

## **USE OF PUBLICATIONS**

Report of the Head of Corporate Communications

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

This report gives an outline of publications produced by Hertfordshire County Council and presents contextual information about the County Council newspaper and website to enable Members to consider how best to scrutinise Council publications. To assist the Scrutiny Committee in considering if they wish to scrutinise the use of communications, representatives of our partner organisations have been invited to have an input. We have therefore invited the following people to attend this meeting:-

Sue Hobbs, District Officer of Hertfordshire MENCAP  
Joel Rasbash, Deputy Chief Executive of POhWER (advocacy service)  
Sue Reeve, Chief Executive of Carers in Hertfordshire

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Hertfordshire, like all large organisations, uses a variety of publications as part of its promotion of its policies and services. This promotion is vital. It is no good spending millions of pounds on delivering high-quality services if people do not know that we provide them and how they can access them.
- 2.2 Publications, for the purposes of this report relate to things which have been designed by a professional designer and printed with technology beyond that found in the normal office. For example, stakeholder newsletters, A5 and DL leaflets, A4 booklets and factsheets. It excludes printed matter such as photocopied circulars and letters, committee reports, posters and the like.
- 2.3 In Hertfordshire the decision when to produce a publication is made either by service managers, communications officers in departments or corporate communications. Arrangements vary across the council depending on the needs of the service.
- 2.4 Suites of leaflets are produced at departmental level by the Environment, Children, Schools and Families and Adult Care Services. Services such as the Road Safety Unit, Libraries and Fire and Rescue's Community Safety Unit, and campaigns such as WasteAware and Travelwise also produce leaflets as service needs demand.

- 2.5 Publications have traditionally had pride of place in the 'marketing mix'. The marketing mix is a term that refers to the range of media used to reach a certain audience at a certain time. It recognises that it is rare that any large and diverse group of people can be reached by a single method of communications and therefore a variety of methods must be used for the Council to successfully get its message across. For example leaflets, posters, press coverage, public meetings and stakeholder presentations.
- 2.6 Two factors have altered the position of publications in the 'marketing mix'. These are the introduction of the centralised Design and Print Portal in the 2002 Best Value Review of Reprographics, the championing of electronic communications in Herts Connect and further in the Communications Strategy agreed as part of the Best Value Review of Communications 2004.

### **3. Access to Service Implications**

Good communications are vital to improve access to services. It is important that in our drive to reduce reliance on printed publications we continue to focus on the needs of our service users and exploit all forms of communications effectively.

### **4. Conclusions**

The Council has already made significant progress in reducing reliance on printed publications. Recent developments will improve how it is managing its publications to maximise their impact and to minimise their cost to the Council. This is particularly within the context of the successful development of the County Council's website. The Committee is invited to consider the issues raised in the report and which if any they consider suitable for future scrutiny.

## 1. Uses of publications - Introduction

### 1.1 Best value reviews

The Communications Strategy, agreed as part of the Best Value Review of Communications 2002 established what has been called a 'hierarchy of media' for communicating with the residents of Hertfordshire and the staff of the County Council:

1. One to one communications (by phone or face to face)
2. Supported by electronic media such as the website and e-mail
3. Supported by printed materials such as newsletters, leaflets and posters.

1.2 The strategy is to champion the development of the web and e-mail while recognising the overwhelming preference of both the public and staff to be communicated with by people – over and above both printed and electronic media. It sets as a standard that any information produced in a printed publication produced by the council must also be available on-line.

1.3 Electronic media are being championed for the following reasons:

- They are as cheaper than printed publications
- They can be easily and cheaply updated and altered
- They can be easily monitored for effectiveness
- The choice on whether to print and read is given to the customer
- They offer real opportunities for providing a better service for hard to reach groups.

1.4 Printed publications will always remain an essential part of the marketing mix for the following reasons:

- They are a proven and effective form of communication
- Older people and those with disabilities like to have their own copy of printed information
- Social limits to electronic communications (what is deemed appropriate)
- Legislation.

1.5 In addition, there are some transitional reasons which mean that in the mid term we may continue to produce more publications than desired:

- They have a major role in promoting electronic communications
- Legislation
- Reputation risk management.

