



Report to Cabinet

Subject Forward Publicity Plan for Spring 2009 and Communications update

Date 5 February 2009

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1. Purpose of the Report

To inform members of proposed publicity initiatives planned for the coming months.

2. Background

The Council regularly produces a Forward Publicity Programme, to flag up issues that it wishes to publicise in the immediate months ahead. The Programme is produced three times a year, to feed into the next edition of Contacts magazine and other forms of communication activity.

This has been recognised as good practice externally.

The Programme is drawn together by the Communications Manager, based on ideas contributed by departments across the Council.

As well as including plans for publicity about the Council's own outward-facing activity, the Programme also includes details of proposed internal communications and publicity activity carried out in partnership with other agencies to help secure the Council's cross-cutting priorities.

3. Proposal

The Forward Publicity Programme for Spring 2009 is attached for members' information at **Appendix A**. It is based on information provided by departments @ 19 January 2009.

If members accept the recommendation elsewhere on the agenda meeting to introduce car park charging, the communication of this decision and its implementation will need to be included in this programme. Issues arising from agreement of the 2009/10 Budget/Service Plan may also need to be added in after Council considers it budget in March. Information about how to deal with the recession is being included on the Council's website.

A range of techniques will be used to deliver the programme. These include the Council's website and intranet and the Spring edition of Contacts magazine.

As usual, press releases will be included on the website for information – where website is included as a specific medium, this relates to those issues felt to be most appropriate for more intense website coverage.

The Communications Team will work closely with lead members and departmental representatives to ensure the programme is delivered. They will also continue to handle and respond to reactive media enquiries, working closely with departments and lead members.

4. The Code of Practice

As always, all publicity included in the Programme will comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The Government (Communities and Local Government department) is currently consulting on possible changes to this Code. Details can be found at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicitycodeconsultation>

A list of consultation questions is attached at **Appendix B** of this report. The deadline for consultation responses is 12 March 2009.

5. Contacts Magazine

The Winter edition of Contacts (issue 20) magazine was distributed in November 2008. Planning is already well underway for the Spring edition, which is due out in Mid March.

As outlined above, stories for Contacts have been sourced substantially from material included in the Forward Publicity Plan.

Contacts Year Plan for 2009/10

Edition	Delivery to Council	Distribution
Contacts 21 (08/09 financial year)	March 19	March 19 and April 5
Contacts 22 (09/10 financial year)	July - delivery no later than 9th.	TBC
Contacts 23 (09/10 financial year)	November - delivery 19	19 Nov – 8 Dec
Contacts 24 (09/10 financial year)	Mid March 2010 (TBC)	(TBC)

6. Refuse Freighter Panels

The recently purchased refuse freighters include a large side panel on each side of the vehicle that can be used for publicity purposes. The panels are manufactured in such a way as to be easily interchangeable. This represents an excellent opportunity to promote Council services, on a one-off or ongoing basis.

We have therefore asked departments to identify opportunities to promote their services in this way, which we then aim to coordinate through this forward plan, in partnership with Direct Services. Costs of producing the panels will need to be borne by departments.

On this basis, we propose to continue to advertise events and services using these panels, including the benefit take-up campaign, neighbourhood wardens/community reassurance, local housing allowance, leisure events and the My Council campaign.

7. Working towards the Local Government Association's (LGA) reputation campaign

As part of its reputation campaign, the LGA has analysed the 2007 Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) data for all councils in England to identify the main reasons for resident satisfaction.

The findings showed that councils whose residents feel most informed about the services provided have the highest levels of overall satisfaction. This is far more important as a factor in influencing satisfaction than residents' perceptions of the quality of services provided. The findings show that the main reason for resident satisfaction is effective information about council services.

At Gedling, we are already working positively towards the LGA's reputation campaign – we have the most well informed residents in Nottinghamshire with 82% of respondents feeling well informed, according to a recent Citizen's Panel

survey. Satisfaction with the Council overall is amongst the Top 25 councils in the country¹

This is in part due to regular forward planning to prepare proactive internal and external communications, and can be attributed to the well-regarded Contacts magazine which is delivered to residents three times a year, proactive media relations and a regularly updated news section on the website. It is important therefore to maintain this approach if the Council's high levels of customer satisfaction are to be maintained.

A new communications strategy is in development which will ensure to good practice continues by addressing the key areas set out in the LGA's 'Reputation' Agenda.

8. Resource Implications

Resources have been made available to deliver the programme. External funding is sought wherever possible to support partnership activity.

As outlined above, funding for refuse freighter panel advertisements needs to be made available from relevant departmental budgets.

9. Recommendation

Members are **recommended** to:

- note the report
- consider whether they would wish to respond to the Government consultation on changes to the Communities and Local Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

¹ 2006 BVPI survey – the most recent national survey of residents' satisfaction with councils. 65% of residents said they were satisfied with the overall service provided by Gedling BC.