Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 5 November 2013

Contact in the Capital – Community Communication Pilots

Item number	7.5
Report number	
Wards	All

Links

Coalition pledges	P33, P35
Council outcomes	CO23, CO24
Single Outcome Agreement	

Alastair Maclean

Director of Corporate Governance

Contact: Lesley McPherson 0131 529 4030

E-mail: lesley.mcpherson@edinburgh.gov.uk

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Executive summary

Contact in the Capital – Community Communication Pilots

Summary

This report addresses the key recommendations in the Contact in the Capital report agreed at Council in November 2012. Council instructed the Communications Service to carry out an analysis of communications channels and audiences and develop innovative ideas and options for investment to improve two way communications between the Council and local communities.

Since the November 2012 report, the Head of Service with responsibility for the Communications Service has left the Council and a new Chief Communications Officer started in August 2013. This new officer will lead the longer term development of the Council's communications strategy.

In developing this report the Communications Service worked with Neighbourhood Managers in reviewing existing communication channels at community level. This included discussions and a focus on "hard to reach" groups. The Appendix outlines options for pilot initiatives to improve two way communications at local neighbourhood level. The pilot options seek to harness the power of communities to reach more people more quickly, broadening the demographic reach, improving two way communications and expanding the range platforms the Council currently uses.

The potential for developing training opportunities for young people and community capacity building was also taken into account.

Recommendations

The report recommends:

1. that the Committee decides whether to go ahead with all of the proposed pilots, whether to proceed with only certain pilots or, to proceed with none of the proposed pilots, and to review other options;

2. that £50k is made available for developing these pilot projects, funded by a cross charge to services based on the historic cross charge for Outlook (former Council newspaper) as stated in the Contact in the Capital report of November 2012;

3. that the Communications Service works with Neighbourhood Partnerships, Community Councils and interested community groups and organisations to

actively support good practice, share expertise and establish sustainable community based communications initiatives; and

4. that the Committee agrees that an update report, highlighting successful community based communications initiatives, be reported annually.

Measures of success

Selected pilot projects will be fully evaluated and reported to the Committee. Performance metrics will be established at the outset.

Financial impact

It is proposed that the £50k costs of the pilot are cross-charged to all services on the same basis that the Council's public information newspaper (Outlook) was previously cross-charged.

Equalities impact

Accessibility issues will be considered within all solutions with particular attention paid to difficult to reach groups.

Sustainability impact

The continuing drive to reduce printed material has a positive environmental impact.

Consultation and engagement

- Councillors survey (2013)
- Cross service working group
- Workshop (members and officers) to develop new ideas (August 2013)
- Edinburgh People's Survey 2012 communications questions

Background reading / external references

- The Edinburgh People's Survey 2012
- Survey of Councillors 2013
- Mosaic Profiling Classification System
- Local Government Reputation: delivery for people LGA 2010
- NESTA UK Hyperlocal media today

Report

Contact in the Capital – Community Communication Pilots

1.   Background

1.1   This report presents options for pilot communications initiatives which aim to improve the way in which the Council communicates with residents with a renewed emphasis on two way communications and local community driven initiatives.

1.2   With the Capital Coalition's commitment to a renewed focus on dialogue with communities and decision making which better reflects public opinion, Edinburgh has an opportunity to spearhead innovative communications ideas while maximising the channels already operating within communities.

1.3   As previously outlined in the report to Council in November 2012, this will require:-

- a range of communication ideas and tools;

- refocusing of resources from straight forward provision of information to enhancing and enabling two way communication at a more local level;

- strengthening of relationships and opportunities within communities; and

- ongoing flexibility to diversify and embrace new ideas and methods.

1.4   In preparing this report, guidance has been sought about current best practice in community capacity building through digital media through researching The Media Trust 360 Project and the Carnegie UK Trust – Neighbourhood News Project.

1.5   A Scotland wide Digital Commonwealth project (Funded by The Lottery Fund) is starting in October 2013 providing Community Media Cafes to encourage Citizen Journalists to cover the Commonwealth Games from a community perspective. The content from these cafes can be adapted to provide training sessions for the pilot projects described in Appendix 1.

