

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**REPORT FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION
BY**

**County Councillor James Evans, Portfolio Holder for HR, ICT and
Communications
December 2017**

**REPORT AUTHOR: Anya Richards, Senior Manager for Chief Executive and
Member Services**

SUBJECT: Review of Communications

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement and funding to conduct a review of Communications and Engagement services across the council to ensure resources are appropriately aligned to deliver the Cabinet's Vision 2025 and other corporate priorities, as well as benchmarking the service with other comparable councils for best practice and value for money.

2. Proposal

2.1 The council's Communications and Engagement services were last reviewed in 2008. Since that time the media landscape has changed exponentially with the rise of social media, the use of personal digital technology, and the prevalence of video as a preferred channel of communication. This review will examine how the council has kept up with the pace of change and consider how best to maximise resources for the future.

2.2 Since the time of the last review Events and Event Management have also seen great change. In 2008 events did not feature as part of the Communications Team workload but today it accounts for a high proportion of the team's overall work. The review will consider how resources are best aligned to deliver events.

2.3 In response to reduced council funding the Communications Team was cut by circa 30%, the review will assess the impact of the reduction in corporate resource and the effectiveness of the subsequent operating model that was established.

2.4 The scope of the review will not be limited to the Communications Team but will consider communications and engagement resources throughout the council.

2.5 The scope of the review is as follows:

- Options for commercialising the service
- Welsh language and translation
- Graphic design
- Media relations - proactive and reactive
- Campaigns - prioritisation, planning, delivery and evaluation
- Internal communications and employee engagement
- Engagement - inc. links to consultation, stakeholder relations
- Digital - inc web, intranet, social media, photography and video
- Events
- Team organisation, structure, finances, operating systems
- Capability – experience, qualifications, skills

2.6 Methodology – the review will involve five days of on-site structured interviews and follow up interviews by telephone with the following:

- Senior manager for communications
- Communications and Welsh Language and Translation Teams
- Acting Chief Exec
- Unions
- Managers from key contact departments (IT, consultation, HR etc.)
- Chief officers from client departments, and/or
- Main contact officers for the team from client service departments
- Council leader
- Other cabinet members including cabinet member for communications
- Council Chairman/staff from civic function/Member Support
- Group Leaders of opposition/shadow cabinet member for communications
- Local journalists
- Focus group of front-line staff
- Focus group of residents
- Consultation institute
- Specific sessions with the team exploring:
 - team management
 - workload and priority planning
 - media handling systems & reporting
 - campaign planning, delivery and evaluation
 - digital systems and capabilities
 - event planning, delivery and evaluation
 - engagement activities, and coordination with work on consultation and stakeholder management

- Welsh Language and translation

2.7 A final report will be produced to include:

- Evaluation, findings & conclusions
- Comparison to best practice elsewhere in local government and beyond
- Detailed recommendations (including options for how to deliver change, not just what changes need to be considered).

3. Options Considered / Available

3.1 In-house review – the review could be conducted in-house at no/low cost. This option would have the least financial impact but would not provide a valuable external perspective or provide effective benchmarking against other councils.

3.2 External review by independent external specialist – Peter Holt of Alexander Herald Ltd has over 25 years experience having worked in the Westminster Parliament, the NHS, the Police, and for the last 12 years at director level in local government. He has worked across the UK from London to Belfast, Paisley to Oxford, and Newcastle to Bristol. He has reviewed local government communication teams in Cornwall, Dorset, Oxford, Brent, Camden, and Renfrewshire, and led the LGA Peer Review team in Cheshire West and Chester. I also has considerable experience of rural councils having managed communications including Cornwall, Dorset and currently Cheshire East. This option is more expensive than conducting the review in-house but provides an unparalleled depth of experience and benchmarking.

3.3 External peer review – The Local Government Association (LGA) can be commissioned to conduct an independent peer review of communications with a team made up of independent communications specialists, councillors from other local authorities and other specialist officers from the Peer Challenge Team at the LGA. This approach is favoured by large urban authorities such as Tower Hamlets and provides a very detailed and comprehensive assessment, however, because of the size of the team involved and the scope of the review the cost will be significant.

4. Preferred Choice and Reasons

4.1 Option 3.2 above, external review by independent external specialist, is the preferred option. This option provides an expert external perspective for £5,600 (plus VAT and expenses) which is covered by a contract exemption. In addition to his direct experience of local government communications, Peter Holt is also a former Chair of the CIPR Local Public Services Committee and an experienced LGA peer reviewer so the council would also benefit from his knowledge of the peer review process.

5. Impact Assessment

5.1 Is an impact assessment required? No

5.2 If yes is it attached? No

6. Corporate Improvement Plan

6.1 The purpose of the review is to consider how the council's overall communications and engagement resources can be better aligned to deliver the Cabinet's new Vision 2025, the priorities identified in the vision, and the newly developing Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) which is anticipated to be completed by the Summer of 2018. The review will also consider how the communications resource is aligned to deliver priorities and campaigns that fall outside the Vision and the CIP.

7. Local Member(s)

7.1 This review does not have implications for specific local members.

8. Other Front Line Services

The findings of the review may impact on how communications and engagement services are provided in the future. Front line services will be consulted as part of the review process.

9. Communications

Have Communications seen a copy of this report? Yes

Have they made a comment? If Yes insert here.

10. Support Services (Legal, Finance, Corporate Property, HR, ICT, Business Services)

10.1 Legal - The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view.

10.2 Finance – the Finance Business Partner is happy to support the above recommendation and suggests that the review takes place in 2017-18 and is funded from the services projected underspend.

10.3 Corporate Property (if appropriate)

10.4 HR (if appropriate)

10.5 ICT (if appropriate)

11. Scrutiny

Has this report been scrutinised? No

12. Statutory Officers

12.1 The Head of Financial Services (Acting Section 151 Officer) notes the comments of the Finance Business Partner and supports the virement of existing service budget to fund the review.

12.2 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

13. Members' Interests

13.1 The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If the Portfolio Holder has an interest he/she should declare it, complete the relevant notification form and refer the matter to the cabinet for decision.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
Adopt option 3.2 above – appoint Peter Holt to conduct independent review of communications and engagement.	To provide value for money external review of communications and engagement provision for PCC.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Anya Richards
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	Jan/Feb 2018

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Background Papers used to prepare Report:

CABINET REPORT TEMPLATE VERSION 5