

**NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING**

**APRIL 2019**

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## Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee. It details the findings and conclusions and recommendations of the Committee from its Communications and Marketing review.

Members of the Committee felt that it was timely to look at how the Communications and Marketing service was working to ensure it was meeting the needs of our customers.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for their input and also the stakeholders who helped inform the review. I would also like to thank the Scrutiny Manager for her support of the Committees work and Democratic Services for the help they provided.

Councillor D Skinner  
Chair of Organisation Scrutiny Committee

## Review Panel

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor D Skinner	-	(Labour) – Review Panel Chair
Councillor J Barry	-	(Labour)
Councillor A Dale	-	(Conservative)
Councillor B Lewis	-	(Conservative)
Councillor T Mansbridge	-	(Labour)
Councillor B Ridgway	-	(Labour)
Councillor L Robinson	-	(Labour)
Councillor R Welton	-	(Conservative)
Councillor B Wright	-	(Labour)

## **1. Recommendations**

That:

- 1.1 The Council reviews the resources within the Communications Team
- 1.2 The Council considers how it can ensure its media articles are interesting and relevant to residents including undertaking a review of The News
- 1.3 The Senior Management Team considers how it can effectively cascade information to the Communications Team to help them capture news stories
- 1.4 The Communications Team produce an article for all officers to raise awareness of the team and their roles including as gatekeeper of the Councils standards of publicity
- 1.5 Officers be made aware of the actions they need to take with regard to keeping portfolio holders and ward Councillors informed relevant to their role
- 1.6 The communications and marketing role be given a higher profile within the portfolio holders remit
- 1.7 The Council considers holding scheduled meetings with Rykneld Homes and also The Derbyshire Times

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 4 July 2018 the Organisation Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Communications and Marketing.
- 2.2 The review panel thought it timely to look at how the Communications and Marketing service is working to ensure it was meeting the needs of our Customers.

## **3. Scope of Review**

- 3.1 The review aimed to:
  - Examine Council communications with the public and other relevant stakeholders to ensure they are effective and achieving the right outcomes.
  - Consider Council marketing and advertising processes and procedures to ensure they are effective and provide value for money.
  - Identify any areas for improvement.

#### **4. Method of Review**

- 4.1 The review panel met on five occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview.
- 4.2 Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of stakeholders.

#### **5. Evidence and Research**

- 5.1 A number of documents and evidence were provided to the review panel for consideration. Details are provided below:
  - Presentation by the Communications and Marketing Manager to set the scene on 5 September 2018.
  - NEDDC Viewpoint Citizens Panel – June 2017 Survey.
  - Communications, Marketing and Design Team – Internal Satisfaction Survey 2016.

#### **6. Key Findings**

##### **6.1 Strengths**

##### **6.1.1 Methods of Communications - External**

The review panel asked internal stakeholders what methods they were using to communicate effectively. They heard that the Council was using a mix of different media to communicate with people as the culture had changed and a wide variety of methods was required to reach the intended audience. One key part was the Council's Website. This provided a large amount of information people could use including Councillor Information, meetings and events taking place, online payment facilities, Bin collection times, Leisure facilities available and other service information in areas such as Planning and Licensing. The Website had received half a million hits so was considered a massive communication tool for the Council. Other key communications tools highlighted were Social Media, which had 6500 hits, twitter which with retweets can reach thousands of people, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram. The Council still, where appropriate, used material like printed publicity but it was considered essential to use a varied approach to communicate effectively. Information gathered via the posts, web statistics, surveys, consultations and enquiries by telephone and reception, all helped the Communications Team to assess and understand what customers want from the Council. The team also lead on projects and advise officers why it is important to provide stories that can be used to inform the public but also capture their interest, especially if they focus on issues that benefit communities.

The team felt they generally had up to date kit which helped them produce high quality products. One example provided was The News, which is NEDDC's resident's magazine. It is produced three times a year and delivered to 40,000 residents. In addition the team deals with press releases and general enquiries. They also work with Parish Councils on issues like tourism and new housing development which benefits both sides. They also help promote start up events for local businesses and tag to other business users in Sheffield City Region or D2N2 or prominent businesses interested in the event. Social media information is also shared with Rykneld Homes, Leisure Centres and Parish Councils. The team quoted one example of where they had worked well with the fly tipping team by posting photographs, which had a good response and served as a deterrent to people undertaking this activity. Councillors were also mentioned as a resource as they were considered close to their constituents, so could tell you how well communications were working on the ground.

