

**BEST VALUE REFERENCE GROUP – COMMUNICATIONS held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on MONDAY 2 OCTOBER 2000 at 7.00 pm**

Present:- Councillors Mrs M A Caton and A R Row

Officers in attendance:- M T Purkiss.

1 **CURRENT SITUATION**

Mick Purkiss updated Members on the work which had been undertaken by the Review Team and highlighted the main areas which still needed to be addressed.

2 **RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRES**

Questionnaires had been sent to Councillors, Business Centre Managers, the media and the voluntary sector of the businesses. Mick drew attention to some of the main points which had been drawn from an early analysis of the responses.

From the questionnaire to Councillors, 78% considered that the current approach to communications was adequate and 22% did not. In terms of options for the future 63% supported continuing/improving the Council Page, 4% supported a quarterly newsletter and 33% supported a Council newspaper. Approximately 50% of Councillors said that they would like training on aspects of communications.

In the response from Business Centre Managers there was general support for the current approach and the continuing/improving of the Council page and there was agreement that there was a need for a Corporate house style for publications.

There was also general support for the current approach from the media and there was general satisfaction with press releases. Problems of contacting the right officer were highlighted.

There had been a good response from the voluntary sector/business. Most of those contacted felt that the Council was helpful and that they had good access to the

Council to discuss matters in person. Most of those contacted found information about the Council either in the local newspaper or on the Council page.

A benchmarking exercise was also being carried out with other district councils in the Daventry Group and in Essex. It was hoped that a number of ideas for good practice would be forthcoming from the responses to these. In terms of resources district councils range from those which had no specific staff or budget to one which had three full time staff and a budget of £128,000.

### 3 **FUTURE WORK**

Mick reported that following a full analysis of the responses to the questionnaires, the Review Team would present a number of options and an action plan.

He sought Members' views on the following options:

- i) Provision of public relations provide in house/outsource/provide in house that buy in elements.

Members supported continuing the provision of public relations in house.

- ii) Information to public.

Continue/improve Council page quarterly newsletter, Council newspaper.

Members supported continuing/improving the Council Page.

Consulting and involving the public surveys (questionnaires) citizens' panels citizens' juries/focus groups.

Members supported the use of surveys and focus groups.

Mick outlined the other areas which were likely to be included in the final report and asked Members for their comments and other issues which they would like to see included.

Members felt that the Council needed to be more accurate in responding to criticism. They also considered that the use of informal press briefings was helpful and that

evidence was needed to illustrate that value for money was being obtained from the current arrangements for the Council's website.

#### 4 **FINAL REPORT**

Mick reported that it was hoped that the Final Report would be submitted to the Council's Management Team on 10 November and that it could then be considered by the Reference Groups at a meeting on 14 November at 6.30 pm. The report would then be submitted to the Best Value Sub-Committee on 27 November 2000.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm.