

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 2 December, 2010

CONTACT OFFICER: Kate Pratt, Acting Communications and Marketing Manager
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 875088

WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

COMMUNICATIONS – REVENUE SPEND

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report has been prepared in response to a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has requested more detail on the level of expenditure by SBC on newspaper and outdoor media advertising.

The report aims to clarify where the council invests its communications budget, why it chooses specific channels and how effectiveness is measured.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the report.

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

- **Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion**
- **Adding years to Life and Life to years**
- **Being Safe, Feeling Safe**
- **A Cleaner, Greener place to live, Work and Play**
- **Prosperity for All**

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

There are no financial implications of proposed action

(b) **Risk Management**

There are no risk management implications of proposed action

(c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no Human Rights Act Implications.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no Equalities implications.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 **Background**

The combined communications and marketing team of the council consists of an acting communications and marketing manager, two part-time marketing officers, a web editor, a senior media officer, a part-time internal communications officer, a consultation officer and a commercial officer (i.e. a total complement of 6.6 FTEs).

As part of the management restructure and resulting cost saving exercise proposed in October 2010, the head of communications post is to be deleted and the team managed in future by a new position of Head of Policy and Communications who will also oversee Policy, LSP and the council's Scrutiny functions.

The current team has, in total, an annual **communications** budget spend of £134,920 excluding staff costs and events. This includes Citizen, all internal communications, the council's website and consultations. The majority of **marketing** activity is funded by the respective department requesting the activity.

5.2 **Advertising channels**

Through the communications team, the council advertises services and events through various media outlets. However, due to the limited budget, careful consideration is always given to maximise impact and exposure. Some advertising is, effectively, free of charge. Where payment is required, preferential rates are nearly always achieved.

The main outlets used at preferential rates are:

Local newspapers

Quarter page colour advertisements and newspaper wrap-arounds either on a stand alone basis or block bookings. In addition, the Slough Express runs a free advertisement every week (called the info spot) as part of a contra deal. In return we buy an agreed number of newspapers for staff and visitors.

We occasionally negotiate free advertising when one of the local newspapers becomes a media sponsor for an event.

Bus shelters

Poster advertising sites on 170 bus shelters across the borough have been provided as part of the council's bus shelter contract. These sites can be used by the communications team free of charge and support planned campaigns and initiatives throughout the year. We usually run two campaigns at any one time as most shelters contain two poster sites.

Posters can be changed free of charge every two months. Changing them more frequently incurs a charge which is why, on occasions, out-of-date posters may appear from time to time.

Local radio

The main local radio station for advertising is Time 1066 FM. However, this is used infrequently due to the relatively high cost and falling listening figures. In addition, the biennial attitude survey indicates that residents prefer not to receive council information this way.

Asian Star and BBC Radio Berkshire are obliged to broadcast community messages and we make extensive use of this facility, including a monthly interview slot with the SBC chief executive on Asian Star.

We recently advertised the bonfire on Asian Star at a heavily discounted rate. This, combined with other initiatives, resulted in a much larger attendance than last year.

Buses

For major projects, the council occasionally uses advertising sites on the sides and backs of buses. Most recently this medium has been used for advertising the new bus station as part of the Heart of Slough.

Hoardings

As part of the Heart of Slough project, the hoardings around the construction site for the new bus station have been used to advertise what is coming. This is standard practice in construction projects.

Billboards

Slough enjoys multiple billboard advertising sites across the borough although the council has only used one billboard site for advertising in the past 12 months at the bottom of Ledgers Road at the junction with Chalvey Road West; this was used for a two week road safety campaign only.

Poster sites

Slough also has multiple poster advertising sites, including at the railway station. The poster sites at the railway station have been used once in the past 12 months to advertise Heart of Slough and the construction of the new bus station. When another advertiser cannot be found our posters will often be left in position meaning we benefit from extended exposure but can also mean an out-of-date announcement may appear from time to time.

5.2 Banner sites

A4

The council currently has 20 lamppost banner sites along the A4 from Gala Bingo in the east to the Town Hall. These are currently displaying Heart of Slough and Proud to be Slough banners but may be changed as required.

The banner sites were initially used as part of the recycling red bin scheme in 2008. Since then they have been changed to reflect other on-going campaigns. There were initial start-up costs for the main banner frames and fixings. However, the cost of installing replacement banners is about half price with no on-going rental cost. We therefore believe the banners to be highly cost effective long-term which is why banners are in position for extended periods.

Slough gateways

In 2010, 24 large banners were erected on the main gateways into Slough. There are currently:

- Six on Tuns Lane, junction 6 of the M4
- Six on the Bath Road, junction 5 of the M4
- Six on the Bath Road, junction 7 of the M4
- Three on Wexham Road
- Three on Farnham Road

Each banner says “Welcome to Slough” on one side and “Have a safe journey” on the other side. On some sites, banners have been individualised to recognise the neighbourhoods within Slough, including Langley, Wexham and Cippenham.

