

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	20 th August 2012
Report of:	Strategic Director for Places and Organisational Capacity
Subject/Title:	Notice of Motion: Corporate Communications
Portfolio Holder	Strategic Communities

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 This report invites the Cabinet to consider the following Motion, proposed by Councillor B Murphy, which has been referred by Council to the Cabinet for consideration:

“This Council calls for an immediate all-party inquiry into the Council’s corporate communications function with particular reference to:

- its purpose, relevance and value-for-money
- overall cost, budgetary provision/resource allocation and cost effectiveness
- political impartiality and support for members
- the corporate culture it seeks to foster
- its policies/protocols for media relations, publications, communication technology, corporate ID, corporate communications/marketing, and internal communications.”

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That the portfolio holder with responsibility for the Communication function sets up a temporary cross party group to review the media relations protocol and that the points made in the motion be noted by cabinet”

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 To enable Council to consider the Cabinets views on the matter.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 None

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 All Members are affected by this matter.

6.0 Policy Implications

6.1 None identified.

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Director of Finance and Business Services)

7.1 None identified.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1 None identified.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 None identified.

10.0 Background and Options

10.1 On 19th July 2012 Council considered a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Murphy regarding the corporate communications function. The Notice of Motion is attached at Appendix 1.

10.2 The work, role, value for money and key priorities for the Communications team were the subject of in-depth debate during 2011/12 and in the run up to budget setting for 2012/13. This involved looking at cost per head at other local authorities, the management of the media, the need to run fewer, more focused campaigns, the need to align the work of the team with other corporate functions eg research, business improvement, the need to report more comprehensively and regularly to cabinet on potential and actual reputational issues and the structure and ways of working of the team.

10.3 The result of this exercise was that the team was reduced by a third taking the total head count to 12.5 staff covering media, marketing and communications. There was also a conscious integration of the media and communications roles to enhance flexibility and give better co-ordination.

10.4 The cost per head is now well below the average for local authorities and indeed based on research in September 2011 is at the very lowest end of cost per head. The service planning process for 2012/13 has resulted in an endorsed team plan for the team which gives five clear objectives with actions and milestones beneath, the team report weekly to cabinet on issues arising and potential reputational issues and relations with key media have been significantly challenged and improved.

- 10.5 The team make up and ways of working take on board all recommendations from the national code of practice about political impartiality and the media protocol is about to be refreshed
- 10.6 The function that has been under constant review since the start of Cheshire East. £230k was taken out of the staffing budget in 2012/13, two staff have left the organisation and four have been redeployed into other posts. In addition two temporary posts funded by other service budgets have been terminated.
- 10.7 Issues relating to PR need to be judged in the context of the whole authority wide approach to service improvement, quality of services and issues affecting public perception. The Communications team are well placed to assist a drive to improve public perception and approach communications, media and marketing activity with professionalism.
- 10.8 If members feel there is a need for further review into the work of the team then it is suggested that an informal review lead by Cllr David Brown the Cabinet member with responsibility for Strategic Communities (which includes Communications and Media Relations) is carried out.
- 10.9 It is also suggested that a focus of this review could be the Media Relations Protocol (Appendix 2). The protocol was first approved by Cabinet in June 2009. Small changes, approved by Cllr Brown, have been made since. However the time is now right to review this more fully.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer. There are no specific background documents.

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