
CIVIC & PUBLIC RELATIONS BEST VALUE REVIEW - INTERIM REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Best Value Review into the Civic and Public Relations service and seeks Members' views on the way forward.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Civic and Public Relations services for the District are delivered through a small staff resource within the Chief Executive's Division. Briefly, the section deals with all matters relating to the activities of the Chairman of the Council, acts as the main point of contact between the Authority and the Media, and is responsible for the production of Rochford District Matters.
- 2.2 An internal officer team has now been set up to review the service and has identified the following issues for further consideration. Members views would be welcomed as to whether these are the most appropriate areas to look at.
- Rochford District Matters (RDM) - is there a future for the newspaper and, if so, in what format?
 - If RDM is retained should production remain largely in-house or should a private contractor be found?
 - Distribution arrangements
 - Assessment of the reliance on advertisements and sponsorship for the production of each issue of RDM
 - The role of the Council's website in providing information to residents
 - A review of all Council publications and consideration of their format, particularly in relation to the role of the newspaper.
 - The role of electronic media in getting the Council's messages across, including the website.
 - The 'Media' and its relationship with the Council, including nominated Council spokespersons.
 - Information signage on development sites.
 - Chairman's handbook.
 - Whether any of the above could be out-sourced, or alternatively if more could be handled in-house.

3 SURVEY WORK

- 3.1 To help with the review much survey work has already been carried out. We have the findings produced from the ORC General Best Value

Survey which has already been reported to Members. We have also randomly sampled residents in the District to get their comments on the subject and contacted other local authorities to find out how they deal with Civic and Public Relations issues and the resources and costs involved. Amongst the key findings from these surveys are the following:

- 51% of the respondents felt that they were well informed about Council activities
- Local newspapers and RDM were highlighted as the most important sources of information about Council activities
- respondents find RDM interesting, informative, easy to read and useful/relevant
- RDM should continue to be published, although with perhaps another one or two editions
- the existing format is acceptable
- there is an acceptable balance between advertising and editorial content
- Generally, most Authorities deal with Civic matters and Public Relations at the corporate level
- PR activities tend to be dealt with in-house
- Significant variations in budgets available to Local Authorities for Civic and PR activities
- Most Authorities have a core set of Chairman's functions, although there is no clear pattern
- Charity activities are considered to be of importance in all Authorities and most see this growing in future years
- About half the respondent Authorities had a communications strategy in place
- Most PR services in Local Authorities are responsible for dealing with all media communications
- Most Local Authorities produce a Council Newspaper in-house about four times per annum, with the budget for production varying from £9,000 - £40,000, although the lowest figure was for one issue only
- The PR section does not always deal with all Council publications - on balance, it seems service departments tend to take the lead on this

4 THE WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 In order to take this matter forward, it is suggested that Members might like to consider forming an all party Member Panel in line with the arrangements for considering the other Best Value reviews commencing in 2001/02. This would enable the issues outlined in the report to be examined in detail, with the aim of presenting a final report from the Member Panel, with conclusions and a plan of action, to the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee in June 2001.

5 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to any comments around the issues highlighted to date ,
an all party Member Panel be created to discuss the findings of the
Civic and Public Relations Best Value Review, with the Panel's
deliberations being reported back to a future meeting of the Corporate
Resources Sub-Committee. (HPS)

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