1.6   The options outlined in Appendix 1 were selected as potential pilot projects as they met the following criteria:

- enables information to reach people more quickly or more effectively;

- offers ways for the Council to communicate with "hard to reach" audiences;

- provides two way communications – encouraging feedback and ongoing dialogue;

- provides opportunities to be adapted or replicated for use in other areas and communities;

- enhances community capacity and in particular links in to Community Council or other community based group activity; and

- adds value to an existing communications channel or uses new technology /social media to add value and save money; and

- offers opportunities for training and skills development.

2. Main report

2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council has previously used a number of platforms to direct people *to* and inform them *of* Council services – including the A – Z of Council Services publication and Edinburgh Outlook, the Council newspaper. The Council decided to move the A- Z of Council Services online and the end of the contract for Outlook afforded the opportunity to look at options to make efficiency savings and refocus communications with a stronger emphasis on two way community led communications.

2.2 An analysis of existing platforms and user profile has been undertaken and has informed the selection of the proposed the pilot projects listed in appendix 1. During the analysis of existing platforms it became clear that there is a need for support and investment in new platforms and models, as technology develops, as well as to add value to existing successful community based platforms. Both traditional media channels and Hyperlocal providers (online news or content pertaining to a small geographically defined community) are usually too small to solve every news challenge in a community themselves but by developing partnerships across platforms a sustainable business model is more likely.

2.3 To help determine preferred channels for support and investment, consultation with Councillors was also undertaken in the form of a questionnaire based survey to determine what their preferred channels were and to seek their views about effective channels in the future. The results of the survey showed that 87% of Councillors from all parties used Community Councils as a preferred channel to communicate and engage with the public (in addition to email and phone) and considered this as a very effective channel to use in future. Community led channels tend to be trusted and valued by the communities they serve as the information is viewed as independent. Supporting the development of community led communications channels would therefore seem to be an effective use of a one off source of funding.

2.4 The Communications Service works with Neighbourhood Teams using their social media channels to reach communities as well as other existing channels of communication – including community newspapers, local newsletters, local websites, public events, local leaflet drops and information provided through libraries and other community facilities. Harnessing all available channels within communities will help reach a wider audience and encourage dialogue.

2.5 The shift by many to online activity and, in particular, uptake of social media and mobile technology requires a shift in emphasis within the Council to engage with

customers and members of the public in this way and to meet expectations for two way dialogue. Digital media developments are therefore the main focus of the pilot projects described in appendix 1 and these include links where appropriate to more traditional channels.

2.6 Neighbourhood managers have helped identify particular target communities for the pilot projects based on local knowledge, MOSAIC profiles (a geo-demographic classification of the population), responses from The Edinburgh People's Survey and the existence and relative effectiveness of community groups and groups of young people in the area.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The report recommends:

3.1.1 that the Committee decides whether to go ahead with all of the proposed pilots, whether to proceed with only certain pilots or, or to proceed with none of the proposed pilots, and to review other options.

3.1.2 that if the decision is made to take the pilots forward, the Communications Service works with Neighbourhood Partnerships, Community Councils and interested community groups and organisations to actively support good practice, share expertise and establish sustainable community based communications initiatives;

3.1.3 that £50k is made available for developing these pilot projects, funded by a cross charge to services based on the historic cross charge for Outlook (former Council newspaper) as stated in previous reports; and

3.1.4 that the Committee agrees that an update report, evaluating the success of the pilots will be submitted.

Alastair Maclean

Director of Corporate Governance

Links

Coalition pledges	**P33** - Strengthen Neighbourhood Partnerships and further involve local people in decisions on how Council resources are used **P35** - Continue to develop the diversity of services provided by our libraries
Council outcomes	**CO23** - Well engaged and well informed – Communities and individuals are empowered and supported to improve local

	outcomes and foster a sense of community **CO24** - The Council communicate effectively internally and externally and has an excellent reputation for customer care
Single Outcome Agreement	
Appendices	**Appendix 1** – Community Media Cafes

Appendix 1

The Appendix proposes 3 pilot projects which have been developed based on the criteria below bringing together new technology with existing traditional platforms and community journalism skills.

