2.   DO WE NEED A COMMUNICATION POLICY? IF SO WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE?

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The purpose of this report is to outline the benefits of developing a Council Communication Policy and to identify the elements a Communication Policy would be likely to consist of.

An attachment to this report also outlines the current role of the Communication Team and includes some case studies.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNICATION?

Success for the City Council in its enabling and community governance roles will be substantially influenced by its ability to communicate the right messages to the right audiences at the right time and to achieve accurate and appropriate media coverage that gives a positive perception.

Council communication includes the following:

- Provision of information on Council services
- Provision of information to enable people to engage
- Provision of educational information
- Promotional advertising
- Statutory advertising

An overarching perception of the organisation is created through its communication and actions, by the organisation, staff and elected members. This perception is also influenced by the news media.

The Committee may recall a presentation made early in the year on the City Council brand. The presentation referred to some recent market research that outlined the many strengths of the City Council brand. Reference was also made to some weaknesses that will become obstacles to the Council being able to perform its role in community governance. In specific, those weaknesses are:

(a)   Trust; especially our decision making processes linked to big ticket expenditure.
(b)   Caring; we are seen to care for places and facilities but not enough for people.
(c)   Organisational attributes; there is a general lack of understanding as to what the Council does, what our logo is and there is confusion between Environment Canterbury and the City Council, particularly where the smog issue is concerned.

Managing our brand and achieving greater consistency in the messages we send (whether by choice or accident) is a key to addressing these issues. A starting point for this work is identifying the overall City Council brand and the values that we need to subscribe to, to support the brand.

Ongoing brand building will be influenced by work undertaken in the areas of internal culture, customer service, advertising and communication and consultation. Current brand perceptions can be measured on an ongoing basis to enable this process to be managed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMMUNICATION POLICY

Communication can be proactively managed and a range of communication tools can be used to effectively enhance outcomes. Set out in a series of attachments is a history of the development of the Communication team at the Christchurch City Council and a set of case studies showing the use of communication tools.

With a communication policy in place, our communication will be more consistent and expected outcomes would be:

- Ability to combine messages from various units to more consistently reinforce key messages.
- The creation of a realistic level of expectation in regard to what information ratepayers and citizens can expect to receive.
- More effective consultation processes.
- Efficiencies in media and promotional spending.
- A higher rate of positive media coverage

All of these outcomes contribute toward achieving a greater understanding by ratepayers and citizens of the role of the Council. This, in turn will lead to a better perception of value for money for rates and citizens and ratepayers holding a more positive perception of the Council.

DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION POLICY

We will need to develop the goals that a Communication Policy will seek to achieve. These goals could include:

- Strengthening the City Council brand through a greater degree of consistency (achieved through developing and communicating organisational values).
- Achieving a heightened public awareness of "value for money for rates" – showing ratepayers and citizens what the Council delivers.
- Ensuring people have good information as to what services are available and the standards of service that they can expect.

Building a Communication Policy could be achieved by developing the following three streams of work:

1. **Information Policy**
   Including:
   - Definition of the organisation's brand and its brand values. (What do we want to project the organisation to be and are we sure that we can live up to it?) Identification of the values that need to be communicated consistently to portray the brand.
   - Definition of the values that the organisation's communication must adhere to eg honesty, accuracy, timeliness, cost effectiveness, transparency.
   - Processes to accommodate use of the Web as a communication tool into the future.
   - The provision of relevant and appropriate information to individuals and community groups who may wish to participate with the Council in influencing its decision to partner with it in achieving its outcomes.
   - The provision of information in a targeted way to meet the needs of interest groups and local community groups who wish to know about and influence change in their areas of interest.
   - Ensuring that all appropriate activities and services are branded so they are recognised as Council outputs.
   - Communication/branding issues in relation to the use of external suppliers and contractors. What are our responsibilities and what are our expectations from them?
   - Managing external PR agencies/providers, communication consultants and advertising agencies to be consistent with our direction.
   - The role and use of City Scene – keeping the content aligned with objectives.
   - Guidelines for the Communication Team and elected members on working together.

2. **Media Policy**
   Including:
   - Authorised spokespeople. Do we adopt this system?
   - Training for authorised spokespeople.
   - Media communication values I.e. honesty, accuracy, transparency, and timeliness.
   - What to do when a journalist calls.
   - How to use the communication team & who to talk to.
   - Guidelines for elected members in talking with the media?
   - Dealing with requests under the Official Information Act.

3. **Advertising and Promotions Policy**
   Including:
   - Portraying the organisation's brand and its brand values.
   - Processes to ensure all promotional material is duplicated on the Council's website and is available to Customer Service Representatives.
   - Maintaining cost – effective processes for advertising and promotional activity, use of City Council systems eg media planner buyer and printers, how to place classified advertising.
   - Ensuring that all appropriate activities and services are branded so they are recognised as Council outputs.
   - Attaining consistency in the look and feel of Council advertising and promotional material.

The development of a Communication Policy is a significant project. We have contacted three other Councils to see what they are doing in this area. Neither Auckland City, Wellington nor Dunedin City Councils appear to have a comprehensive policy or plan in place. Wellington and Dunedin both have media policies and Auckland are just embarking on the development of a media policy/strategy.

NEXT STAGE

Our next steps will include gaining agreement on the key outcomes we are seeking to achieve, our communication goals, and the Council's overarching brand values. This will need to bring together the issues around brand values (such as trust, caring, integrity etc), awareness of value for money for rates, and also issues around availability and quality of information.

Following discussion of this report it is intended that a further paper will be produced developing these next steps.

Chairman's
Recommendation: For discussion.