings, suggestion schemes and appraisals.

1.30 The Committee felt that the need for effective employee engagement was needed more than ever during the changes that will arise from the EIT process. Research has shown that engaged employees are those who deliver improved business benefits.

1.31 The Committee concluded that it was essential for employees to challenge current ways of working to achieve efficiencies, embrace change and be open to delivering services in different ways, to be increasingly flexible to meet the changing needs of the Council, to be innovative to find new and better ways of doing things and to be open to learning new skills.

Other Service Improvement Opportunities

1.32 The Committee were also mindful of the many and detailed suggestions from Employees, Councillors and the Citizens' Panel on how Council communications might be improved. The Committee felt that all of the suggestions should be considered and used to inform a detailed service improvement plan to be reviewed by the Committee at an appropriate time.

Recommendations

1.33 Overall, the Committee concluded that there were a range of different pressures on all of the service areas reviewed ranging from the impact of the current economic climate, additional pressures on services, rising customer expectations and advances in technology. Whilst there were examples of best practice and good performance, there were also a number of areas where improvements could be made. The Committee felt that there was a need for better co-ordination of internal functions and a clearer strategic focus.

1.34 The Committee believe that the recommendations will deliver significant savings, estimated at £300,000 per annum, whilst improving the effectiveness of the services reviewed.

Recommended

- 1. That a centralized Communications team be created which combines all media, marketing, employee communications, web development and internet content responsibilities within the Council. Strategic leadership of the team will be provided by a Head of Communications.**
- 2. That the procurement of marketing services, advertising, printing, design services, brand development and photography be centralized and delivered by the communications team through 4 year framework agreements.**
- 3. That a review of the Design and Print service is undertaken in the final quarter of 2009.**
- 4. That a clear Council protocol for using the corporate Consultation team be established.**
- 5. That the possibility of delivering a consultation services for other public sector organisations be explored.**
- 6. That a comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy be produced to provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to community engagement and involvement. The Strategy will include a strategic framework on funding for and use of community buildings. The Strategy will be completed by 31 March 2010.**
- 7. That a single Community Engagement team be created to deliver the Community Engagement Strategy. The team will be in place by 31 March 2010 to deliver the strategy in recommendation 6 above.**
- 8. That an Employee Engagement Strategy be produced that brings together all current engagement activities and as part of this process that an employee suggestion scheme with clear feedback route be introduced. The strategy and scheme will be in place by 31 December 2009.**

9. That the Communications, Engagement and Consultation teams consider and report back to the Select Committee on the detailed service improvement opportunities included in Appendices 3, 4 and 5 of this report by 31 March 2010.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The report presents Cabinet with the outcomes of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement undertaken by the Committee between June and October 2009.

2.2 The review formed part of a three year programme of EIT reviews covering all services provided by the Council. The programme aims to ensure that all services are reviewed in a systematic way to ensure that they are provided in the most efficient manner, provide value for money and identify opportunities for service improvements and transformation.

2.3 The topic was identified for review by the Scrutiny Liaison Forum on 26 February 2009 and was subsequently included in the Select Committee work programme by Executive Scrutiny Committee on 24 March 2009.

3.0 Background

3.1 A scope and project plan for the review were drafted and approved by the Committee on 18 May 2009.

3.2 The review examined all of the Council's communication, consultation and engagement with the public, employees, councillors and partners. The overall aims of the review were:

- To communicate what we do more effectively and to improve perceptions of the Council and the area.
- To identify options for future strategy, policy and 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.

3.3 The Select Committee's report has been informed by:

- Review and challenge of baseline information about the service areas
- Information on best practice from other Councils provided by the IDEa
- A presentation on "branding" from a local advertising and design agency
- Consultation with employees via employee discussion groups
- Viewpoint Focus Groups
- Telephone interviews with all Councillors
- IT workshop with Newcastle City Council

4.0 Evidence and Findings

Structure of Report

4.1 The structure of this report reflects the presentation of evidence under the three themes reviewed and is set out below:

Communication:

- Media Relations
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Internal Communications
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Marketing
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Branding
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Communication – Financial Impact of Recommendations

Consultation:

- Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Consultation – Financial Impact of Recommendations

Engagement:

- Community Engagement
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Employee Engagement
 - Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures
 - Findings and Conclusions
- Recommendations
- Engagement – Financial Impact of Recommendations

Other Service Improvement Opportunities

Equality Impact Assessment

COMMUNICATION

Media Relations

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.2 The Council has included a communications service since inception with the corporate team providing PR support and advice across the council. The service directly delivers:

- A Press Office function to co-ordinate messages issued by the Council (approx 700 news releases pa & 1,200 media enquiries pa)
- Support on issues management.
- Communications role in crisis management

4.3 The 2009/10 budget for media relations is £317,000. There is minimal capital expenditure. This costing does not include an assessment of the cost associated with the staff time in other services providing information for media purposes.

Appendix 1 sets out the current service provision and staffing levels.

4.4 There have been no recent, formal evaluations of the media relations function. The most recent internal audit report was issued on 1 August 2007. This audit was generally positive with only minor recommendations for improvement noted. The performance of the current service has been reviewed with both internal customers and external partners as part of this review. In general the service was characterized as solid, reliable and steady. No major problems were noted although the scope for more pro-active media activity was widely noted. The April 2008 Corporate Assessment did not make any specific reference to communications. There was, however, a general acknowledgement in the assessment that the public have a positive view of the Council and therefore it could be inferred that the communication function was operating reliably.

4.5 There are increased demands on the service as a result of financial pressures faced by the media (especially local media), rapidly emerging new forms of media, increased levels of expectation from the public and requests under the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, the political problems associated with governance and probity at a national level has led to increased demands for information about public services. Developments in CAA and community empowerment policy increase pressure on the communications service to make sure that people are informed about the services provided and in order that they can be effectively involved.

4.6 Many organisations use external PR agencies to supplement their internal organisations but there seems, in most organisations, to be a desire to control the corporate message closely with an internal team. There is a key question of judgement about the role of media relations in the organisation which can be summed up as to whether the organisation wishes to provide a pro-active service which actively feed stories to the media or a minimal purely reactive service. This judgement depends upon whether the organisation is convinced by the benefits of positive media coverage. A more pro-active media service is, in theory, discretionary, however the well accepted link between measured success and perception is so

strong that in reality all organisations provide some degree of pro-active media service.

Findings and Conclusions

4.7 The Committee found that there was scope for the service to be used more widely by employees and Members for the dissemination of positive media stories. In addition, the service could be used more extensively by the third sector and partner organisations to promote issues which are of general importance to the Borough.

4.8 The Committee heard that the delivery of a high quality media service was hampered by the lack of a clear statement of the position, role and importance of the function within the organisation. There are varying degrees of “buy-in” to the service depending upon individuals, therefore the priority given to media related work varies across service areas. The Committee found that a clear statement of corporate intent and priority would help to resolve this issue and that this statement of intent needs to be backed up with the appointment of a senior head of communications to lead and guide the team to deliver the corporate aims.

4.9 The service can adapt to meet the new pressures from new technology and increased demand by reorganising, specialising and tightening the focus of the media team. These changes would take place as part of a wider exercise to centralize all communications activity.

4.10 The service is facing increasing demands as outlined above and the service can only deliver efficiency savings by working more efficiently within the team (possibly by specialising) and by improving communication with other services.

