Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 April 09

Briefing Paper for Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Update on Corporate Communications Strategy  
Author: Kate Robertson (AD Customer Services, Communication & Business Change) 020 8379 4431

Introduction

The Council’s Corporate Communications Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in October 2008 and since then, significant progress has been made against a challenging agenda for further improvement.

Below is a summary of progress against the major themes of the strategy.

1. Improve communication with residents

Progress has been made in developing a welcome pack for new residents. Working with the GIS team, the Council will be launching a new ‘find my nearest’ capacity as part of the new website. This will enable residents to input a post-code and find a wealth of area-based information relevant to them. Some of the information includes:

- Local ward councillors  
- Day of refuse/recycling collection  
- Nearest schools  
- Nearest parks and open spaces  
- Nearest library  
- Nearest leisure centres  
- Conservation areas  
- Planning applications

We are now working up the arrangements for Council Tax to advise customer services of new residents so that we write to them with their unique customer reference number and include the ‘find my nearest’ information.

The Enfield Strategic Partnership has agreed a new comprehensive engagement framework following a 12 week consultation. The next step is actively promoting the different ways people can get involved and influence decision-making not just of the council but other partner organisations.

The regularity of Our Enfield has been reviewed and from May 2009, the magazine will be published monthly and also be distributed to small businesses and retailers.

The Council is currently in the process of procuring a new online resident and staff suggestion scheme so that we can formally capture and disseminate good ideas and innovation.
2. Develop targeted communications

The older people web portal went live last Autumn and further work is underway with Health and Adult Social Care to review and restructure their web content. The first business breakfast took place and again work is taking place to update and improve the web content for business in advance of the launch of the new website. This will then enable us to develop e-newsletters and forums for businesses.

As the committee is already aware, discussions have also taken place with the Youth Support Service about how we can best promote youth activities in the borough, looking particularly at SMS texting and social media. The taskgroup is meeting in early May and will be involving young people in advising the group and the council on how to use new media more effectively.

Neighbouring Barnet employed a dedicated social media manager who developed the use of social media for residents. Whilst the Leader’s blog has been successful, there has been limited take-up of other avenues.

3. Putting Enfield on a national stage

Significant progress has been made since September 2008. We have written 12 award submissions and so far won the Beacon Award for supporting independent living, were shortlisted for 4 LGC awards and were highly commended for Legal Services. We are waiting to hear whether our submissions for the MJ Awards and Regeneration and Renewal Awards have been shortlisted.

We are working with a public affairs agency, Lexington, to support our lobbying campaign linked to the place-shaping priority areas. An audit of stakeholder perceptions has been completed and an annual programme of activity including national and specialist press, events and speaking opportunities at conferences.

Key influencers and decision makers have also visited the borough over the last six months including Boris Johnson and his deputy mayors, John Healy MP and Iain Wright MP.

4. Supporting place-shaping

We continue to support the Place-shaping team in effectively communicating with and engaging local communities in the four-place-shaping priority areas. A communications strategies have been developed for Ponders End and the North Circular, the latter in partnership with Transport for London and Enfield Homes.

Staff and members tours of the place-shaping areas have taken place with very positive feedback.
5. Integrated campaigns and better planning

Discussions are underway with directors and their departments to identify priority campaigns for 2009/2010 linked to the Council’s aims. In addition, a corporate campaign calendar is being populated so that effective planning and co-ordination can take place.

Two recent campaigns are teenage pregnancy and school attendance both of which have used a variety of channels including multi-media, discussion groups and theatre.

The Council is currently preparing a campaign around the improvements to the recycling service over the coming year and summer promotion of our parks linked to national ‘love parks’ week.

6. Effective branding

A review of branding has shown that many of the council’s capital schemes are not branded effectively to reflect the council’s investment in new and improved facilities.

Similarly the review identified that the Council had over 70 different letterheads and over 1000 logos in use. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that residents do not know what the Council does or associates us with quality services.

The Council’s communications team is in the process of assessing the different logos and reducing them to the minimum. It is also redesigning the Council’s letterhead to ensure consistency and has incorporated the web address into the logo for all future publications.

7. Media relations

The Council’s press team continues to provide a 24 hour press liaison service working both proactively and reactively to journalists. The new media centre will be launched as part of the new website including the ability for people to comment on news stories and add their own stories.

As from 1 April 2009, Enfield Homes will be managing their own press liaison but a protocol has been agreed to ensure consistency.

8. Website

Work is progressing well on the new website. Focus groups have been held with young people, older people, disabled people, members, staff and residents aged 20-50.
The Council has also worked with Quickheart, a company working with a consortium of councils in the north west of England to understand customer navigation on local authority websites.

These comments/studies have been incorporated into the new design and navigation structure for the site. A temporary web editor is working with services in reviewing the 4000 pages of web content to ensure that any content migrated to the new site is up-to-date and written in plain language.

As referred to earlier, new facilities such as ‘find my nearest’, the media centre and more customer interaction, are being developed as part of the new website.

There has been a slight delay in the go-live for the new website due to the technical infrastructure. The new website is due to go live on 10 June 2009.

9. Value for money and capacity to deliver

A strategic review of communications activity is underway and due to report next month. The review is being conducted by the Leaner Programme and will look at communications staffing, resources and expenditure across the Council in order to identify efficiency savings and more effective and joined up service.

10. Staff ambassadors

The implementation of the internal communications strategy has slipped due to staffing shortages. This has now been resolved and the communications team is now beginning to implement the actions. These include:

- Organising a change champions event end of April
- Refreshing the staff magazine
- Launching the new staff suggestion scheme
- Further development of the intranet
- Launching this year’s staff excellence awards

11. Member communications

The Council's communications team continues to provide advice and training for members designated as official spokespeople for the Council. A members tour has been arranged of the place-shaping priority areas but at this stage there has not been any progress in developing a Members’ e-bulletin.