### 6.1.2 Methods of Communication – Internal

Various stakeholders were asked for their views on the effectiveness of internal communications. Officers from the Communications team referred to the new recently launched intranet. This was considered a significant improvement from the old system as a lot of time had been invested in this project. The old site was thought to have been dry and corporate and not updated quickly. Efforts had been made to make it more fun, up to date and much quicker and in real time. People can also now access it on their mobile. It was a place for documents from service areas including policies, had a social room space which staff were using, showed job vacancies available and aimed to keep people informed about what was happening within the Council. It was still being further developed.

The communications team also outlined their role in supporting Councillors. This included uploading information on to the Extranet for members, writing leadership briefs and monthly e-newsletter for all members. Support was provided to the Chairs charity events and other fund raising undertaken by staff and individual service areas. The TV screen PowerPoints to all three leisure centres and reception at Mill Lane were provided by the team which helped promote various services. Posters were produced and displayed in kitchen/staff areas in support of various issues relating to staff such as Health and Wellbeing. Other areas that had previously been supported were weekly e-bulletins for staff and the Chief Executives blog. A monthly Leisure Centre Communications and Marketing meeting takes place to discuss what is working well or needed promoting and any feedback from centre users. This leads to the production of marketing materials such as magazine adverts, flyers, posters, social media posts. Service areas feeding back to the team also helped them know what they wanted from the service.

### 6.1.3 Accessible Information

A number of measures/tools were identified that the Council provides to enable people with disabilities or people for whom English is not their first language to communicate with the Council. Examples provided were the language translation service which was advertised by an information panel included on publications and the website, provision of sign language facilities, documents in braille, large print/high

font or with colour changes, say to black and yellow, were offered. Checks are also made to ensure the media used for communication is right for people such as someone who has dyslexia. The information is kept up to date and accurate for users and the digital officer monitors the website to keep fit for purpose.

#### 6.1.4 Performance Measurement

Stakeholders were asked how they measure the performance of the communications service. The panel heard that the Communications Team used the Website facility of google analytic which provided information on hits on both the website and individual pages. It gives a breakdown on male and female users of the site and information on the type of device being used. This helps produce monitoring information to assist officers in understanding what the customer needs. Social Media statistics were also available on how many people connected by that communication method. In the last two years people using mobiles had increased from 40 to 60 percent. The Council has an internal performance system called Perform. One stakeholder who said he used it felt the statistics could be improved as he felt the measures needed to be less about an increase in numbers but ones that helped us interact better with our users. In support of this statement he gave an example of a campaign with 20,000 names which had used false information so was not reliable as it could only produce opinion not facts. Another stakeholder commented that any measures used needed to be meaningful and in his view measuring the number of clicks was not very useful. A more successful measure he felt was the Leisure Centre marketing which he thought had been very good and helped increased memberships. This campaign had been supported by the Communications Team. Results from surveys and questionnaires, such as the recent internal satisfaction survey were considered useful indicators. However the point was made that the service had previously undertaken more surveys and secret shopper exercises to find views out but due to capacity the team don't do as much anymore.

#### 6.1.5 Working with Partners - Rykneld Homes

The review panel wished to consider how Rykneld Homes delivered their Communications Service. Two senior managers attended the review panel and provided a useful overview of the service. The panel heard the importance of the organisation's Corporate Plan and the three key objectives within it that are embedded and understood by Rykneld Homes staff. It was stated that communications is everything you do and we want to make sure we do communicate. It was however, also acknowledged that sometimes you can get it wrong on message. The website was seen as increasingly important. It was stated the site's accuracy was checked regularly to ensure it was up to date including liaising with service teams to check still relevant. Most of the data is in real time on the website. Other media was mentioned including Twitter, checked every day, Facebook every couple of days. There is also a five language translation service but can accommodate others. Additionally there is a talk back service on request. The website is disability compliant and includes browse aloud.

