

Item No:	Classification: OPEN	Date: 25 November 2003	Meeting Name: EXECUTIVE
Report Title:	REFERENCE TO EXECUTIVE: REQUEST FOR EXECUTIVE TO RECONSIDER DECISION [4/11/03] IN RESPECT OF SOUTHWARK'S EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN.		
Ward(s) or Group affected:	All Wards		
From:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee [17/11/03]		

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Executive re-considers its decision taken on 4th November 2003 in respect of Southwark's external communications strategy and action plan, taking into account the particular concerns of Overview & Scrutiny Committee as set out in paragraph 9 of this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. On 4th November 2003 the Executive considered a report on the Communications Strategy. A copy of the original Executive report is attached at Appendix A.
3. On 4th November 2003 the Executive considered the report, *Building Better Communications – A Communications Strategy for Southwark*, from the Assistant Chief Executive (Performance and Strategy) – attached at Appendix A - and the following decisions were made:
 - i. “That the external communications strategy and action plan be welcomed and agreed as a means of fulfilling the recommendations of the Executive meeting in January 2003 as set out in (II) below.
 - ii. The Executive notes the implementation measures already underway (as set out in paragraphs 7 – 12 of the report) and welcomes the appointment of the new communications managers who will set in process further budgetary, communication and implementation detailed in the strategy document.
 - iii. That the Assistant Chief Executive (Performance & Strategy) be instructed to review the delivery and progress of the communications strategy annually and report the findings to the Executive for information.”
4. On 10th November 2003 the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Kim Humphreys, and three members of the Committee (Councillors John Friary, Barrie Hargrove and Andy Simmons) called in this decision.
5. The reasons given for the call-in were as follows:

“Question the implication of officers promoting individual Executive Members who are politicians and who may benefit politically, and no balance between Executive and Scrutiny with regard to Communications.”

6. The meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 17th November 2003 received copies of the following reports/minutes relating to this item, which are attached to this report as follows, i.e.

Appendix A: Covering report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 17/11/03

Appendix B: Executive cover report: “Building Better Communications – A Communications Strategy for Southwark” and “Building Better Communications – Corporate Communications Improvement Plan”

Appendix C: Southwark Council Communications Strategy

Appendix D: Extract from 4/11/03 Executive minutes

Appendix E: Call-in request

Appendix F: Draft Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 17/11/03

7. On 17th November 2003 Overview & Scrutiny Committee met to consider the call-in request. Councillor Gurling – Executive Member with portfolio for Communications and Performance Improvement was present at this meeting. In addition, the Chief Executive, Head of Communications & Customer Relations and Assistant Chief Executive [Performance & Strategy] informed Member discussion.

8. The Borough Solicitor had previously confirmed that the original Executive decision giving rise to the call-in request was not contrary to the policy framework and accorded with the budget.

9. Having considered the decision, the Committee agreed as follows, i.e.

1) *That the Executive be asked to re-consider its decision of 4 November 2003 in respect of Item 17 – Building Better Communications: A Communications Strategy for Southwark [Executive Agenda 4/11/03 pages 184-211], addressing the following concerns of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, i.e.*

2) *That the Executive, in conjunction/liaison with the Head of Communications and Customer Relations, be asked to review the Communications Strategy to ensure that the appropriate level/balance of emphasis be given in respect of references throughout the document to Scrutiny/Executive/Community Councils.*

3) *That the Executive be asked to address Overview & Scrutiny Committee’s following specific points of concern in relation to the report to the Executive and the Communications Strategy itself, i.e.*

- a) Agenda Page 5: [Report to Executive Committee, 4/11/03, "Building Better Communications – A Communications Strategy for Southwark", paragraph 3]. Delete second bullet point "*Greater recognition throughout the council of opportunities for raising the profile of Executive Members and the council*".
- b) Agenda Page 13: [Building Better Communications – Corporate Communications Improvement Plan, November 2003: Action identified in relation to effective management of media relations]. Bullet point "*Identify areas of strength, innovation..*" should be clarified to ensure this applies to scrutiny also.
- c) Agenda Page 14: [Corporate Communications Improvement Plan, November 2003: Action identified in relation to joined up communications and consultation]. Outcome for bullet point "*Continue to support community Councils, scrutiny & decision making..*" refers only to Community Councils and should be amended to explicitly refer to a continuing profile for scrutiny also.
- d) Agenda Page 18: [Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. New paragraph 1.1 to be included making clear reference to the role of both scrutiny and Community Councils within Southwark.
- e) Agenda Page 25: [Protocols section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Scrutiny protocols were agreed earlier this year and should be included in paragraph 4.11.
- f) Agenda Page 25: [Protocols section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Paragraph 4.11 to include explicit statement that the Council does not promote individual Members or political parties.
- g) Agenda Page 28: [Positive media relations and public affairs section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Additional bullet point at paragraph 7.2, stating support for scrutiny function.
- h) Agenda Page 28: [Positive media relations and public affairs section of Southwark Council Communications Strategy 2003/06]. Amend second sentence within paragraph following bullet points at paragraph 7.2 to include reference to "*scrutiny Members*".
- i) Agenda Page 30: [Action Plan – Communications Framework]. Table to include reference to scrutiny function.

10. In accordance with Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 19.4 the matter stands referred to the Executive for consideration.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 19.5 requires that decisions referred back to the decision making body be considered within seven clear days of the date on which the decision to refer back was taken, i.e. 17th November 2003. If the Monitoring Officer or Chief Financial Officer determines that the decision falls within the budgetary and policy framework, the decision-making body may amend its decision (or not), before adopting the final decision.

LEGAL & FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. Members of the Executive have been requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to reconsider its decision in respect of the Communications Strategy, for the reasons defined in paragraph 9.
13. Members may decide not to accept the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In view of the additional information which has come to light as a result of the consideration of the “call-in” request, members may be of the view that they were not in possession of all the information which they needed when this matter was previously considered on 4th November 2003.
14. If Members do consider those matters as requested by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Members should ensure that they have all relevant information available for consideration.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Agenda and Minutes	Scrutiny Team, Rm 3.16 Southwark Town Hall Peckham Road London SE5 8UB	Lucas Lundgren Scrutiny Team T: 020 7525 7224

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer/	Shelley Burke, Head of Overview and Scrutiny	
Report Author	Lucas Lundgren, Scrutiny Team	
Version	Final	
Dated	Thursday 20 th November 2003	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	Yes	Yes
Chief Finance Officer	No	No