1.6 However, our strategy is to ensure that printed publications are no longer assumed to be the sole or primary form of communications and that service managers should always consider whether or not they are necessary when communicating with the public.

1.7 In addition, the Best Value Review of Communications revised the council's visual identity to push the website URL [www.hertsdirect.org](http://www.hertsdirect.org), to the forefront of all its communications from vehicle livery to printed leaflets.

- 1.8 The Review also established that the standard by which electronic media such as the website should be judged. That we would judge the success or failure of our electronic communications not by formal analysis but by whether people used it. To assist officers in doing so the statistics for website, and intranet, usage are available on Connect, the staff intranet, and have been widely disseminated throughout the organisation to focus us on real success factors.
- 1.9 The Best Value Review of Reprographics 2002 introduced the Print and Design Portal. The aim of the portal was two-fold:
- To improve print and design buying to make efficiency savings
  - To produce business information that would enable us to better manage our printed communications.
- 1.10 For the first time the print portal will enable us to have an overview of all of the printed communications produced by the council, and their costs. The portal was launched as a pilot in August 2003 and has now been extended to almost all print buying across the council. While the figures presented here are not yet for a whole year, they do enable us to envisage the scale of the challenge facing the council in effectively managing its publications.

## 2. **Printed publications in Hertfordshire County Council**

- 2.1 Printed publications form an essential part of communicating with the public. It continues to be seen by the general public as a very desirable form of communication. 60% of people saying that council magazines and newsletters had influenced their opinion of the council, well above the website (32%) (MORI Environmental Priorities 2003).
- 2.2 In certain sections of the public, older people for example, leaflets are the most popular form of receiving information. This is over and above face to face communications with 62% saying they would prefer to receive information about services in leaflet form compared to 49% wanting to receive over the phone. (MORI Panel Survey 2003).
- 2.3 Exploiting printed communications effectively as part of a marketing mix including the web and Herts Direct newspaper remains core to our communications activity. It has been able to lead to significant reductions in our reliance while continuing to improve access. For example, the leaflet production of one department Adult Care Services over the past three years is as follows:

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
Total leaflet production	114,159	105,969	78,522

- 2.4 This has been achieved through a combination constantly improving management of leaflet production, increased use of web and shifting some publications (such as the Long Term Care Charter) to publication in the county council magazine.
- 2.5 The managed reduction of printed materials (in an area where the audience is sensitive to leaflet production) has not affected service quality or access. On the contrary the SSI Inspection noted: 'And effective public information strategy was in place and ACS has revised and re-launched an extensive range of public information leaflets relating to available services. These were service user friendly and widely available in public access sites.'

2.6 The initial figures from the Print and Design Portal about the number of publications produced by Hertfordshire County Council and their cost broken down by department will follow.

### 3. **Electronic communications in Hertfordshire County Council**

3.1 Hertfordshire has three major forms of electronic communications: [www.hertsdirect.org](http://www.hertsdirect.org) (the county council's website); Connect (the intranet for staff) and e-mail.

3.2 In addition, there are various minor media such as digital tv and text messaging, and campaign websites such as [www.wasteaware.org](http://www.wasteaware.org) and [itsmanicinherts.com](http://itsmanicinherts.com).

3.3 The first County Council website was launched approximately ten years ago and the first edition of [www.hertsdirect.org](http://www.hertsdirect.org) was launched four years ago. In June 2004 a new edition was 'soft launched' to bring it up to the most recent standards of accessibility and to refresh the design and navigation.

3.4 As an indicator of progress the monthly statistics for 'visitor sessions' each December are as follows:

<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
49,533	95,315	117,847

(The latest monthly statistic available are for May 2004 show 152,813 visitor sessions).

3.5 Since 2003 we have been collating figures for Page Views which equate to 'hits' but are a more robust measure. In May 2004 this stood at 2,512,663.

3.6 The number of transactions such as application for nursery schools and highways fault reporting are also available on Connect. The total transactions carried out for the year 02/03 are 102,829 rising to 130,059 for the year 2003/04.

3.7 The awareness of the county council's website has increased dramatically over the past two years. Whereas in 2002 only 19% of people had visited the website and MORI reported that 'many expressed surprise that the council would have a website', in 2004, 44% of people surveyed knew of the council's website rising to 54% of internet users and 23% of all residents had visited the website in the last year.