4.11 The Committee found that there was a need to raise awareness of the value and importance of media relations across the organisation to ensure that it is considered at an earlier stage in service planning and given broad support. The service also needs to start measuring the effectiveness of its communications activity.

Internal Communications

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.12 The internal communications activity does not exist as a discrete function. It is provided across the Council as follows:

- The Corporate Team:
 - Produce 12 editions pa of “Keeping You In Touch”
 - Provide the “Message of the Day” service
 - Support to specific HR campaigns e.g. Smoking cessation, Single Status, employee survey
- The Xentrall team maintain the intranet to provide employee information
- Various HR, service and team newsletters are produced for specific issues or groups of employees

4.13 **Appendix 1** sets out the current service provision across the Council.

4.14 The 2009/10 budget for internal communications is £103,000. This costing does not include an assessment of the cost associated with the staff time in other services. There is minimal capital expenditure and the overall cost of the service is low.

4.15 The April 2008 Corporate Assessment found that “there is a high level of awareness of Council priorities and goals among the workforce: this becomes stronger for service priorities”.

4.16 There are increased demands on the service due to the changes and pressures associated with the economic climate and the associated EIT reviews. Effective internal communications are needed to inform staff about the outcome of these reviews. The increased use of technology within communications has led to an increase of the volume of information being spread widely around the Council; this has serious consequences for security, the capacity of the IT systems and increases the risk that really important information is missed amongst the volume of data being transferred.

Feedback from Consultation with Employees

4.17 The 2008 Employee Survey included six questions about internal communications. Overall the results were positive, although there were variations across the services. On the key question of whether employees felt they were kept informed about things which affected them 70% gave a positive reply. This compares very favourably with a median score of 50% across other local authorities and 50% across a range of public and private sector organisations.

4.18 A summary of key findings from the Employee Survey in relation to communications is included in **Appendix 2**.

4.19 The latest formal review of the Employee Newsletter “Keeping you in Touch” (KYIT) took place in 2005. It identified that 83% of staff read KYIT and 86% of staff were very or fairly satisfied with it.

4.20 As part of this review the Committee followed up the employee survey with two focus group meetings to discuss the findings, particularly with services where problems were identified. A further focus group session was held with service areas where there were particularly high levels of satisfaction with communication to ensure that the Committee was able to learn from any positive lessons for wider use.

4.21 In general, the tone of the sessions was positive. The feedback suggests that whilst employees referred to many examples of good practice, it was important to ensure that there was greater consistency in the frequency and quality of communications across all services. There were also a number of specific suggestions on improving communications between services/ departments. A detailed record of the discussion groups is available as part of the Committee’s evidence and a summary of the key points is included in **Appendix 3**.

Feedback from Consultation with Councillors

4.22 As part of the review all Members were given the opportunity to give their views through a telephone interview about communications to understand better what they expect to hear about, what they would like to hear about, how and when they want to hear about things, the feedback mechanisms and their overall view of

the current service. In total 42 Members gave their views. Full details of each interview (in an anonymous format) were presented to the Committee and are available as part of the evidence from the review. The key points from the findings are summarized in **Appendix 4**. Valuable information about content areas and general suggestions about how we might improve the problem of too much information flow have been identified. There is a general level of satisfaction with the service but many areas for improvement.

Findings and Conclusions

4.23 The Committee concluded that effective internal communications are essential in a large organisation and that failure to deliver the service would result in reduced efficiencies, a reduction in service delivery standards and a fall in staff morale.

4.24 The Committee found that there was a lack of clarity about who is responsible for internal communications and what the organisation wants to achieve from it. This manifests itself in lost opportunity and inefficiency as duplication of communication effort happens across the organisation as services attempt to undertake effective communication themselves. In addition, effective internal communications are hampered by the fact that too much information is spread indiscriminately around the organisation. A reduction in the amount of information sent and more clarity on the storing of information would make the information that is sent more effective. The service can adapt to meet new demands through better co-ordination of all internal communication functions and a clearer identification of its aims. A saving in management time across the services could also be achieved if a more effective co-ordinated internal communications service were provided.

4.25 Improved communications also have a direct role in enabling more efficient working through “joined-up” approaches to service delivery and through unlocking more potential from all staff within the organisation.

4.26 The Committee concluded that the Council needed to make sure that it was getting the most from its internal communications activity. The service lacks a strategic focus and consequently the organisation is missing an opportunity to support and influence staff.

4.27 The main drivers of change are

- increased demand arising from the EIT reviews
- the chance to improve the service through the input of strategic direction and leadership.
- The need to reduce the strain on IT systems associated with the volume of data being passed around the organisation. This will also reduce the risks associated with data security, the waste of staff time dealing with data and the risk that important communication is lost in the mass of information.

Marketing

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.28 The communications service has included some elements of corporate and service marketing since inception.

4.29 The marketing team within Development and Neighbourhood Services (D&NS) was formed in 1999 as a result of specific needs associated with project and events activity.

4.30 The corporate team:

- Produce six editions pa of “Stockton News”.
- The A-Z guide to services
- The electronic image library

4.31 The D&NS Marketing Team lead marketing campaigns and produce marketing materials for various events and council campaigns e.g. Reputation Campaign, Infinity Spring Festival, Christmas Festival, Recycling Campaign etc.

4.32 The Xentrall Design and Print Service offer a design and print service across the Council.

4.33 Web-site design and content management work is carried out in Xentrall and in D&NS by the Systems Development Officer.

4.34 Various micro-sites have been commissioned and are managed by staff across the Service Groups.

4.35 External Marketing services are bought for specific projects e.g. marketing for major events such as SIRF, design work, artwork, council campaigns etc.

4.36 There has been no formal evaluation of the entire marketing function. However aspects of the service have been assessed and have generally been supported:

- The 2008 Ipsos MORI survey found that 59% of Stockton residents felt well informed about the Council. This result was in line with recent years (60% in 2006, 61% in 2004 and 50% in 2002).
- The 2008 MORI survey shows that 88% of residents had seen Stockton News and 84% found it useful. 24% of residents had accessed the website in the last 6 months; 86% had found it helpful.
- A 2007 Viewpoint Survey on A-Z Guide to Council Services found that 87% of those surveyed found it a useful tool and 95% said that it was value for money.
- The Socitm “Better Connected” review of Council Web-sites was published in April 2009. This commended the Stockton site for accessibility.

Feedback from Viewpoint Discussion Groups

4.37 Three adult Viewpoint Discussion Groups and one Youth Viewpoint Discussion Group were held during the review. The Committee received a detailed note from each of these groups. In general, panel members were able to cite examples of good communication (including Stockton News) but still felt that there was room for improvement including responses to individual letters and the Website. On the whole, panel members felt that they could not personally influence decisions, whilst there was a desire for panel members to be more involved with issues which affected them. There was also a mixed response to the questions on whether the

Council was in touch with residents and provided value for money. A summary of all of the sessions is attached at **Appendix 5** and highlights that there are areas for improvement.

Findings and Conclusions

4.38 The Committee acknowledged that there is an increased need to “sell” the message about what the Council is doing particularly at a time of potential contraction/ reconfiguration in services due to the economic situation. The increased importance of public assessment of services in CAA also requires investment in communication. There is likely to be an increase in the demand for the web-site service due to the changes which result from the EIT review and as result of the new opportunities and demands arising from social media such as Twitter and Facebook etc.