Criteria

The Pilot Project:

- enables information to reach people more quickly or more effectively
- offers ways to reach hard to reach audiences
- provides two way communications – encouraging feedback and ongoing dialogue
- provides opportunities to be adapted or replicated for use in other areas and communities
- enhances community capacity and in particular links in to Community Council activity
- adds value to an existing channel or uses new technology /social media to add value and save money
- offers opportunities for training

1   Hyperlocal Community News in Gorgie/Dalry (£11.5k)

Develop a digital news and events channel and social media training programme with a particular focus on inclusion of older people.

Gorgie / Dalry – South West Neighbourhood

5. The proposed online hyperlocal platform development would deliver a new online local media / events service targeting Gorgie/Dalry and training citizen journalists in the area to publish locally themselves.

6. The particular emphasis in this community would be to build on work already underway on the award winning computer training for the over 50's initiative.

7. Working to close the digital divide, this project could provide a model with potential for replication in other areas, ensuring older people are included in two way communication with the Council and with their own community

8. The project would work closely with the recently launched Digital Sentinel in Wester Hailes and liaise with The Media Trust to fine tune

a model that follows best practice and is also in tune with the particular needs of the community.

2   **Community news and digital development - North Edinburgh News (£25k)**

- North Edinburgh and specifically the Forth Ward provide a good cross section of demographic profiles based on the Edinburgh residents' Mosaic Profiles and the Edinburgh People's Survey demographic profiles.

- North Edinburgh has a locally well regarded community newspaper and blog and is currently developing a website. Developing a digital platform would be a cost effective and sustainable way to enhance community led, two way communications in the area while retaining local trust in the North Edinburgh News brand.

- As with the other proposed pilot projects, best practice models and specific advice would be sought from The Media Trust.

- Forth Neighbourhood Partnership has a successful Youth Forum and the proposal is to involve young people from this and other areas of North Edinburgh in the running of the NEN and provide training opportunities in digital platform development, citizen journalist skills and social media marketing skills.

- The North Edinburgh Young People's Forum have been awarded a small community grant to support community journalism training and this pilot project could expand this opportunity to many more young people in the area.

- There are 7 Community Councils in the area covered by the North Edinburgh News. The proposal is to strengthen the Community Council and youth involvement in the North Edinburgh News and to use the platform to publicise local activities and community initiatives.

- Strengthening Community Councils as a conduit for improved two-way communications with the Council and with communities was identified as desirable through the survey of Councillors carried out in 2013.

- Community Councils have recently been through a nomination and election process and it is clear that some Community Council's would benefit from the ability to publicise their activities more widely and encourage the involvement of younger people.

3   Digital Chronicle (working title) – Craigmillar area (£13.5k)

- Craigmillar is an area that continues to undergo significant regeneration work with a focus not only on the physical environment, but also within education, health and well-being, employment, economy and social cohesion. The reintroduction of a local news platform would be a key enabler to help co-ordinate this work and actively involve and engage local residents.

- The local community through various Portobello & Craigmillar Neighbourhood Partnership meetings and sub-groups, and engagement exercises have identified the need for a hyperlocal media platform to help bind the community and give a sense of place and purpose, provide information about local events and service developments, and counter negative perceptions.

- The revival of a local news platform would help support some of the key messages to reinvigorate the role of Castlebrae Community High School in the heart of the community and help increase the school roll. The community's involvement in the development of a new hyperlocal digital news and events sharing platform is crucial to its success.

- The pilot project and school would support young people to take an active role in developing a hyperlocal news and events channel and provide skills in citizen journalism, photography, video and recording.

- This project would provide a useful vehicle to involve the wider community and support work to help close the digital gap that exists in some of Edinburgh's communities.