3.8 Of those people who had visited the website 86% found it useful. 32% of residents found it very useful.

### 4. **Herts Direct**

4.1 We print 465,000 copies of Herts Direct, four times a year, at a cost of £168,000 (2003/04) for print, distribution and production. These are delivered by Royal Mail to all households in the county.

- 4.2 The purpose of the publication is to promote the council's services and policies, to assist the county council in meeting its legislative requirements to keep the public informed, particularly around consultation and to support services by overcoming the fragmented nature of many of Hertfordshire's media. This is best illustrated by comparing paid for advertising or editorial coverage in the press where we have over 30 different titles covering different parts of the county but it is a general issue for all media (including radio advertising, billboard sites etc).
- 4.3 Customer feedback is sought in surveys of people in Hertfordshire. The feedback is comparatively good.
- 67% recall seeing a copy of Herts Direct
  - 64% say they read a few articles
  - 20% say they read all or most of it.
- 4.4 The recall figure is the best of any county surveyed by MORI and the reading figure is also in the top 25%.
- 4.5 Advertising is used to defray the cost of producing Herts Direct and its growth is another indicator of the success of the media. From £x in XXXX it has grown to Y in 2003/04.

## 5. **Developments**

### a) Distribution

- 5.1 An essential part of communication via printed media is targeting and distribution. It does not matter how wonderful the leaflet is if it does not get to the right person at the right time. There is a potential that if targeting and distribution and targeting are not closely monitored there can be over estimation of the number of copies needed, failure to disseminate the information effectively and unnecessary storage costs.
- 5.2 Children, Schools and Families and Adult Care Services have created an on-line leaflet ordering system. Development work is now underway to establish a generic approach for the whole council which fully exploits new technology and is as accessible as possible to the general public.
- 5.3 A pilot is presently being carried out in Adult Care Services to improve the effectiveness of how we track and monitor how printed leaflets are distributed to where; which publications are re-ordered (how many and when); and to reduce where possible stocks held by the Council. A seminar on the pilot has been held for all communications officers.

### b) Business information

- 5.4 As the business information produced by the Print and Design Portal becomes more sophisticated and robust the council's communications function will be able to better challenge and support managers in implementing the communications strategy and reducing the council's reliance on printed publications.
- 5.5 The exact nature of those reports will be developed over the coming year by the Communications Management Team and the Print and Design Portal.

c) Electronic communications

5.6 The present direction of travel is a good one. There remains the fact that although the awareness of our website is rising rapidly, its usage seems to be rising due to around 20% of people doing more and more business with the Council on line. The 'cradle to the grave' nature of contact with the council means that raising awareness is crucial in the long term.

5.7 A new element of the strategy may be to focus efforts on those groups already using the internet, for example, the 54% of people who use the internet and are aware of the Council's website.

5.8 This is being done through the following mechanisms:

1. a dedicated officer in corporate communications
2. programming to reflect internet usage
3. an e-mail bulletin service
4. dedicated advertising on other websites.

6. **What does success look like?**

6.1 The challenge with evaluating communications and particularly printed publications is that individual elements which can be costed form only part of the marketing mix. It is often difficult to tell which piece of a communications programme had the most impact.

6.2 The development of the Print and Design Portal and a successful roll out of the distribution pilot will give the council confidence that it is:

- getting best value for money from the printing it does
- that it is printing only when necessary for effective communications
- that it continues to print when it is in the service users interest
- that it using its printed publications for maximum impact.

6.3 These developments need to be judged in balance with our performance against the key strategic indicators for communications:

	<u>1999</u>	<u>2004</u>
How well informed do you feel	44%	51%
How satisfied are you with Hertfordshire County Council	62%	67%

6.4 While at present the direction of travel is good and compares very well with other councils, these figures can go down and they reveal a significant hinterland of people who do not feel well informed and do not feel satisfied with the performance of the Council.

6.5 We need to continue making our decisions on how best to communicate on a service by service basis, based on the needs of individuals, while improving our ability to manage resources effectively, to promote the use of electronic communications and to use printed publication to maximum impact.