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| <b>Item No.</b>                    | <b>Classification:</b><br>Open | <b>Date:</b><br>4 November 2003   | <b>MEETING NAME</b><br>Executive |
| <b>Report title:</b>               |                                | <i>Building Better Communications – A Communications Strategy for Southwark</i> |                                  |
| <b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b> |                                | All wards   |                                  |
| <b>From:</b>                       |                                | Assistant Chief Executive - Performance & Strategy<br>(Head of Communications)  |                                  |

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That members agree the external communications strategy and action plan.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Best Value review of External Communications and the CPA assessment each identified the need for further improvements in the council's external communications. At an Executive meeting in January 2003, members considered the Best Value vision and agreed the following recommendations:
  - A four-year socially inclusive communications strategy be developed by the end of April 2003.
  - That this strategy be drawn up in consultation with individual Executive Members, and external professional communications consultants if appropriate, with a view to ensuring that strategic communications become an integral part of the annual service planning process and clearly identifying local Performance Indicators for ongoing management appraisal.
  - The roles and responsibilities of the communications unit be revised in order to provide the professional lead for communications across the council.
  - The strategy will clearly display the benefits of co-ordinated economies of scale under a professional communications function within each department.
  - That the strategy will ensure that the new process of communication activity is explained to staff members alongside the borough identity guidelines.
  - That in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, the published strategy include clear analysis as to the Council's past communications and publicity spend (across all departments) as a priority so that future efficiencies arising from the implementation of the strategy be identified.
3. At a joint meeting between COT and the Executive in March 2003, these recommendations were reviewed and the following actions were agreed:
  - Communications Strategy to be in place and working by the end of June 2003, subject to review by external consultant.

- Greater recognition throughout the council of opportunities for raising the profile of executive members and the council.
- Communications operational plan established and working by new municipal year.
- All Departmental Communications Managers in place by June 2003.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### ***External Communications Strategy***

4. The attached external communications strategy has been produced following an extensive iterative process over the summer and a series of discussions with an external consultant, as directed. It has been designed to meet a number of requirements, including those of a future CPA assessment, and draws on the best practice published within the ODPM, LGA and the IdeA's 'Connecting with Communities' initiative.
5. The strategy sets out to achieve the following:
  - Establish communications objectives, goals and vision;
  - Identify a baseline from which future performance can be measured (MORI survey data) and a series of locally based performance indicators;
  - Define a communications framework based on the five council priorities;
  - Integration of communications into the council's budget and business planning process;
  - Establish a means of agreeing strategic communications priorities and their delivery annually;
  - Clarify the roles and responsibilities of chief officers, executive members and communications staff in agreeing priorities and delivering a proactive, policy and service driven communications agenda;
  - Establish a council-wide budgeting framework for creating transparency on communications spending and a more effective means of assessing cost effectiveness, efficiency and value for money.
6. An action plan is attached as an appendix with specific actions, responsibilities and timelines to achieve this.

### ***Communications managers***

7. Recruitment of the communications managers was completed in June 2003. Lengthy notice periods led to long lead times but the team was complete in time for a Communications Away Day in late September 2003, introduced by the Leader.
8. Weekly operational meetings led by the head of communications with all senior communications staff have already led to substantial improvements in co-ordination and sharing of communications activities across the council. Communications planning and co-ordination is the key agenda item at each of these meetings.
9. Communications forums are held monthly with invitations extended to all professional communications staff in the council (and contractors such as CEA). The purpose of these is to build a strong corporate communications network, share knowledge, promote best practice and develop and deliver a council-wide

programme to educate staff about communications protocols and responsibilities.

10. Line management of the communications managers is shared between departmental heads and the head of communications.
11. As a starting point, each communications manager is undertaking a baseline communications audit in their department to identify all current marketing and publicity materials. The results of each of these audits will be discussed directly with the relevant executive member and chief officer prior to establishing a publications schedule based on criteria set out in the communications strategy.
12. Whilst this exercise will produce some information about spend on communications it is likely that further detailed work will be required to reach a true figure. Once the schedule and spend are combined, communications managers should be in a position to make a judgement on value for money and the potential for greater efficiencies (assuming the information on spend is forthcoming).

### ***Policy implications***

13. The communications strategy draws substantially on the existing policy framework of the five priorities agreed by the council and the Southwark Alliance. Wherever possible, it proposes that all communications activity should be framed within these priority areas.
14. Effective communications and reputation management also help to determine a council's final rating in the CPA assessment and it is hoped that the development of an External Communications Strategy and the reputation work currently being undertaken by MORI will contribute to an improvement in the council's next CPA assessment.

### ***Effect of proposed changes on those affected***

15. Clear and properly targeted communications have a major role to play in helping to ensure that the council reaches all parts of the community and provides equal access to services and information for everyone in Southwark and this is highlighted in the strategy.

### ***Resource implications***

16. The cost of appointing the new communications managers was contained within existing departmental resources. As a result of the baseline audit and subsequent analysis of communications spend, it is hoped that communications managers and their chief officers will be in a strong position to achieve better value for money – and potentially a reduction in spend - as well as improved communications.

### ***Consultation***

17. The best value review of communications drew upon extensive data sources from a range of MORI residents and other surveys. Full use has also been made of information collated as a result of other surveys which include questions on communications and this will continue to be the case.

18. Evaluation of Southwark's performance will continue to be measured bi-annually via the MORI residents survey, and the possibility of a smaller interim survey designed specifically to test public awareness of the five priorities and the council's actions to tackle them will be considered for alternate years.

**Legal/Financial Implications**

19. There are no specific financial or legal implications arising from this report.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

| <b>Background Papers</b>  | <b>Held At</b>  | <b>Contact</b>                        |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>14 January 2003<br/>Best Value Review of External<br/>Communications – Vision &amp;<br/>Improvement Plan</i> | <i>Communications Unit<br/>Town Hall, Peckham<br/>Road, SE5 8UB</i> | <i>Amanda Hirst<br/>0207 525 7312</i> |

## Audit Trail

|   |                                     |                          |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Lead Officer</b>   | <i>Amanda Hirst</i>                 |                          |
| <b>Report Author</b>  | <i>Amanda Hirst</i>                 |                          |
| <b>Version</b>  | <i>Final</i>                        |                          |
| <b>Dated</b>  | <i>27<sup>th</sup> October 2003</i> |                          |
| <b>Key Decision?</b>  | <i>No</i>                           |                          |
| <b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b> |                                     |                          |
| <b>Officer Title</b>  | <b>Comments Sought</b>              | <b>Comments included</b> |
| Borough Solicitor & Secretary   | No                                  | No                       |
| Chief Finance Officer   | No                                  | No                       |
| Chief Officer Team  | Yes                                 | Yes                      |
| <b>Executive Member</b>   | Yes                                 | Yes                      |
| <b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services</b>          | 27 <sup>th</sup> October 2003       |                          |