

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 28 January 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Corporate & Resources

SUBJECT: Communications, Design and Marketing Service Update

WARDS: Borough-Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the work of the Communications, Design & Marketing service

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

That the content of the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Communications, Design and Marketing is a centralised service, within the Legal & Democratic Services Division. The team is organised to deliver a broad range of functions including media relations, internal communications, creative design and marketing. The service also supports the Authority's statutory responsibility for 'warning and informing' and provides communications advice and support during emergencies/incidents.
- 3.2 The service adheres to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011).
- 3.3 The role of the department has changed over the years due to a number of factors including restructuring, financial restraints, the evolution of shared services/partnership working and by the opportunities provided by new technology.
- 3.4 The service has been subject to internal review as part of the Efficiency Review in 2010 and subsequently in 2013. During the latter, changes from the previous structure included moving digital services into the Customer Intelligence Unit and Print Services into the administration shared service.
- 3.5 Of the remaining functions, there has been a reduction in staffing levels from 16.54FTE (April 2010) to the current 8.1FTE. With a reduced

resource, the team has focused its efforts on activities where its expertise brings most value to the organisation. As such, work within the department is prioritised against a number of criteria, these being:

- An income will be generated for the authority
- There will be a reduction in cost/improved efficiency
- The reputation of the authority will be significantly enhanced/or risk to reputation will be reduced
- There is a statutory duty

- 3.6 A key priority over the years has been to support the marketing of Council-owned venues – namely The Brindley, Stadium and Widnes Market. From 2016 this has also included support for Halton’s leisure centres.
- 3.7 There has been ongoing support for major projects and regeneration activity. The Lead Officer represents the Council on the Mersey Gateway Communications & PR Group that coordinates all related Mersey Gateway PR & Communications activity from lobbying for funding in the early stages of the project, through to the organisation of the road opening fireworks event and subsequent official opening event by Her Majesty the Queen.
- 3.8 Where shared services/joint working arrangements have been established, the team has contributed its expertise – at present a member of staff delivers marketing/recruitment and retention activity as part of the Foster4 collaboration. In addition, capacity is being provided to coordinate communication activity related to One Halton. The team regularly work alongside partners on cross-borough/cross-regional campaigns and initiatives including the Cheshire Resilience Forum, SciTech Daresbury, Pan-Cheshire CSE and Domestic Violence campaigns.
- 3.9 Social media has provided a fast, inexpensive and effective way to reach increased numbers of our community. We now have an established following across our various social media accounts, enabling us to share content directly with users and/or drive them to further online content on our newsroom, websites and applications.
- 3.10 The paid-for advertising opportunities offered across these platforms have helped us to significantly reduce advertising spend. As well as being a much lower cost, digital advertising enables in-depth targeting of adverts so that tailored messages can be directed at specific audience groups – making the adverts far more cost-effective. In addition they allow us to measure much more accurately the impact of adverts.
- 3.11 It is understood that not all in our community have access to the internet, or have the necessary skills or desire to engage with the Council online. For these reasons we continue to use more traditional methods of communication and marketing where appropriate. For example our

residents' newsletter Inside Halton is delivered to each household in the borough, three times a year.

- 3.12 Choosing the right mix of activity is part of the planning process, with the service working closely with departments to understand their business, their various audiences, priorities and desired outcomes. Support in this planning process is also provided through the Customer Intelligence Unit, who can provide and analyse data to ensure we are working from a strong evidence base.
- 3.13 There is a recognition of the continued influence that broadcast, print and online media outlets have and the role they play in influencing and informing the public. Our central press office works across departments to generate positive news coverage, consistently achieving high percentage take up of press releases across our local and regional media.
- 3.14 Proactive media relations remains an important core function of the service. We endeavour to provide timely and accurate information in response to enquiries, being honest and open in our dealings with media outlets.
- 3.15 Further cost savings have been achieved through our in-house creative design service, who, working closely with our internal print unit have ensured the vast majority of marketing materials are now produced in-house. Workflow management through an 'I Want' portal has been established to improve efficiency and keep internal customers informed of task progress.
- 3.16 The service continues to strive to ensure that all communications and marketing activities achieve a high standard of quality and to keep up to date with latest practices.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The service has sought to reduce costs in all areas whilst delivering desired outcomes and offer a cost effective service to the authority

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The work of the service supports services across this area in achieving their outcomes and priorities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

As above

6.3 A Healthy Halton

As above

6.4 A Safer Halton

As above

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

As above

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The service is a centralised function, which brings the benefit of having a suite of activities being carried in one area, avoiding duplication, maximising impact and maintaining quality. A key risk is the fragmenting of activity, with elements starting to be carried out in isolation by departments. This risk is mitigated through various processes and policies including the design and print policy and 'I Want' online portal.

Capacity within the service continues to be a risk as workloads increase and departments look to communications to support them in achieving income; shifting customer transactions and helping to find innovative solutions to achieve outcomes with reduced budgets.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None. Through its work, the service supports the Council in ensuring all members of our community have access to information.