

IMPLEMENTATION EXECUTIVE
6 October 2008

TOWARDS ONE COUNCIL – COMMUNICATION

Executive Summary

Communication could make or break the reputation and perception of the new council both locally and nationally. It is vital that we implement a robust communications plan to convey clear targeted, timely and consistent information to all our staff, members, stakeholders, communities and local residents throughout the next six months as it is a period of significant change.

This period provides a real opportunity to promote and position the new council. Perception will be based on the level of understanding and awareness that there is about what the council is setting out to achieve, the services it delivers and what impact it will have on individuals or community groups.

This report updates and requests the Implementation Executive (IE) to make key decisions to deliver an assertive and cohesive communications plan to ensure that all our stakeholders are aware of what's happening as we rapidly move towards to one council.

Recommendations

1. That the Implementation Executive is asked to note current public perception based on the feedback received at recent road show events.
2. That the Implementation Executive approve the communications plan and the proposed actions to increase awareness of the new council and deliver targeted communication to respond to public feedback.
3. That the Implementation Executive considers publishing one Wiltshire-wide magazine (from 1 January 09) and requests the use of district council vehicles, facilities and reception areas to promote information on one council
4. That the Implementation Executive notes the strap line for the new council.
5. That the Implementation Executive considers the proposed organisational arrangements to manage communication during the vital period of transition to one council.

Reasons for Proposals

In April 2008, the Implementation Executive agreed a Transitional Communications Strategy. This strategy has been revised to reflect recent feedback from local people and to deliver a targeted communications action plan.

The plan includes actions to increase understanding of the new council and provide factual information to dispel concerns and misleading information affecting how people can access the new council and where they go for services.

Our approach to communication county-wide has delivered awareness of the new council. To avoid any further confusion and respond to the lack of understanding about the new council we must make a step change in our approach to ensure that key messages and information relating to the new council are consistent and co-ordinated and that opportunities to maximise the impact and convey targeted and timely information are not being missed or diluted but are maximised.

In July 2008, the Implementation Executive agreed that an audit of external signs and livery be carried out and that a procurement process is undertaken. The Implementation Executive also agreed that the new council will be known as Wiltshire Council and that a new strap line is developed by engaging local people and staff from the five authorities.

Keith Robinson
Programme Director

Author: Laurie Bell
Service Director
Policy, Research and Communications

1. Introduction

1.1. We are rapidly approaching the transition towards one council and communication is a critical factor affecting and influencing how the new council will be perceived both at local and national level. The Department of Communities and Local Government has indicated that communication and public perception will be measured in determining the success in setting up the new council. It is vital that our communities, members, stakeholders and staff have a clear understanding and awareness of how the new council will work and how and where services will be delivered.

1.2. To deliver a targeted approach to communication it was vital that we understood the public's current perception and level of awareness of the new council and how it will work. Without this intelligence, we would not be confident that our communication activity and delivery is appropriately focused.

1.3. To ascertain current perception and level of awareness of the new council, a series of public road show events, widely promoted through the local media and directly supported by GWR and BBC Wiltshire radio, took place throughout week commencing 1 September. The road shows, held in Salisbury, Trowbridge, Devizes and Chippenham focused on one council and provided an opportunity to talk directly to local people and measure their awareness of the new council, how much they knew about it and concerns that they may have. A full briefing note on the road show events is attached as appendix 1.

1.4. Of the hundreds of people who talked to the communications team, who manned the road shows, almost all were aware that there would be one new council for Wiltshire next April. The awareness and perceptions of the new council and what it would do highlighted key areas of misunderstanding and significant gaps in information. In summary these were;

- How can services be accessed?
- Will everything be based at Trowbridge and/or Chippenham?
- How will it affect local service delivery?
- Where will decisions be made – all in Trowbridge?
- How can they find out more about particular services?
- Will services change or be cut?
- Which services will be improved?
- The new council wont be local
- How will the Area Boards work?

1.5. A revised communications plan has been drafted taking a cohesive and county-wide approach to include targeted actions to address the issues, concerns and misunderstandings highlighted in 1.4. The overarching revised action plan was distributed to members at the IE meeting on 23 September 2008.

1.6. Every opportunity should be taken in the next six months to deliver the plan and focus on consistent, frequent and targeted communication to increase understanding and promote information about the new council, its services and how the Area Boards will work. The plan, therefore, includes;

Forthcoming events and forums

- Budget Consultation
- Face to Face sessions with Town and Parish Councils
- Frontline Service workshops
- Area Development Boards
- Public road shows
- Wiltshire Assembly Annual meeting
- Media Briefings

Promotional activity

- Refuse Freighters and other vehicles
- Reception Areas main offices
- Leisure Centres, Arts Centres and Libraries
- Poster campaigns at bus shelters etc.
- Radio campaign

Publications and promotional information

- A Wiltshire magazine – one edition
- A co-ordinated series of leaflets for specific services
- An A – Z of services
- Contact cards with 1 number and golden numbers
- Advertorials in local newspapers

2. Council Identity

2.1 The IE agreed in July that the new council will be known as Wiltshire Council and that a revised style guide would be produced and a new strap line developed by local people and staff.

2.2 To increase awareness and engage people in the new council it was agreed that developing a strap line should be run as a competition. Staff and the public were encouraged to take part and in three words state what the new council would mean to them.

2.3 Over 500 entries were received. These were narrowed down to reflect the most popular and consistent choice of words representing what the new council will be like. The final shortlist was circulated to all Implementation Members following the meeting of 23 September 2008 for their comments and preferred choice.

2.4 It was agreed that the final decision, based on feedback, would be delegated to Jane Scott. The strap line selected is “Where everybody matters”.

2.5. The strap line will underpin the Wiltshire Council logo and a style guide will be produced by mid October to ensure that the new council branding is applied consistently and appropriately by 1 April 2009 on all signage, livery, uniforms, stationery, promotional materials and publications.

3. Organisational Arrangements

3.1. Over 30 staff deliver communication across the existing five Councils plus there are over 20 staff delivering design and print services in Wiltshire County Council, Salisbury and Kennet District Councils. Each council has its own communications plan setting out its activities between now and 31 March 2009. The level of activity varies in each of the councils.

3.2. The five plans have recently been collated into an overarching county-wide communications project plan. The activities and actions are timed and there is a focus on promoting and positioning the new council and keeping communities, stakeholders, staff and members informed of what is happening across the county.

3.3. Communications staff from all five councils are aligned to delivery of the plan to ensure that the delivery and impact is maximised, wherever possible.