When asked about performance monitoring and understanding what the customer wants a number of comments were made. The organisation carries out a Tenant survey which was considered important as it helps measure how well Rykneld

Homes are communicating with tenants and takes account of their views. Google analytics is also used to see how information is being found and if it is relevant or not. Additionally two or three stand-alone surveys were undertaken. Stakeholders felt they had a good working relationship with their colleagues at NED and meet to discuss arising issues. Work with colleagues from Police, Derbyshire County Council and Health also took place. Further comments were made on the sharing of information, such as retweeting each other's tweets. Reference was made to the importance of using different methods of communications for sections of the community. Examples provided was some elderly people not always liking social media and some young people often wanting to text rather than talk to someone. It was stated that the Contact Centre was the first preference for people with the tenant magazine second for tenants. The Business plan was refreshed every year, performance data was available every month and an Annual Customer Report was produced. Scrutiny and Tenants Groups were also held. The organisation had also won awards in communications and had the customer excellence award.

Internally it was stated the organisation had a number of measures to communicate well with our employees. Identified initiatives included repairs and maintenance groups, tool box talks, six week 1:1s and meetings with unions. A staff magazine was produced every six to eight week with many ideas put forward from the staff think tank but all staff could contribute. It contained some corporate items but was staff led. Lots of consultation and keeping in touch with members was done too.

NEDDC was seen as an important partner and joint press releases and communications were often done. Rykneld Homes Communications Manager met with the NEDDC Communications Manager on projects and they had a good relationship. There was also a number of groups which meet monthly including Housing Operations and Human Resources.

#### 6.1.6 Working with Partners - Bolsover District Council

The panel wanted to hear from the Councils strategic partner Bolsover District Council. Councillor Steve Fritchley attended the meeting with the Councils Communications Manager. The service had a number of joint officers and the panel thought it would be useful to discuss any initiatives that Bolsover District Council was undertaking and whether they would be appropriate and beneficial for NED. He spoke enthusiastically about the recently launched Bolsover local TV. Interviews were been carried out in the area with reports talking to local people like shopkeepers. He advised that the Council has its own Newspaper and publication had increased from three to four times a year. In between this time the Council also produced a Gazette four times a year to keep getting message across. It explained what District Council and Parish Councils were doing. The Newspaper was well received but he felt it needed to widen what it talks about and not just contain good items. They also heard that NED provide printing for Bolsover and vice versa.

#### 6.1.7 Working with Partners -Derbyshire Times

The Editor from the Derbyshire Times attended the review panel and was asked what his organisation wanted from the relationship and communication with the Council. He explained that he was looking for a mutually beneficial relationship, a two way

street and an opportunity to help each other. He would like to see more openness when interacting with his organisation. He felt sometimes that it could be a struggle to get the Councils side of the argument over. Whilst understanding there may be reasons for this he said there was a lot of chat around and it was good to get the Councils side of a message across. He felt his organisation did not come to the Council enough to talk about things coming up and he would welcome more dialogue. He also suggested he would like to get together with the Communications department to look at things on the horizon, as this would be mutually beneficial. One example provided was the A61 Project. He gave an assurance he would respect confidentiality and that the two organisations needed to build up trust and make time to do this. He also spoke about the method of communication changing with more people using Facebook and coming to the Derbyshire Times website to read the information and invigorate discussion. He personally felt he could drive audiences through social media and that the Council could grasp this more, although he recognised that resource may be an issue.

## **6.2 Areas for Improvement/Observations**

### **6.2.1 Resources**

All the internal stakeholders commented on their changing roles and the increased workloads within the team. They felt that resources were key to the delivery of the service and they felt capacity was an issue. The panel heard other comments from people outside of the team which supported this view. One stakeholder commented that the section does not always have the staff to respond quickly enough to job requests. Another said I don't have the staff to do the work. Officers say they react to demands and do not have enough resource to be proactive or more creative. It was stated that more manpower was needed in every area but especially advertising and sponsorship, which had seen two jobs merged into one. It was also commented that it would be useful if visits could be undertaken to other authorities to network and compare services. Overall the feeling was that the team could do much more if they had the resource. The Viewpoint Survey was highlighted where it was thought improvements could be made to the number of people using it. Other suggestions were the creation of a media hub or the use of video with the aim of identifying what works for residents. Additionally more work to promote Tourism in the District could be done. A stakeholder also said they need time to meet with customer services to discuss things but recognised this could again be a capacity issue from that section.

