| **Subject:** | Communications Strategy | **Status:** | For Publication |

| **Report to:** | Policy Overview and Scrutiny | **Date:** | 9 November 2010 |

Report of: Head of People and Policy

Portfolio Holder: Finance and Resources

Key Decision: Yes / ~~No~~

Forward Plan [x]   General Exception [ ]   Special Urgency [ ]

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The Communication Strategy sets out how Rossendale Council will organise and communicate to residents and stakeholders. It looks to create a communication culture which uses a variety of media to communicate and values listening to customers and shaping services to meet their needs.

1.2 The Communications Strategy sets out the way forward for the Council to deliver value for money communications whilst responding to a changing external media environment, particularly the recent growth in the use of social media.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-

- Delivering quality Services to our customers
- Promoting the Borough
- Providing value for money services

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- **Council Reputation** - Effective communications play an important part in maintaining the Council's reputation. The options for changes to Rossendale Alive set out in this report all carry the risk that the Council

will have less direct influence over the messages that local people receive about the Council.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 The Rossendale Alive newsletter currently costs approximately £6,000 per edition to design, print and distribute from a budget of £19.9k per annum. Seven options have been considered to reduce the cost of communicating directly with residents in the borough.

These options are:

- Option 1 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and securing advertising revenue to offset production costs.
- Option 2 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and securing funding from other public services.
- Option 3 – Reducing to 2 editions per year and exploring a Community Delivery option
- Option 4 – 2 inserts per year into the Rossendale Free Press or Rossendale Independent
- Option 5 – Rossendale Alive Annual Review once every year
- Option 6 – Two editions per year of Neighbourhood News for each Neighbourhood Forum Area
- Option 7 – Reduce the number of editions of Rossendale Alive from 3 to 2 per year.

The costs and implications of each of the options is set out below.

	Number of Council pages per edition	Number of copies produced	Cost per year
Option 1*	6 sides of A3 paper	30k	£7,200 reducing to £4,000 by April 2013
Option 2*	4 sides of A3 paper	30k	£6,000
Option 3*	6 sides of A3 paper	30k	£7,600
Option 4	4 sides of A3 paper	13k	£3,000
Option 5	4 sides of A3 paper	30k	£3,800
Option 6 *	2 sides of A3 paper	24k	£6,000
Option 7	8 sides of A3 paper	30k	£12,000

*These options will all produce additional workload for the Communications Team and have a potential impact on productivity

4.2 The Communications Strategy proposes that Option 5 should be the preferred option of the Council and therefore the last edition of the Rossendale Alive newsletter will be in March 2011. It will be replaced by an annual review to be published once a year at a cost of £3,800, resulting in a saving of £14,200 per year. Members are asked to consider if this is the appropriate way forward or whether other options should be developed further.

4.3 The Council has established a number of mechanisms for engaging with its communities on those issues that affect them, these mechanism will continue to be used to communicate Council news, activities. If a decision is made not to

continue with Rossendale Alive there is the need for proactive engagement with the media to promote community news

4.4   The timing and method of production of the staff newsletter Grapevine will take be explored with a view to identifying savings.

4.5   The Council's A-Z will be maintained electronically on the website. Options to produce a joint community directory (to replace the A to Z) in conjunction with one of the local papers will be explored so as to achieve savings.

4.6   A number of key employees will be provided with additional training on writing effective press releases and a camera will be made available for all officers to be able to take photos to publicise good news stories and the work of the Council.

4.7   The following officers will receive additional training and have the authority to speak to the press: All Directors, the Head of Finance, Head of People and Policy, Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, Communities Manager, Planning Manager, Area Managers, and others at the request of a Council Director. Where an issue is a subject of the Programme Board and/or it is recognised that there are high reputational risks associated with that issue, the Communications Manager should be the lead media contact.

4.8   The Communications Team will continue to oversee the use of the "Rossendale Alive" Branding.

4.9   The number of employees who can use the social networking sites will be increased. A policy of the use if social networking sites will be developed to protect the Council's brand and reputation.

4.10   The use of customer and mosaic data (customer profile) will be used to inform and target communication campaigns.

4.11   Further efficiencies need to be explored in terms of variety of websites promoting Rossendale and the production of publicity material with partners.

4.12   In terms of contingency planning the ability and facility to remotely update website news will be extended from the Communications Team to a number of other officers.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5.   SECTION 151 OFFICER

5.1   Financial implications are noted in para 4.2 above and compare to current budget resources.

6.   MONITORING OFFICER

6.1   No Human resources Implications arising from the report.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1 No Human Resources implications arising for the report at this time.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 It is four years since the previous Communications Strategy was adopted by the Council. The new strategy builds on the work that this been done since then whilst identify cost saving options for the future and recognising the growing importance of social media. The new strategy will enable the Council to build its capacity to communicate effectively.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 Members consider their preferred option in relation to the future of the Rossendale Alive newsletter.

9.2 Members recommend to Council the adoption of the Communications Strategy.

9.3 All future minor amendments to the Communication Strategy to be delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Councillors, Council Staff, Executive Management Team, Place Survey, Cultural Survey, Cabinet Briefing Session, soft feedback from consultation events and opportunities.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required   Yes / ~~No~~

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached   Yes / No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required   ~~Yes /~~ No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached   ~~Yes /~~ No

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Background Papers	
Document	**Place of Inspection**
New Reputation Guide – Local Government Association	www.reputation.lga.gov.uk
Rossendale Culture Review - August 2009 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Borough Council Staff Survey - January 2010 - Collaborative Research & Consultation Service	Stubbylee Hall
Rossendale Members Questionnaire on Communications	Stubbylee Hall