4.39 Failure to market Council services would mean that residents were less well informed about the Council - this would in turn lead to a drop in satisfaction with the Council. The 2008 Ipsos MORI survey found that the 76% of respondents who felt well informed about the Council were also satisfied with the Council. Whereas only 47% of those who were not informed about the Council were satisfied.

4.40 Failure to deliver the website service would lead to increased costs for the Council as the public would require more staff time to get the information it required. The Soctim report indicates that local government enquiries cost 17p via the web, £4 by phone and £7.81 for a face to face enquiry.

4.41 The current financial climate should lead to an increased focus on the website and other information services such as Stockton News as a means of providing efficient contact with the Council. Improvements in these services will lead to reduction in avoidable contact and an increase in self service for enquiries.

4.42 The marketing functions are dispersed across various service areas and consequently there is little co-ordination of activity; this is limiting the effectiveness of marketing effort. There is no clear agreement about what is an appropriate level of marketing activity for the Council. There is some nervousness that the social marketing campaign could be perceived as “spin” or commercially motivated and therefore as inappropriate. The development of a marketing strategy and guidelines would fulfil the important function of agreeing what level of activity the organisation is comfortable with.

4.43 The LGA Survey of local authority newsletter/magazines 2009 found that 95% of all respondent authorities produced a regular newsletter/magazine (97% of unitaries) and that 79% produced their newsletter up to six times a year. The LGA Survey of local authority newsletters/magazines 2009 indicates that the average cost of a newsletter is £70,000 and requires the equivalent of one full time person to produce it. The cost in Stockton is slightly lower than the average.

4.44 The service can adapt to meet new demands through better planning, co-ordination of all marketing activities and a clearer identification of its aims. The service needs to consistently measure the effectiveness of all marketing activity.

4.45 The 2009/10 service budget for marketing is £854,000. There is minimal capital expenditure. This costing does not include major items of third party expenditure. There is significant third party expenditure on advertising, marketing and

design and print services. The total spend of £1.63m in 2008/9 and £1.55m in 2007/8 is notable due to the lack of centralized buying and the high number of suppliers.

4.46 The Committee acknowledged the need to co-ordinate marketing activity across the Council in order to improve the service by providing an overall marketing strategy. This co-ordination will also lead to savings from more efficient procurement activity. The Committee were also aware of the need to treat the website as a corporate asset and manage it corporately to ensure that the quality and coverage of its content is even across the organisation.

4.47 The main driver of change is to ensure that the savings from centralized buying of marketing services is achieved. The co-ordination of activity will also deliver an improvement in the quality of the service through delivery of a consistent approach and standards. The raised profile of the website will lead to an improvement in its content and efficiencies delivered by reduced demand for customer service time.

4.48 The link between the public understanding of the Council and their satisfaction with the service is well documented. Therefore it is not enough just to deliver good services, the communication and marketing of these services must be excellent too. The LG Communications Chief executives Challenge report April 2008, identifies that “feeling informed remains the single most significant attribute for predicting resident satisfaction with councils. The more informed people feel, the more satisfied they are with their council.”

Branding

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.49 Branding activity does not exist as a discrete function. **Appendix 1** sets out the current service provision.

4.50 Early work on branding Stockton-on-Tees as a Borough has been undertaken by the Regeneration Team supported by external branding and design advisors.

4.51 The promotion of tourism within the Borough is provided by the team of two staff in Regeneration. This work is carried out in conjunction with visitTeesvalley on a sub-regional basis.

4.52 The branding of the Council itself is covered by a corporate ID manual and a writing style guide. The promotion of the brand has not been actively pursued.

4.53 The 2009/10 service budget for branding is £117,000. There is minimal capital expenditure. The limited branding work has been designed by a third party supplier in the order of £40,000

4.54 The Committee were informed that all branding services could be provided by an external agency and that tourism promotion could be provided more directly by the regional tourism team. However, the Committee felt that it would not be in the Council's interests to outsource the service but instead only use the services of external agencies where necessary.

Findings and Conclusions

4.55 The Committee felt that the promotion of Stockton as a good place to invest, live, work, study and visit is even more important in a time of economic contraction. The economic climate provides additional challenges in attracting investment due to overall scarcity however the climate also provides a timely opportunity to promote the savings and values associated with relocating from more expensive parts of the country.

4.56 The increased importance of total place assessment requires an underlying investment in promotion of Stockton as a place. The presentation of a positive image for Stockton as a Borough will feed through in general feelings of wellbeing about the area.

4.57 A Viewpoint Survey conducted in 2001 found that 95% of respondents felt that a strong identity and positive image was important.

4.58 The increasing delivery of services through partner organisations such as Tees Active, through third sector organisations and through joint initiatives with other public sector organisations such as the PCT and the police etc. makes it more important to be clear about the promotion of the Council brand. It is increasingly difficult for the public to identify the Council's role in delivery of public services.

4.59 As part of the review, the Committee received a presentation from Yousif Khalid of "Different" Advertising and Design Agency. The presentation provided the Committee with examples from the private and public sector of the benefits of creating a positive brand both in terms of reputation and inward investment. The Committee heard that all organisations had a brand identity irrespective of whether they had sought to influence their image. Conversely, all organisations could take a decision to take a proactive role in the direction of their brand.

4.60 The Committee found that there is a lack of clarity about what the Council brand is and to what extent the organisation wishes to promote it. A clear overall aim will then allow for an appropriate strategy to be developed. It is essential that the Council provides overall leadership in shaping the place and setting a vision for the Borough.

4.61 The main driver of change is to ensure that the role of the Council is consistently identified and understood and therefore that its reputation is enhanced. The need to confer the positive status of the separate services on the Council as a whole is necessary.

4.62 The Committee concluded that the Council needs to co-ordinate branding and promotional work with other communications activities. The Committee felt that this should not necessarily commit the Council to additional expenditure but rather this should not necessarily commit the Council to additional expenditure but rather it should ensure that any existing spend is directed to a consistent, corporate message and this may even lead to further efficiencies. The Committee also concluded the focus of branding activity in the first instance should be about developing the Council brand although it would still be important to work with key partners and organisations.

Feedback from the IDeA on External and Internal Communications and Branding

4.63 To support the work of the Committee, the IDeA was asked to provide research on lessons to be learned and best practice from other Councils. A copy of the research paper is attached at **Appendix 6**. The paper reinforces that:

- Good communication is central to the reputation of local government
- Positive satisfaction scores for a service do not automatically transfer to positive satisfaction ratings
- It is important to get core services right as well as telling residents what you can and are doing for them
- Communication is better addressed via community magazines rather than leaflets
- Communication Strategies need to address personal experience/ first contact with the Council and confusion about what services the Council provides and how Council tax is spent
- The best performing Councils have a communications specialist as an integral and active member of the top team and consider strategic communication within all aspects of business planning
- “Brand Stockton” needs to be defined, managed and reviewed and linked to the communications strategy
- The best performing Councils are most likely to have staff that will speak up for them
- Staff need to feel consulted, listened to and involved
- An internal communications action plan is a good starting point for improving good internal communications
- Internal communication is not just about top down but sideways also

Recommended

1. That a centralized Communications team be created which combines all media, marketing, employee communications, web development and internet content responsibilities within the Council. Strategic leadership of the team will be provided by a Head of Communications.

2. That the procurement of marketing services, advertising, printing, design services, brand development and photography be centralized and delivered by the communications team through 4 year framework agreements.