It is expected that these are semi-permanent sites with no current plans to make changes. The one-off cost of proving all 24 banners was £6,600 which is only £275 per banner.

5.3 Citizen

Citizen is the council’s newspaper for residents and is the flagship publication of the council, winning local and national awards. It is published six times per year and distributed to 46,500 households across the borough. It is also available at all libraries, Town Hall, St Martins Place and MyCouncil. An electronic version is also posted on the council’s website.

The Citizen budget for the year is £48,300 which equates to £1.03 per household, per year. This figure has reduced over the last four years, whilst the publication frequency has increased from five to six issues. This has been achieved by bringing design and print management in house, and by sharing pages with public sector partners who then help fund publication.

In the latest attitude survey of residents (March 2010):

- 39% of those surveyed prefer to receive information about the council through the Citizen. This was more than in 2007 and equal with local newspapers
- 93% of those who read Citizen find it informative
- 70% said they found it useful when finding out about local services
- Respondents who recalled receiving a copy of the Citizen in past six months were significantly more likely to feel very or fairly well informed about council services and benefits and more like to feel proud to live in Slough
- Respondents who receive the Citizen feel much more satisfied with the council than those who don’t

5.4 Grapevine / internal communications

Grapevine is the internal newsletter for all council staff published 11 times per year. Most readers access the publication electronically via the intranet but a small number are printed for staff with limited IT access and for staff lounge areas. The actual printing costs are, therefore, small.

Grapevine is an important part of our internal communications strategy. A recent benchmarking exercise by an independent company on the percentage of staff feeling informed in councils demonstrated SBC has some of the best informed staff in the survey, despite using relatively few resources.

Council	Informed staff	Not informed staff	Public sector average not informed
SBC	78%	22%	44%
Outer London Brg	53%	43%	44%
Inner London Brg	61%	36%	44%
Northern county	61%	35%	44%

5.5 Advertising costs per directorate / campaign

The following directorate campaigns have been delivered over the last 12 months.

Green and Built Environment

Refuse and recycling bank holiday collection dates: £1,456

Community Safety: £1,402

Housing futures / People 1st consultation: £1,150

Road Safety: £558

Education and Children's services

Family Services Fair: £1,816

Fostering / Adoption / Home from Home recruitment: £6,854

Community and Wellbeing

Libraries: £231.00

Lifelong Learning: £294

Active Slough: £294

Improvement and Development

Economic development: £882

Resources

Heart of Slough: £36,558

Chief Executives

Bonfire 2009: £738

Christmas Lights 2009: £1,294

Other Christmas events 2009: £900

Canal Festival 2010: £350

5.6 Measuring Value for Money

All campaigns and activities are built around best practice templates and include measurable objectives.

Many of SBC's activities are designed to communicate information or generate awareness of a service. Ideally a campaign would include an element of pre- and post- campaign primary research to identify the change in the target audience's awareness or comprehension but this can be prohibitively expensive for smaller scale campaigns.

Campaigns that aim to generate a direct response or engagement in an activity are easier to measure. For example, a bus interior campaign which aimed to

raise people's awareness of the signs to look out for to identify vulnerable adults led to a measurable increase in calls to the Safeguarding Adults helpline.

More and more campaigns are focused on social marketing – ie using marketing techniques to affect behavioural change. Where possible we would look to put a monetary value on this behavioural change and so demonstrate Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI).

Other, non monetary measures are often used. These can include measurable increases in positive behaviour (eg more people swimming, an increase in recycling rates) or an observable and measurable response to a direct response communication (eg attendance at an event, people enquiring about becoming a foster carer).

Any learning is fed back into future campaign plans. In particular the success of previous activity targeting hard to reach groups is informing the nascent census strategy.

5.7 Use of external agencies

Slough Borough Council does not generally use outside creative agencies and has not done so in the last year. The council's in-house designer delivers excellent value for money and we only outsource urgent design work when this person is on holiday. Benchmark figures from other councils suggest this saves SBC tens of thousands of pounds each year.

6. Comments of Other Committees

There are no comments from other Committees.

7. Conclusion

This report demonstrates the council uses council-owned channels as a preference and whenever possible and appropriate, enabling the communication team to deliver excellent value-for-money.

Occasionally it is necessary to use additional channels to make a greater impact or target a specific segment of the population.

Initiatives and campaigns are measured for value-for-money whenever possible although budget constraints often mean primary research cannot be afforded. In these circumstances proxy measures are made such as the increase in recycling or attendance at an event.

8. Background Papers

'1' 'Biennial attitude survey' (available from Democratic and Member Services: tel 01753 875018)