
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW TASK AND FINISH GROUP HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 9 JULY 2012**Membership**

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| * G Butland | * J W Pike (Chairman) |
| * M Mackrory | |
- (* present)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door, Committee Officer
Robert Fox, Governance Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies reported.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest reported.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Customer Access to Information

The Group considered an oral report on the Social Media information whilst ensuring that customers unable to access the website were not disenfranchised, presented by David Wilde, Chief Information Officer Eleri Roberts, Head of External Communications.

Corporate external communications were diverse and rapidly changing with the new technology like Facebook and Twitter. Different aged populations tended to use different technologies. Facebook tends to be used by people in the age group of 25 years until mid to late 40s, whilst Twitter was used by people in their early 20s and above. LinkedIn was used across the all age groups by professional users. Young people aged 14 to 20 mainly used Blackberry Messenger as other age groups did not use it to the same extent. Current technology was normally superseded every 18 months to two years by new ways of on line communications with people migrating to the new technology.

External Communications used Social Networking to inform the public about the Olympic Torch Relay through Essex and build up the excitement/momentum before the Torch arrived in Essex for the two days in July. A special Essex Works was delivered to every Essex household to ensure that any members of the public who were not engaged with Social Networks were informed about the Olympic Torch Relay events. The County and Local Authority partners linked together on a specific website to provide the Essex experience and enable the public to load up their own photographs of the event. This illustrates the positives of engaging with Essex public on Social Networks.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That Social Networks like Facebook tended to be monitored better than closed Networks. Social Networks were global and therefore individual country's laws cannot be used to constrain them, there would need to be a global law although it would be difficult to obtain sign up from all countries;
- Members were concerned that they were not aware that there had been a joint social network site set up for the Olympic Torch Relay, so although it had been good for the public it could have been better advertised internally for Members who could have been promoting it to constituents for a wider audience;
- When the public was tweeting complaints about pot holes, for example, the External Communications team reply giving the County's reasons;
- The Public expect instant responses to their tweets, currently the Head of External Communications had taken on this role out of office hours checking Social Networks regularly at 15/20 minute intervals, responding if information was incorrect or if it needs a response outside office hours;
- The Social Networks need constantly monitoring as one rogue on line remark could quickly jeopardise the County's reputation, and even if it was refuted the information was still available on line;
- County staff were blocked from using Social Networks at work; they were able to use the internal network Yammer. Social Workers who need to access Facebook to engage with the young people and vulnerable adults they were working although they would need their Managers to submit a business case before staff were given access. Country Parks and Libraries have a limited number of staff who were allowed to tweet informing the public of forthcoming events;
- Members would need to decide whether to use Facebook or Twitter as a professional tool and keep the other Social Network for family and friends;
- There were policies for Social Network use for both staff and Members;
- Elected Members would need training on Facebook and Twitter and its usage;
- Members would not be able to use the County IT equipment to use Social Networks in the pre-election period;
- There was an External Communications Member Development which would take place on 31 October 2012 which would now include the use of Social Networks.

The Group **Agreed** that:

- David Wilde would provide the staff and Member Policies on the use of Social Networks;
- Eleri Roberts would include use of Social Networks in Member Development briefing;
- Discuss with Cabinet for their views on Social Network.

The Chairman thanked David Wilde for his information.

5. External Communication Strategy Plan

The Group considered information on the Internal Communication Service, (EXC-EC/01/12), presented by Richard Puleston, Assistant Chief Executive, Director for Strategic Services and Eleri Roberts, Head of External Communications.

The External Communication Strategy Plan had been through consultation with Political Leadership Team, Corporate Leadership Team and all Directorate Leadership Teams. This strategy would be updated annually. Out of the eight overarching areas of work the current largest was the Olympics and its legacy. Each priority had a strategy on how it would be developed which includes interaction with Social Networks, the budget was challenged to provide value for money.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Each of the eight priority campaigns had a strategy which sits behind the main Strategy Plan providing detailed information on the campaign objectives and benchmarking. This document would be available in September 2012;
- If any campaign does not provide an outcome or a change then it does not go ahead as the County had moved away from spending budgets on campaigns without ensuring that there would be outcomes;
- It was anticipated that as the County moves to a commissioning service providers would buy back County services, but this may prove a challenge if the provider had different aspirations from the County. It was explained that currently the External Communications Team manage this by reflecting the views of the provider as different to the County by using different staff, the Local Enterprise Partnerships was given as an illustration;
- The Strategy Plan was drafted before the Community Budget and Customer Service information was available, although they would be included;
- The Outcomes would be taken to the Strategic Communications Board on 17 July.

The Chairman thanked Eleri Roberts for her information.

6. Scoping Document

To review the Scoping Document for the External Communications Review in the light of the first two meetings.

The Group **Agreed** that:

- Internal Communication Service staff should be invited to the next meeting;
- The Media should be invited to the next meeting to give their view on the County's External Communications, Robert Fox would liaise with Eleri Roberts to provide contact details of witnesses;
- The Benchmarking document would be available on the eight priorities in September/October;
- Price Waterhouse Cooper reviewed the integration of External and Internal Communications, Eleri Roberts would obtain this report for the Group;
- The Scrutiny Board had agreed that each Policy and Scrutiny Committee Chairman could release a press release after the Committee meeting, Eleri Roberts would take this forward.

7. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee **Agreed** to set future dates.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 11.55 am.

Chairman