3. That a review of the Design and Print service is undertaken in the final quarter of 2009.

Communications – Financial Impact of Recommendations

4.64 The financial impact of the communications recommendations is still being evaluated in detail as the new procurement arrangements are being developed. Indications based on spend over the last two years and early work on new procurement arrangements indicates that the total savings will be of the order of £300,000 per annum.

CONSULTATION

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.65 Consultation activity is carried out by 1.5 staff in the Corporate Policy, Performance and Partnerships service:

- Research and Consultation Advisor (P/T)
- Residents' Panel Co-ordinator

Additional specialist advice and support is provided on consultation activity by the engagement and diversity teams.

4.66 Consultation with children, young people, parents and carers in the design and delivery of services in CESC also takes place through the "PIC" (Participation, Involvement and Consultation) Network. The service does not have a dedicated resource.

4.67 The Over 50s and Youth Forums are supported by the CESC Department and provide a consultation vehicle on Council and Primary Care Trust policy and services.

4.68 The service is provided directly by the corporate teams and also through provision of support to consultation activity across the Council. Direct activities include:

- Management of the Citizen's Panel (Viewpoint)
- Co-ordination of the Consultation Plan and Consultation Working Group
- Management of large scale consultation events for the Council and partners
- Support to consultation activity across the Council through specialist advice including questionnaire design

4.69 The PIC activity is managed through the PIC Steering Group, a multi agency partnership who deliver the PIC action plan.

4.70 The Over 50s Forum and Youth forums are supported by CESC.

4.71 The annual costs of the service are as follows:

- Corporate consultation activity £102,000
- Employee costs £56,000
- MORI Survey £25,000
- Viewpoint £21,000
- PIC network allocation £24,000

4.72 There has been a growth in the demand for consultation services in line with the national agenda to increase the role of the community in public services. There is also a statutory requirement to consult for some services.

4.73 The service performs well but is struggling to meet demands.

4.74 The April 2008 Corporate Assessment stated "The Council has a strong and effective consultation mechanism", Priorities take account of views expressed by partners and residents including LSP", "The Council is well informed about the views

of older people". The Joint Area Review stated "There is an extensive consultation with young people...PIC network provides a good focus for consultation activity and for promoting participation..."

4.75 A Viewpoint Survey on Viewpoint was carried out in 2006 which showed net satisfaction at 90% with 92% of panel members feeling very or fairly well informed about Viewpoint.

4.76 A "Tell us what you Think" Members' survey in 2008 found that 91% of respondents were aware of consultations before they took place all or some of the time, 64% stated that they had access to results of consultations all or some of the time, 64% felt that there were more occasions when they should have an active role in consultations.

4.77 The service could be delivered by individual services, outsourced or delivered in partnership.

Findings and Conclusions

4.78 The Committee found that although all services within the Council are potential customers, there is no comprehensive measure of demand. There is evidence that consultation activity is taking place across the services without corporate involvement and there are capacity issues in the corporate team. In addition, although the Viewpoint Survey mechanism is well used and respected, there is evidence that the service is not well enough marketed and capacity issues need to be addressed before the service is marketed internally or externally.

4.79 The Committee acknowledged the importance of the service which was a key tool in the development of key policies and in the assessment of performance. It was also recognised that the requirement to consult users is likely to continue to increase in line with the national agenda and therefore the service, currently at minimal levels, needs to grow to meet demand. The Committee noted that there was scope to enter in joint arrangements with other public service providers and market the service externally which could deliver efficiencies or increased capacity.

4.80 The Committee were aware that there had been discussions about reducing the frequency of resident surveys in order to avoid consultation fatigue and it had been proposed that the Council should only continue with the biennial, statutory Place survey. Members of the Committee were reassured that officers would, however, be seeking to supplement the Place Survey through additional questions.

Recommended

4. That a clear Council protocol for using the corporate Consultation team be established.

5. That the possibility of delivering a consultation services for other public sector organisations be explored.

Consultation – Financial Implications of Recommendations

4.81 The recommendations are cost neutral, any additional work to carry out consultation services in partnership with other public sector organisations would be on a cost sharing basis.

ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.82 The service is provided across the Council by:

- the Corporate Partnership and Engagement Team – 5 FTEs – support for Renaissance, CEN, Engagement Strategy and the LAA, participatory budgeting, financial inclusion events, bespoke consultation events
- the Community Development Team in Housing – 5 FTEs – management of the Voluntary Sector Support Fund, through the negotiation of objectives, performance management and monitoring. The team also support provision of Ragworth Community Centre and have asset management responsibility for 23 community buildings. The work involves an intensive programme of mentoring, governance, procurement and best practice support. The team also deliver a programme of events and interventions to the third sector.
- Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre
- the Housing Regeneration Team (part of the work of the team on renewal projects)
- Community Engagement Officer in Democratic Services – 1 FTE – increasing participation in democratic processes
- through funding to third sector organisations to carry out community engagement work in the Borough

4.83 The resources to deliver the service are set out in **Appendix 7**.

4.84 The service performs well:

- Knowledge and understanding of the Renaissance structure and Area Partnership Boards remains high at 75%
- Awareness of Sustainable Communities Strategy 66%
- Feeling of being able to influence and shape the CEN increased to 75%
- Inspection and internal audit reviews are positive
- The April 2008 Corporate Assessment identified that “The Council engages well with stakeholders”, “The Council takes positive steps to involve its communities in the delivery of priorities”, “Community engagement in the area of older people is good”

4.85 However, the 2008 Place Survey indicates that whilst there are high levels of satisfaction with the Council, there are indications that engagement levels could be improved.

4.86 The demand for services is also likely to grow, partly as a result of the economic downturn and partly as a result of the increasing profile achieved by the success of the service.

Findings and Conclusions

4.87 The Committee acknowledged that the service contributed to the Council’s Citizen Engagement agenda and was fundamental to creating the conditions for strong and sustainable communities. The service also was critical to helping create

the conditions for a vibrant and thriving third sector and a range of other national priorities highlighted in recent White Papers. Strengthening the citizen's voice is an underpinning theme of many government developments. There is also a statutory requirement to create a Sustainable Community Strategy through a Local Strategic Partnership and a duty to co-operate with the LAA targets.

4.88 The Committee concluded that the use of external organisations to bring about community engagement delivers value for money as the core funding provided by the Council is used as match funding and the Council funding accounts for 10.5% of their turnover. The Committee also noted that the 2010/11 budgets already indicate significant reductions in spend and therefore the service needs to change to tackle the issues associated with the reduction in funding available. The Council needed to make decisions about the weighting of funding between internal and external delivery of community engagement activity. The Committee also concluded that organising internal engagement activities in one function would deliver operational efficiencies and ensure an overarching strategic approach to engagement so that initiatives are co-ordinated across the Council and its partners.

