

Current Service – Form BV 2

Best Value Review of the Public Relations Function

Current Service Report

Statutory Role: Performance reporting and communication with the public is a statutory requirement. The Public Relations team provides this service on behalf of the council. It does this in five key ways:

1. West Dunbartonshire News

A full-colour, 12-page publication, the Council's free newspaper is delivered to 44,000 households in West Dunbartonshire, with 2,000 additional copies distributed to council offices, community groups and local organisations. It was launched in May 2001 – at the time it was the first free Council newspaper in Scotland. The main aim of the newspaper is to keep local residents informed about council services and activities. The 'News' is the medium through which the council actively reports its performance to the public with performance articles published in every edition. It also includes a 'Community Planning' page, where partner agencies publish information in an established communications mechanism. A four-page A-Z of council services is also inserted on an annual basis in the publication and it is used as a vehicle in which to conduct surveys and recruitment drives.

2. West Life

The PR team's other core marketing function is to produce the staff magazine – *West Life*. An integral part of the council's Communications Strategy, it aims to be both informative and readable. It is used, in conjunction with Team Briefings, Notice boards, Memos etc. as a mechanism for the two-way communication of council information. It was re-vamped in April 2002 and is produced quarterly with advertising revenue offsetting each edition. It is distributed by the PR team to all 6,500 staff. It is also available on-line.

3. Media Relations

This includes attending and promoting coverage of committees, public meetings and local/ national elections as well as working closely with local and national media (print and broadcast), handling press enquiries, providing press releases, staging photocalls, press conferences and launches. Speech writing is also provided to Councillors on request along with media training to services and members.

4. Marketing Communications

This includes copywriting and design of council publications and exhibitions as well as campaign planning and strategies and event management. The service also copy writes, organises, designs, proof reads internal and external printing, public notices, radio and bus advertising on behalf of the council.

5. Emergency Planning

The PR team provide a 24/7 press service and acts as one of the lead response services in any emergency.

Strategic Role: The service provides a central unit of expertise for departments to access and draw on. Given the specialities of the service and the high-profile nature of aspects of the service, all marketing, design work and press enquiries/releases are handled in-house by the PR team to maintain control and provide an effective and consistent branding of the council's image.

Marketing and communications work consists of producing promotional literature ranging from flyers, leaflets and posters, to large-scale publications. The service has one in-house designer who is responsible for the majority of design work produced on behalf of the council. This includes print advertising, corporate merchandising and exhibition design. Around 10% of all design work produced on behalf of the council is commissioned externally due to demand for the design service. In this instance, the PR team liaise and oversee these marketing jobs directly with the external design agency.

Updating, developing and monitoring the photographic library is a core task. A photographic consent system has also been developed to ensure that copyright issues are addressed. In addition, all photographic material is now maintained and stored electronically.

The service also maintains a news portal on the Council's website where press releases, the council newspaper and the staff magazine are available.

Need/demand: Demands are placed on the service from various internal departments and councillors in terms of press releases or design work or marketing work. In addition to this, external stakeholders and agencies such as local newspapers, radio and other local authorities often request information and submit enquiries to the service.

The council newspaper is a key communication tool for the council and its regular production requires considerable resources to secure advertising and carry-out the required design and editing.

In response to demand, the staff magazine *West Life* was increased from two editions per year to four. Again, this has placed more demands on the service as a result of this increased frequency.

Currently, the need/demand of the service is monitored through the use of databases established by the PR team. These include:

- Marketing database
- Press enquiry database
- Advertising database
- Photographic database
- Press release database
- Photocall database

These databases record the workload of the service and all databases are up to date. A document management system for all job tasks has been recently introduced. This includes a series of booking and job tracking forms.

Service Targets and standards: The service has three main standards. These are:

- Produce a staff magazine quarterly
- Respond to press enquiries within agreed press deadlines
- Produce six editions of the Council newspaper each year

Performance Measures: This service has no Statutory Performance Indicators. It does have three local Performance Indicators which are recorded in the Action Planning Database and these are shown below:

- % of press enquiries responded to within agreed deadlines
- % of press releases which appear in the press
- % of photocalls which appear in the press

Management and Service Planning: The service is part of Chief Executive's Department. The main objectives as identified in the Departments Service Plan are to:

- Increase accountability to stakeholders
- Promote a positive image of the Council

These objectives are achieved through a number of actions ; for the year 2006-2007 these are as follows:

- Write, design and distribute a quarterly staff magazine
- Issue press releases to promote good balanced news stories in local/national media from the council
- Respond to press enquiries within agreed press deadlines
- Provide an effective Advertising service for the council
- Provide an effective Marketing Communications service for the Council
- Edit, design, produce and distribute six edition of the Council newspaper

Given the nature of this service, not all events can be thoroughly planned in advance. As well as being a pro-active service, the service is also reactive. Unforeseen current events can have a direct impact on the workload, resulting, for example in an increase in press enquiries and press releases requested of the service.

Prudent and long term investment planning is crucial for the service. Continuous planning is undertaken reviewing existing and potential needs. Many items involve high investment such as computers, design upgrades, photographic library stock, exhibition materials, audio-visual equipment and corporate merchandising stocks. A balance must be consequently achieved between maintaining stocks and service provision within operational budgets.