### **6.2.2 Effective Communications**

A lot of evidence was provided on what stakeholders felt makes communications effective. One recurring theme was the changing culture and the need to produce stories that mean something to people reading them. Things that had relevance to people's lives, human interest stories. This was recognised and one stakeholder spoke about how he had been trying to improve the Councils publications. Another commented on the need to be enthusiastic and get out into communities for stories as this reaps benefits. Additional comments included the need for harder hitting stories in NED News and making sure the Council did not use propaganda but gives a story.

### 6.2.3 Sharing Information

The sharing of information within the organisation was raised by some stakeholders. One stakeholder felt that an opportunity was being missed to cascade information from SAMT as no communications officer attends this meeting. A similar comment was made with regard to Heads of Service and Directors giving Communications information. The demanding needs of jobs, especially where undertaking a joint roles, were acknowledged. However, it was considered very important to have clear direction for the service and awareness of things that were out in the departments. This was sometimes exacerbated by communications officers having too much work to be able to capture this information.

### 6.2.4 Awareness for officers

A couple of comments were made on officers not generally being aware of the role the Communication team has as gatekeepers for the Councils standards of publicity, media, press releases and design criteria. This was both in terms of brand and professional appearance but also in ensuring that visually things are right for people with disabilities. This is sometimes a problem when a service issues something direct without liaising with the Communication Team. It was also felt it would be useful for the team to be able to advise other managers about talking to the public via media and who can offer help from within the Communications Team. A suggestion was made that an advice sheet on who does what should be produced to assist colleagues.

### 6.2.5 Councillors

A number of comments were made on the need to keep Councillors informed and aware of what was happening within their wards. It was acknowledged that there was a number of briefing papers and reports that aimed to keep members informed. However, members still raised anecdotal evidence of projects taking place within their wards which they were unaware of. Constituents often approached Councillors to discuss or comment on things happening within their ward and Councillors wished to be able to respond appropriately. It was suggested a template could be developed to help ensure this communication was happening successfully. Similarly officers should be aware that when writing a key report on behalf of portfolio holders they need to liaise with the portfolio holder on the content and more generally be aware of ward member's roles.

The Members Newsletter was also discussed and it was felt that it could be improved and a survey could be undertaken to clarify what members want from this briefing. Suggested articles might highlight where the Council was working with Parish Councils on issues like housing development. Additionally closer co-operation with Parish Councils could help, as they have land which both the District and Parishes could benefit from. The panel heard about several pieces on Tourism being highlighted within Bolsover media. It was felt that NED could also do more of this type of promotion.

### 6.2.6 Portfolio Holder

The current portfolio attended the review panel and gave her views on the Communications Service and how well she considered communication was being delivered both externally and internally. Currently the portfolio (Corporate Governance) at NED contains a number of responsibilities. The Bolsover portfolio member considered media and marketing as a key part of his role and was involved in many of the initiatives taking place at his Council. The panel felt that the identification of a clear role for communications within the NED portfolio should be considered further.

### 6.2.7 Liaison Meetings

Rykneld Homes felt they had a good relationship with the Council and met informally with Communications to discuss matters of mutual interest. However, when asked about possible improvements they said that they would welcome these meetings being formalised rather than on an ad hoc basis. The Derbyshire Times also had suggested that regular meetings with the Communications team would be welcomed and beneficial.

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The review panel heard views from both internal and external stakeholders during the review process. This included officers from the Communications Service, Rykneld Homes, The Derbyshire Times plus portfolio holders from both NEDDC and Bolsover District Councils. The review process identified a number of measures that were working well.
- 7.2 However, some areas for improvement were highlighted around resources, awareness, working with partners and Councillors.

## **Appendix 1**

### Stakeholders Engaged During the Review

P Bramley	-	Derbyshire Times Editor
S Chambers	-	Communications and Marketing Manager
Councillor Fritchley	-	Bolsover District Council
C Jarrald	-	Marketing and Design Officer
L Shaw	-	Managing Director Rykneld Homes
N Smith	-	Communications Officer
Councillor R Smith	-	Portfolio Holder - NEDDC
D Vickers	-	Digital Media Officer
J Ward	-	Communications Manager Rykneld Homes

Tupton School Media Group – offer not taken up