Feedback from the IDeA on Consultation and Engagement

4.89 The support the work of the Committee, the IDeA was asked to provide research on lessons to be learned and best practice from other Councils. A copy of the research paper is attached at **Appendix 8**. The paper reinforces that:

- Effective employee engagement is seen as key to delivery of effective services
- A one size fits all approach will not deliver effective engagement
- It is essential that all engagement activity is centrally co-ordinated
- It is useful to map and audit existing engagement and involvement
- There are a variety of ways that Councils can develop engagement

Employee Engagement

Description of Current Service, Evaluation and Service Pressures

4.90 The Organisational Development Team of 15 within Human Resources undertake employee engagement activity as well as other roles and within their wider remit to deliver health and wellbeing, policy development, file management and training and development. The team co-ordinate:

- Investors in People Accreditation
- Development of the Appraisal Scheme
- Development of an Employee Engagement Strategy
- Fair employment practices
- Development of a Trades Union Partnership Agreement
- Employee Satisfaction Survey
- Development of a network for BME employees

4.91 There are no specific resources allocated to employee engagement activity.

4.92 The main method of consultation is through the biennial employee survey which illustrates high levels of satisfaction with the Council as an employer. There is one question on employee engagement which indicated that 72.1% of employees felt they were encouraged to make suggestions to improve the way things are done at

work. In addition, there are a range of formal and information mechanism to engage staff including employee forums, team meetings, suggestion schemes and appraisals.

Findings and Conclusions

4.93 The Committee felt that the need for effective employee engagement was needed more than ever during the changes that will arise from the EIT process. Research has shown that engaged employees are those who deliver improved business benefits. The evidence both in the academic and business communities shows that there are clear links between highly engaged employees and the following:

- Service quality
- Customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Absence
- Employee turnover
- Organisational citizenship
- Creativity and innovation

4.94 The Committee concluded that it was essential for employees to challenge current ways of working to achieve efficiencies, embrace change and be open to delivering services in different ways, to be increasingly flexible to meet the changing needs of the Council, to be innovative to find new and better ways of doing things and to be open to learning new skills. The Committee also concluded that there was a need for formal staff forums to be established to provide a platform for discussion about changes arising from the EIT process and to facilitate wider employee engagement.

Recommended

6. That a comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy be produced to provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to community engagement and involvement. The Strategy will include a strategic framework on funding for and use of community buildings. The Strategy will be completed by 31 March 2010.

7. That a single Community Engagement team be created to deliver the Community Engagement Strategy. The team will be in place by 31 March 2010 to deliver the strategy in recommendation 6 above.

8. That an Employee Engagement Strategy be produced that brings together all current engagement activities and as part of this process that an employee suggestion scheme with clear feedback route be introduced. The strategy and scheme will be in place by 31 December 2009.

Engagement - Financial Impact of Recommendation

4.95 The recommendations are cost neutral.

OTHER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

4.96 In addition to the recommendations set out above, the Committee were also mindful of the many and detailed suggestions from Employees, Councillors and the Citizens' Panel on how Council communications might be improved. The Committee felt that all of the suggestions should be considered and used to inform a detailed service improvement plan to be reviewed by the Committee at an appropriate time.

Recommended

9. That the Communications, Engagement and Consultation teams consider and report back to the Select Committee on the detailed service improvement opportunities included in Appendices 3, 4 and 5 of this report by 31 March 2010.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.97 An equality impact assessment of the recommendations has been carried out and the recommendations have, at this stage, been assessed as having a positive impact. It will be important, however, to review the impact of the recommendations as part of the monitoring of the review.

Appendix 1

SBC Communications Service - Who provides the current service?

Current Service provision	FTE Count	PR	Marketing	Internal Comms	Branding
Resources - Communications Team					
Interim Head of Communications and Marketing	1				
Communications Manager					
Deputy Public Relations Officer	1				
Assistant Public Relations Officer	1	65%	20%	10%	5%
Press & Media Officer	3				
Communications Assistant					
Administrative Assistant	0.5				
	1				
	1				
D&NS Performance and Business Service					
Marketing Manager	1				
Marketing Assistant	1				
Systems Development Officer	1		100%		
Promotions & Canvassing Officer	2 (4xp/t)				
Environmental Awareness Officer	1				
CESC – BSF					
Communications Officer	1	65%	20%	10%	5%
D&NS – Regeneration					
Tourism Service Manager	1		50%		50%
Tourism Promotions Assistant	1				
Xentrall – D&P					
Design & Print Manager	1				
Business Support Manager/Print Buyer	1		80%	10%	10%
Receptionist/ Admin Assistant	1				
Studio Supervisor	1				
Senior Graphic Designer	2				
Graphic Designer	3				
Assistant Graphic Designer	3				
Print, Copy and Finisher Supervisor	1				
Printer	3				
Copier Finisher	4				
Receptionist/copier/finisher					
NB(3 staff at Darlington site)					
Xentrall – Business Service					

Web Master	1		80%	10%	10%
Total	38.5				

Notes

There are 38.5 staff engaged in communications activities across the council and in Xentrall. These are the current staff and services considered in the scope of this review.

The 21 staff in Xentrall provide the service to Stockton and Darlington – 3 of these staff are based at Darlington.

The final 4 columns of the table give an approximate assessment of the proportion of each teams time spent on each type of communications activity.

Internal Communications Activity is also undertaken by all service groups as part of general management and staff development activities.

Appendix 2

EMPLOYEE SURVEY 2008

The survey was distributed to 4,657 employees for completion on a voluntary basis either electronically or by hard copy. School based staff, Xentrall Shared Services, Tees Active, casual/temporary staff and Tristar employees were all excluded from the survey. An overall response rate of 40% was achieved with 1,840 surveys returned. This compares to a 30% response rate in 2005.

KEY FINDINGS

Employee Survey 2008 Questions	Total Agree (%)	Total Disagree (%)	Net Agreement (%)	Modal Score	Mean Score
COMMUNICATION					
Q11.12: Employees are encouraged to make suggestions to improve the way things are done around here	72.1	16.3	56	Agree	Slightly agree
Q11.13: Communication between departments is good in this organisation	54.2	30.6	24	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree
Q11.25: I am kept informed about matters that affect me	69.9	18.9	51	Agree	Slightly agree
Q11.26: I receive regular feedback on satisfaction levels from users of our services	61.6	19.4	42	Agree	Slightly agree
Q11.27: The organisation keeps employees informed	69.4	17.9	52	Agree	Slightly agree
Q11.51: The reasons for change are well communicated to me	63	19.4	44	Agree	Slightly agree

Appendix 3

Staff Focus Group – Summary of Key Points from Staff Discussion Groups held on 9 June 2009 and 13 July 2009

What we do well?

Wide range of communication methods utilised
Staff forums in Resources Department cited as good practice
Good inter departmental working and co-operation where there is established contact
Many examples of good suggestion schemes across departments
Some departments have employee of the month/year scheme

What works not so well?

Lack of consistency across departments in terms of frequency and quality of communications
No formal Council wide mechanism to feed back on issues in general
Lack of regular corporate communication leads to rumour (eg current financial climate, efficiency work and potential restructurings) – Should have communications to even to say that there is nothing to update
Insufficient feedback on some occasions to staff suggestions etc
It is not clear how to make suggestions for other service areas
Limited contact across services/ departments unless there are established relationships
Some email groups and info on the intranet is not being kept up to date
If staff are hearing about things at different times, can lead to “Chinese Whispers”

What can I do to improve the situation?

Build relationships
Ask to be kept informed about things that affect me
Pass information on

What can we do corporately to improve the situation?