Service Structure: The structure for this service is shown below:



Staffing: The service has five full time employees all of whom are based in Garshake Road. The ratio of staff to areas of responsibility is shown below:

| | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Press Releases | - 1.0 |
| Press Enquiries | - 1.5 |
| Marketing | - 1.0 |
| Advertising | - 0.5 |
| Design | - 1.0 |
| Total | - 5.0 |

Other Resources:

ICT: The service uses various software programmes in its day-to-day work, particularly with design and photography work. The main software packages used are Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and Adobe Acrobat. Both are used on an Apple Mac Computer. A photographic library has been developed which is supported by photographic stock CD images and digital photography from external freelance photographers.

External design: Following a Scotland-wide survey of distribution companies the PR service cancelled its contract with the Royal Mail to distribute the council newspaper. A new contract was awarded to a Glasgow based company – Communicate Marketing - which reduced distribution costs for the council newspaper and ensured distribution in one week rather than over 8 weeks with Royal Mail.

Distribution: A review of print companies was also carried out for printing of the council newspaper. A new contract was awarded to a Glasgow based company DC Thomson- which reduced print costs for the council newspaper by 30%.

Newspaper Design: The specialist nature of the council newspaper and its frequency (i.e. bi-monthly) led to two external freelancers being commissioned prior to its launch to oversee initial copywriting and page layout. However, editorial support, photographic images, final page layout/design, editing, proofing, printing and advertising design/advertising sourcing/administration/distribution are still supplied by the in-house PR team.

Costs and Budgets: The annual budget for the Public Relations service totals £190,680. This is broken down as follows:

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| Employee Costs | £168,550 |
| Property Costs | £670 |
| Supplies & Servicing | £14,710 |
| Admin Costs | £3,920 |
| Other Expenditure | £2,830 |

(Source: Revenue Estimates 2006/2007).

Production and distribution costs have been closely monitored for the newspaper and over the last few years the service has reduced the cost from £0.23 pence for 45,000 copies to £0.20 pence. The newspaper is part-funded by external advertising with, the remainder gained from internal advertising revenue and direct council funding support. No more than one quarter of the publication (e.g. three pages) is allocated to advertising in any one issue. This is essential to obtain a balance between editorial and advertising space.

The staff magazine is produced quarterly with advertising revenue offsetting each edition to the value of £800 – £900 per edition. The cost of the publication is now £0.18 per issue

as a direct result of print costs being reduced by £600 over the last 12 months.

A one-hour flat rate of £70 has been negotiated with the most frequently used photographers who attend photocalls on behalf of the council.

The direct cost of the Council Newspaper (and external copywriting) does not come out of Public Relations Budget. In addition, any other out-sourced design work is paid for by the client departments within the Council.

Service Processes:

Further detail to be included on the key processes through which the service is delivered e.g. where is there any lack of clarity, duplication, unnecessary work, bottlenecks and where and how processes could be improved.

Equality Issues: The service is as accessible as possible to all groups. In addition, the service follows Internal guidelines in its design and marketing work to ensure consistency. This includes RNIB guidelines being used where possible in all marketing communications materials.

The 'News' is available, on audiotape, for people with a visual impairment and is on both the internet and intranet. Large print formats and copies of publications in a foreign language are also available on request. *West Life* is also available on the Council's website.

Sustainable Development: The staff magazine is produced on recycled paper. Additional options will be investigated.

Public Performance Reporting: In 2001, the Service consulted with a group of residents on the Citizens Panel. The survey asked residents how they would like to receive information from the council, and results showed that over 50% of panel members would prefer information delivered directly to their home. To meet the wide target audience distribution, and to be as inclusive as possible, the council newspaper was produced to meet this communications need.

The Citizen's Panel were again surveyed in 2003 on the council's communication with residents, and 100% of respondents agreed that they like to receive information via the council newspaper. The Citizens Panel was again consulted this year (2006) regarding customer service standards within the Council. 1200 postal questionnaires were issued and 749 were received back. It concluded that 75% of respondents had read the 2 page performance articles and 65% felt that placing articles in the newspaper was the most effective way to provide the public with information on the council's performance.

The delivery of the newspaper is also audited by the internal 'mystery' customer scheme involving members of staff, who are resident in West Dunbartonshire, who are e-mailed with an attachment of the new issue's front page, asking if they have received it. Results are fed back to the distribution company for remedial action if required.

Initially two issues of the staff magazine were distributed sporadically throughout the year to staff. Responding to an employee survey and, to build loyalty in the new magazine and improve internal communication, *West Life* was increased to four issues per annum. The new schedule has a seasonal frequency, spring, summer, autumn and winter. We have conducted two readership surveys since *West Life* was launched (in June 2003 and May 2005). Our latest results indicate that:

- 91% read all of the magazine
- 72% find it easy to read.

- 44% want it produced more frequently
- 49% receive the magazine within 10 days of publication.

Summary of current service:

The PR service is an in-house centralised service and has five full time employees. The services main areas of work focus on press releases/press enquiries, marketing, design and advertising work. The service produces an internal quarterly staff magazine and also produces a bi-monthly local newspaper.

The following SWOT analysis has been carried out.

Strengths

Team Working
 Good communications
 Flexible and responsive employees
 Internal and external networks
 Discrete and loyal employees
 Databases and internal systems
 Libraries of images and information
 Skilled, experienced, professional employees

Weaknesses

Size of team
 Lack of resources
 Volume of work expected/timescales
 Relative focus
 Ongoing IT Pressure
 Operational focus (little strategic focus)

Opportunities

Internet
 Shared working with other Council's
 Benchmarking
 Ongoing staff development
 Expand electronic storage of images

Threats

Budget Cuts
 Succession planning
 Freedom of Information Act
 Political Environment - changes
 Scottish Exec legislation on communication

| Lead Officer | Date | For Project Board | Date |
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