Raise awareness of different roles across the Council
Hold STS type events for all officers to enable staff to meet with colleagues in other departments
Hold meetings across tiers of management to promote understanding and seek ideas for improvement
Seek to introduce more consistency in communications across the Council
Introduce a corporate suggestion scheme and incentives to submit suggestions
Give clear feedback on how suggestions have been taken forward (to all employees)
Maybe through KYIT
Provide feedback from principal officer meetings
Have a weekly bulletin on key issues affecting staff and to highlight key achievements
Make the intranet more user friendly
Include full staff structures and contact details on the intranet (with geographical responsibility)
Frequency of KYIT could be increased if this was circulated electronically – sometimes it is out of date
More news on Chief Executive and Leader’s work

Appendix 4

Member Survey - Overall Summary of Main Points

What you expect to hear about?

Ward matters – top priority for all Councillors

Wider issues, major policy decision, legislative changes, Borough wide initiatives etc – most Councillors want to have an understanding of wider issues and how this links with the local agenda

Key developments in other bodies.

Many Councillors gave examples of good communication practice e.g. CFYA

Most Councillors felt that communications were good overall but most stated that there had been occasions where there had been a lack of communication about ward issues – some examples given

What you would like to hear about?

Changes to staffing structures / responsibilities (who does what) – office moves

More consistent levels of communication from all services

Bad news stories (and what the Council is doing about it) as well good news stories

Several Councillors felt that ward councillors should be copied into responses to residents and parish councils where appropriate

Notification of ward specific items on agendas

Several Members suggested that there should be a formal mechanism for reporting back from outside bodies and the various Boards and Groups.

Several Members commented that there should be better report of incidents of crime and anti social behaviour in wards

One Councillor suggested that there should be consultation with ward councillors where appropriate before the issue of press releases

One Councillor commented that there was a need for Councillors to be “on the radar” of more officers (not just senior officers) and that officers needed to understand the important role that Members could play in getting messages across to residents.

Notification of officers leaving/ joining the Council

How you want to hear about it

Most Councillors commented that they were inundated with information. However, a number of Councillors commented that it was impossible to officers to make a decision about what was important for them. “Difficult to know what is relevant” was a recurring comment

Suggestions for making this manageable were:

- more summary info/ condensed briefings enabling Councillors to scan information at a glance
- bulletins with headlines with links

- Graded with what Councillors were expected to do with the information (e.g. for info/ action, circulation to residents...)
- Better targeting of information for Members who have expressed an interest in a particular subject
- More meaningful wording in title messages (especially emails)
- Better co-ordination of information from the range of external bodies, partners and the third sector

Email fine for most communications but not for large documents or big attachments (A number of comments were received about unnecessary graphics and logos resulting in blocked in boxes). – Better to have links.

A lot of duplication in the information Councillors receive – Need to review the number of publications created in the different parts of the different directorates.

“Councillors don’t want long reports that they don’t have time to read”

Less jargon – info needs to be presented in an easy to understand format

Too much information is still sent out in the post – should be aiming for paperless communications wherever possible.

Seminars difficult for working Councillors to attend – need to circulate info in other ways as well for those that can’t attend. (Power point handouts are often meaningless without the detail).

Minutes to Council not a good way of finding out info – better to have bulletins from LSP groups and external bodies.

Need to avoid papers being tabled on the day of a meeting. All tabled items from Committee meetings/ date changes etc. should be sent immediately after the meeting to anyone submitting apologies.

Agenda papers should have all pages numbered and numbers/ letters should be used in place of bullet points where this is needed for ease of referral

Council minutes should avoid referring to appendices as far as possible but where this is necessary, there should be guidance as to where supporting papers can be obtained

Need dates on the footer of all documents and publications to help Councillors manage the huge volume of paperwork they receive.

Several Members commented that it is useful to have all meeting invitations via outlook.

When you want to hear about it

Before anything goes public or to Partnership Board, Parish Councils or other bodies.

Before governing bodies are informed about proposals.

Need more informal discussions at earlier ideas stages and need adequate lead in on consultations

Need plenty of notice of meeting dates.

Do you know how to feed back your views?

Most Councillors were generally clear about how to feed back their views.

A number of Councillors felt that it was difficult to navigate their way around the system and suggested that structure charts with contact details would help and where they are located)

Any other comments?

Several Members commented on the invaluable support from Democratic Services in helping Members with information requests.

Several Members found the new telephone system frustrating as it did not enable Councillors to see which officers had called.

One Member felt that there was some abuse of voice mail and felt that this should be examined. Another Member suggested that where voice mail is used, an alternative number should be given.

Need more reliable IT equipment

Councillors need to be able to use the most up to date technologies for communication such as the social networking

Need for more key words on the intranet to help with searching and a “help box”

Staff need to be reminded to use the courier service for Members’ post (unless urgent and cannot wait for the delivery)

Councillors themselves need to respond and communicate better.

Appendix 5

Communication Viewpoint Focus Groups Summary 8 and 9 July 2009

Background

In order to gain the views of the general public to inform the scrutiny review of Communications, Consultation and Engagement, it was decided to hold Viewpoint focus groups.

Three adult discussion groups were held (34 viewpoint members attended in total) and one youth panel was held (7 youth viewpoint members attended).

The sessions were facilitated by Jenny Elstob and Judith Trainer and also attended by Michelle Jones.

A summary of the comments made at both sessions follows:

What do you expect the Council to be telling you about?

Comments were varied and included:

- Services
- Performance
- Road works
- Public transport and changes
- Events
- Recycling
- Council Tax
- Councillor Expenses
- Tristar issues
- Future Plans for the Borough
- Parish Council role
- How residents can get involved

The youth session were interested in:

- Events
- Youth Clubs and activities
- Public Transport

Do Panel members have examples of where Council communications have been good? Why was it good?

Recurring examples of good communication included:

- Stockton News
- Care for Your Area
- Recycling Information
- SIRF
- A-Z of Services
- Good response from main switchboard number

Youth viewpoint highlighted events, Stockton News and libraries

Are there instances where communications have not been good? How could they have been improved?

Several panel members had experienced poor communications/ lack of response in respect of individual issues.

Panel members expressed dissatisfaction with:

- The Council's website and response to emails
- Poor communication about changes to public transport
- Confusion about role of different organisations
- Need more information about the role and work of Councillors
- CD versions of Stockton News are abridged
- With the exception of SIRF, not all events are publicised well
- Some dissatisfaction with responses from Councillors

Youth viewpoint felt that there was not enough information about activities for young people and that communication from Tristar was poor.

Do you feel that the Council is in touch with people in the Borough?

The adults groups generally felt that the Council was in touch or was trying to be in touch although there was several comments that the Council was not in touch with individual residents.

Youth viewpoint strongly felt that the Council was not in touch with young people.

Do you feel that the Council gives good value for money?

There was a mixed response to this question but in general members felt that Council had a good reputation and was better than in other areas. Good cleanliness of the area was highlighted.

The youth session felt that money was not being spent on the right things and that more money should be spent on young people.

How do you feel the Council is viewed by local people; what does it stand for?

Again there was a mixed response to this question. Although there were some positive comments and reference to improvements in recent years, most members felt that this depended on where you lived in the Borough.

The youth group felt that the Council was not approachable for young people.

Do you think that a strong identity and positive image is important for the Council?

All groups felt that this was very important. One group commented that this had to be earned.

Do you feel that you have enough information about decisions that are being made by the Council?

In general the groups felt that more information could be given – specifically area/ ward based information and more information on the role of Councillors and how Council money is spent. Several members commented that although minutes were

on the Council website, a more user friendly format and proactive approach to informing residents about decisions being made would be welcomed.

The youth session commented that they only knew about Youth Viewpoint.

Do you feel that you can personally influence decisions affecting your local area?

In general the groups felt that could not personally influence decisions being made. Participants felt that there was insufficient information or that residents heard about things after decisions had been made or that consultation was not genuine.

The youth sessions again commented that they only knew about Youth Viewpoint.

To what extent do you want to be involved in decisions being made?

Participants wanted to be involved where there were big issues under discussion or where issues affected them as an individual or in their local area.

How do you want the Council to keep you informed?

Panel members advocated a range of methods:

- Libraries
- Email
- Website
- Stockton News
- A-Z Guide
- Local Parish Magazines
- Ward Newsletters
- Communications through schools
- Local Newspapers
- Leaflets
- Information with Council Tax Bills

One group felt that leaflets to the door was a waste of money and paper and often got “junked”.

The youth session wanted to be kept informed in the main through events/festivals or through displays in town centres. Only some wanted to be contacted by email or text.

Views on the Website

Most panel members had used the Council website although comments were mixed. Some areas of the website had been found useful but some members found it difficult to navigate (in particular the search engine). There were some concerns about information not being updated regularly.

Several panel members highlighted some problems for people with visual impairment when using the website.

The youth session suggested an area of the website for young people.

Views on Stockton News

Comments in relation to Stockton News were generally positive. Most panel members read Stockton News, found it enjoyable and informative and kept it until the next edition. Panel Members highlighted the following good things about Stockton News:

- Well balanced
- Eye catching
- Good format
- Good spread of issues across the Borough
- What's On
- Day in the Life
- Breakdown of Council expenditure

Ways that Stockton News could be improved included:

- Too much positive spin
- CD version for blind people does not contain all information
- Needs more articles on ward issues
- More information on the work of individual Councillors – perhaps a day in the life
- Councillor expenses should be published in it
- Should contain alternative views – perhaps a letters page
- Need more info on library opening times and NHS opening times

Youth viewpoint members had seen and read the magazine but felt the format was not so good for younger people as there was too much text. They suggested that there should be a section of the magazine for under 16s and 16 – 25s and that there should be more about future events than past events.

Appendix 6

IDeA Communication Feedback Summary 30th June 2009

Context

1. IDeA was asked to support a scrutiny review of communication, consultation and engagement activity in Stockton Borough Council. This is the first of two feedback summaries and covers the first element of that brief - internal and external communication.
2. High performing councils invariably have effective communication at the heart of all that they do. In these councils effective communication is integral to business and service planning. It is not an add on that is used to get the message out after decisions on policy are taken; communication specialists play an active role in offering strategic advice to inform decision making from within the top team.
3. The government wish councils to develop a greater customer focus and external communication plays a key role in developing the relationship between the council and residents. This is also a key element in the new comprehensive area assessment process. The CAA performance framework will increasingly be informed by local perception of service quality and satisfaction.
4. Since April 2009 the duty to consult has been enshrined in law and it is likely that the emphasis on working with, and empowering, local communities will become a central feature of the vision for local government into the foreseeable future.
5. The LGA recognises that good communication is central to the reputation of local government and this forms the basis of its ongoing Reputation Campaign. One finding from the LGA & IPSOS/MORI research is that authorities cannot rely solely on improving satisfaction scores from service users as a result of receiving a service. Positive satisfaction scores after receiving a service do not seem to transfer over into the overall satisfaction ratings that form the basis for performance review.
6. Although high scores on service specific feedback rarely translates into high overall satisfaction ratings IPSOS/MORI identify a number of core activities that when delivered well will enhance public perception of the local council. These are
 - Getting the core services right that affect the daily lives of everyone and publicising them well
 - Tell residents what you can and are doing for them and this will show what residents get for their money
7. Examples of the former include high visibility and strongly branded cleaning operations, one phone contact points, dealing with grot spots, timely removal of abandoned vehicles, a green flag award for parks, education and enforcement to protect the environment. Examples of the latter include good media management to promote and defend the council, an effective A – Z guide to services, regular information to the public via newsletters etc, a

consistent council brand linked to services, communicating well with staff so they act as ambassadors for the council.

8. Communication is better addressed via community magazines rather than standard council leaflets. The major preoccupations of residents are twofold and these two aspects need to be addressed in any communication strategy. First, their own personal experience of the council whether directly or in relation to services that should be provided e.g. attending and requesting a service or the condition of the roads, second confusion on what services councils provide and what their council tax is spent on.
9. A number of councils have well developed communication strategies. Those councils that do one aspect well generally do all aspects well so although we identify specific areas to look to for good practice they all can tell a more detailed story. Good examples of positive council communications include Manchester, Westminster, South Tyneside, Lewisham, Southwark and Bristol.

Key questions

- Why are you doing this now, you need a clear focus on why communications are being reviewed, is it to improve performance against the indicator, is it to anticipate CAA and the focus on understanding your area, You need to start at the outcome you want and work back to the steps to take to get there.
 - Its all perceptual – its about how you are viewed now, and knowing this across all your diverse staff and residents groups, and taking remedial action to tackle deficits
 - The key is trust, clear and honest communication and transparency leads to trust
 - (Re)Branding can be seen as a negative -another waste of council tax – it needs to be linked to credibility, for staff and residents, its not point saying how wonderful you think you are if the experience doesn't match up
 - First contact and customer interactions are the most visible experience of the council and how you communicate the most with staff and local people. All staff who come into contact with people by phone, internet or in person communicate something about the council, make sure it's an experience that says what you want.
 - Technology is there to stay, Bristol and Hampshire have a lead on many councils in the fields of technology, it's about more than a youth survey by text, its integral; to what you need to be doing.
 - Communications is not just about a better newsletter or telling someone about a particular service. The best performing councils have a communications specialist as an integral and active member of the top team and consider strategic communications within business planning, not just when they want to know what leaflet to send out to publicise something.
10. **Branding** – This is both the 'personality' of the council and the 'promise' that the council makes to residents. If you go to buy your sandwich in M&S you expect to pay a higher price but to have better than average quality. Similarly residents will have their own image of what Stockton council represents.

11. It's key to understand how you are perceived, what people in Stockton think of the council, as no branding exercise can succeed without first knowing what you are already in the minds of people. This will vary widely across your population.
12. Common issues that councils need to tackle in 'brand management' include too many priorities and complex messages, inconsistent use of corporate identity, too many 'sub brands' within the council, a credibility gap between what's stated and what is experienced first hand.
13. The perception of the councils brand is based on
 - Purpose – what is the council there to do
 - The values that underpin it – what drives the council to do what it does
 - Delivery – does what is promised get delivered for the man in the street
 - Staff – how do residents get treated when they are your customers
 - Look and feel – how the council goes about business
14. 'Brand Stockton' needs to be defined managed and reviewed by the top team with expert advice from communications specialist. Over half of all councils now have communications specialist playing an active role in the top team. Looking at communications strategically means considering how to get from here to where the council wants to be. This should link to specific areas of activity such as an external communication strategy rather than promoting individual aspects or services as and when or on an ad hoc basis, culture change for all, and internal communications. The behaviour of leading players has a significant impact on brand, be they senior officers or frontline staff.
15. Developing Brand Stockton needs to include the following
 - Know what people think of you and why
 - Know what you want to be known as
 - Focus on key messages and say them in a way people understand
 - Get it right – be credible don't just manipulate symbols
 - Get good design
 - Ensure all that you publish sits together well
 - Do a visual audit of what messages you are currently putting out via buildings, vehicles and facilities
 - Audit what you already put out so it coordinates with where you want to be going
 - Get the credit – don't hide your light under a bushel, use every opportunity to get out there
16. **Internal communications** – The best performing councils are most likely to have staff that will speak up for them externally so winning over your own staff is a winner on two counts. First you are likely to be serving local people better, and secondly, research has shown that if frontline staff understand the importance of communications they feel more proud of being part of the council and tell people about this. To do this staff need to feel consulted, listened to and involved. South Tyneside has run an effective induction programme to increase awareness of communications across staff.
17. An internal communications action plan is a good starting point for improving internal communications. This would include
 - An audit of existing internal communications

- Identify key stakeholders and opinion formers
- Develop clear messages and quick wins
- If you promise to listen to staff back this up with action to prove it and tell them the impact of what they said

18. Internal communications is not just top down but sideways. Ensure staff talk to each other, know roles and responsibilities and how to contact each other when necessary. This is often the case at call centres but can fall down when queries are passed on to the back office. Email free days and open days have been found to increase personal contact and help managers connect to staff.

Appendix 7

Community Engagement – Service Position Statement

Cost of Community Engagement Activity	2009/10 Cost £
Internal Costs	
Corporate Engagement team	£305k
Community Development team	£248k
Democratic Services Engagement Officer	£43k
Housing Regeneration team	Not separate from other work
Internal Sub-Total	£596k
Payments made to third sector organisations	
St Ann's Neighbourhood Partnership	£258k (1)
Parkfield Neighbourhood Management	£80k
Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre	£114k (2)
SRCGA	£36k (3)
CEN	£130K (1)(3)
Stockton International Family Centre	£55k (3)
U.N.I.T.E	£17k (3)
Catalyst	£36k (3)
Newtown-Norton Community Resource Centre	£51k (2) (3)
Hardwick in Partnership	£31k (3)
The Corner House	£36k (3)
The Clarences	£20k (2) (3)
The Five Lamps	£76k (2) (3)
The Billingham Partnership	£31k (3)
External Sub-Total	£971k(4)
Total	£1,567k

Notes

1. Funding ends 31 March 2010
2. This funding does not include the payments made for delivery of services for The Communities Fund skills programme, Sure Start, Adult Day services etc.
3. Affected by the reduction in the VSSF core funding for 2010/11. The fund drops by £93k for 2010/11 the allocation of this reduction is subject to review.
4. If one assumes that the grant to SDAI remains unchanged for 2010/11 (subject to a separate review) then of the £971k currently spent on 3rd Sector Community Development activity only £488k of identified funding exists after 31 March 2010. (Note that the Stockton District Advice and Information Centre is covered by a separate EIT review of Advice and Information.

Appendix 8

IDeA CASSI Report Back Summary Part two Community Engagement

This summary is submitted to the scrutiny review as a short position statement for consideration. The IDeA lead is unable to attend the July meeting but hopes to attend a subsequent committee meeting at which he can respond to queries and questions arising from this paper.

Context

1. Developing an effective approach to community engagement is becoming more and more essential for all councils. There are a number of different phrases current in documentation, principle amongst these are neighbourhood empowerment, connecting with communities, community engagement, community empowerment and community involvement. For the purpose of this feedback we use community engagement as a catch all to refer to any attempt to consult on local needs and/or involve residents in reviewing and developing services or policy.
2. Local authorities have acquired new responsibilities in relation to community engagement in recent years specifically to promote democratic understanding, a formal response protocol for local petitions, and extension of the duty to involve partners in strategic development and delivery of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). A duty to inform, consult and involve was enacted in April 2009.
3. The new performance framework for councils, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), places considerable importance upon knowledge of local needs and local perceptions of services. There are seven indicators within the national indicator set that forms the basis for the LAA that relate to community empowerment.
4. There is an aligned impetus from central government and from the LGA to develop a more customer focussed approach to council services. This is not possible without effective community engagement to identify local need and the type of provision that residents want and consider to be effective.
5. The LGA has been keen to increase community engagement and to improve local perception of service quality. The LGA Reputation project has provided baseline information on engagement and highlighted areas for development and challenge for all councils. LGA/IDeA have recently received funding from CLG to initiate a network of empowering councils with two identified lead councils in each region, a benchmark of an ideal empowering council and a self evaluation toolkit.
6. IDeA also has a customer insight project which provides guidance on how to better understand community need and the active application of this in the design of services. A downloadable guide to customer insight is available via the IDeA website.
7. Local Government Employers are about to commence a major project, together with CLG, on empowering the frontline workforce, which will include employee engagement. Effective employee engagement is seen as key to

delivery of effective services. Our previous summary of findings (on consultation) included issues to consider in relation to employee engagement/consultation.

8. IPSOS/MORI and the LGA have produced a review of 'The key drivers of resident satisfaction with councils'. There is a report by the Community Development Foundation on 'The duty to involve: making it work'. Both these reports contain practical advice and guidance for authorities. The IDeA knowledge website has many case studies and findings that relate to community engagement and customer insight and these are regularly updated as is information on the network of empowering authorities.

Issues to consider

9. A one size fits all approach will not deliver effective engagement. There is no one picture of community needs and views. Councils need to understand the needs of specific priority target groups/neighbourhoods as well as the general picture in each of its local communities. Some needs and user groups will not fit into a picture based on physical communities, such as the needs of vulnerable adults, and will require a specific approach to their engagement.
10. It is essential that all engagement activity is centrally coordinated within a dedicated council team, even though delivery may be delegated to individual services to implement. There is a need to develop an overarching strategic approach to engagement so that initiatives are coordinated across the council and its partners. Such an approach needs to be developed at the most senior level of the council. Much of the existing work on engagement will traditionally have been located within specific council services. Strategic coordination will require that specialist communications officers play an integral role in policy development and strategic decision making and have an advisory role with services in relation to service specific engagement activity.
11. It would be useful to map and audit existing engagement and involvement activity. The information can then be used to better plan engagement in a strategic fashion corporately rather than delegating this function entirely to individual services. This is neither cost effective nor an efficient use of officer and resident time.
12. There are a variety of ways that councils can develop engagement, from informing local people, consulting them, through to involving them in decisions on budgets and the delivery and design of services. The DH have produced a good toolkit to plan how to involve local people 'Real involvement: working with people to improve health services' which although obviously health related uses the concept of different levels of engagement/involvement to map out an effective strategy. The IDeA self assessment tool and the benchmark could also be used as an aid to developing more effective engagement.
13. Manchester's 100 days campaign provides a good example of strategic engagement which has led to 10,000 people becoming involved across all sectors of the local community. South Tyneside undertook a smaller but equally effective campaign 'Blitz it and do your bit' a number of years ago in relation to an area based street maintenance initiative. Staffordshire County Council used an innovative mix of methods of consultation and has 50 staff who have volunteered to be community first champions to raise awareness and share good practice across the council.

14. Engagement with different groups. There have been beacon awards for 'positive youth engagement', 'positive engagement with older people', 'transforming services, citizen engagement and empowerment' and 'getting closer to communities' details of which are on the IDeA beacon website.
15. A number of London authorities have developed interesting practice in relation to bme community engagement including Tower Hamlets, Haringey, and Crawley.
16. There are other examples of effective work with young people in Devon Young Commissioners, and Hampshire with its Futures group using multi media in schools.