

# Bolton Council

**Report to:** Corporate Issues Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 4 February 2008

**Report of:** Director of Legal and Democratic Services

**Report No:** 21

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**Report Title:** **An update on the work of Bolton Council's Communications and Marketing Agency**

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**Confidential**

**(Non-Confidential)** This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

**Purpose:**

To update Committee Members on the work the Communications and Marketing Agency and future priorities

**Recommendations:**

The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

**Decision:**

**Background Doc(s):**

**Summary:**

- Agency set up in 2006, with 42 FTEs, against a scope of 59
- Broader remit includes place brand management and strategic media management
- Bolton brand is national award-winner and brand strategy/shared service infrastructure is viewed as best practice
- 20+ key partners in Bolton using the brand. Unprecedented in UK outside London
- Annual savings and efficiencies gained / able to be articulated, on behalf of the organisation, of over half a million pounds - through a shared service model - include consolidation of stationery (£25,000); consolidation of Bolton News advertising (£100,000); foster carers recruitment campaign (£100,000); delivering consultation projects in-house (£81,000)
- Brand management and application is leading to higher levels of awareness and response to communication campaigns
- Media coverage evaluation now tracked, with over 90% positive, balanced or neutral stories gained; over half with prominent positions; and equivalent advertising value running at an average of over £240,000
- Structures in place to aid forward-planning include regular Exec Member meetings, quarterly DMT slots and a strategic communications session monthly with EMT
- New and developing initiatives include corporate reputation management, departmental planning, trading model and Events Strategy

## **1. Background**

The Communications and Marketing Agency was set up in 2006 to drive greater efficiencies, both qualitatively and quantitatively, across Bolton Council's consultation and research, marketing, design and communications activities. The Agency also has a key remit to help raise the profile of Bolton through the evolution and management of the Bolton brand, working with partners across the borough.

The Agency is structured into four teams to offer support across different areas of the organisation. Each team has a manager and a number of principal officers, who act as either specialists in different disciplines or work to specific departmental portfolios. The four teams are as follows:

- Consultation and research (statutory and non-statutory surveys, both internally and externally, including General Residents and BME; management of the council's consultation database)
- Marketing Development (supporting D&R, ES, partners and Town Centre marketing and managing sponsorship and events)
- Marketing (supporting Adults, Children's and Corporate departments and managing the council's design team)
- Communications and media (press office, internal communications and corporate publications including Bolton Scene)

Through the scoping process for the shared service which was to become the Agency, a total of 59 FTEs (full-time equivalent staff) were identified as working in-scope. The Agency now stands at 42 staff, a 29% efficiency against this scope. The Agency team also handles a much broader remit than previously undertaken, with additional responsibilities including the management of a place brand for Bolton and a more strategic approach to media.

## **2. Achievements to date**

The creation of one central team to work across the scope of activities outlined above, has enabled efficiencies to be realised on a number of levels:

- Eliminating duplication of effort and reducing cost
- Setting objectives for and planning in-scope activities at a more strategic level
- Creating a communication standard for the council and its partners (the Bolton brand) which consistently promotes all council services under a common umbrella and ensures the council gets the credit for the services it delivers

The Agency team has handled over 1000 projects in the last 12 months and some examples to follow will illustrate the efficiencies outlined above.

Further evidence of the success of Bolton Council, in terms of how the Agency function is perceived in local government, comes via the recent Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) awards when, just over one year after the launch of the Agency, the team captured the runners-up spot in the coveted principal award category of 'Communicators of the Year'. Additionally, a number of councils from all over the UK have contacted and/or visited the Agency team in Bolton as our brand strategy and working model is viewed as best practice.

### **2.1. The Bolton Brand**

The development and management of the Bolton brand is the responsibility of the Agency team. The brand is nationally acclaimed, beating the Welsh Assembly Tourism brand and the Scottish Six Cities campaign, to win a UK brand identity award in 2006.

**2.2. Raising the profile of Bolton / working with partners** The brand has also been very effectively endorsed by partners and key Bolton businesses, with the Agency securing its use by a number of partners including Bolton PCT, The Octagon, Bolton Wanderers, Bolton School, Bolton Community College, Bolton Lads and Girls Club, Emerson, Bolton hotels including Holiday Inn and Egerton House, Bolton CVS and the Bolton Fairtrade Foundation.

Uptake of a place brand across such a broad cross-section of public, private and voluntary sector organisations is unprecedented in the UK and has been driven by the Agency. The message to investors and residents alike is that Bolton has a great story to tell and partners all want to play their part in telling that story. Private sector businesses have indicated that there is a real buzz about Bolton, particularly among developers – with really high awareness of the brand.

### **2.3. Savings and efficiencies from a one brand / one council approach** In

terms of efficiencies delivered through applying the brand at its simplest level, the council has moved from over 70 different kinds of letterhead and compliments slip, to one – saving approximately £25,000 in year one of the brand's roll-out.

Similarly with Council vehicles, as old leases expired, replacement vehicles were acquired but with the new brand. The new vehicles have cost less because they are plain white and the livery is of one kind and much simpler to produce.

The brand has been the catalyst for a one council approach and a stronger voice which means the council gets credit for the services it delivers and our communications directly reflect the values of the brand. This joined-up approach to communicating means we can eliminate duplication of effort and save money - in one year a saving of over half a million pounds has been realised against regularly commissioned projects - while all the time increasing our profile.

This figure includes a year-on-year saving of £100,000 on Bolton News advertising, based on the migration of a previous 26 different advertising accounts which were operating across the council, to one, managed by the Agency.

Other examples include streamlining all the regular print requirements from the museums, libraries and children's departments, with a saving of over £25,000; producing the 'know your councillor leaflet' in-house at a saving of £6,500; the council's fostering campaign (see 2.4.2) means less children are fostered through private agencies or outside the borough – an overall saving to the council of over £100,000 (after taking into account the cost of the campaign itself); delivering many consultation projects in-house including parks and get active surveys has delivered a saving of at

least £81,000; and streamlining area forum communications print and developing electronic communications has saved £18,000.

**2.4. The brand creating greater awareness and better response** The Agency's application of the brand in terms of service-based and direct-response campaigns has also delivered some of the highest response rates seen by the council.

**(2.4.1)** The Developers Forum marketing, promoting the Bolton Innovation Zone generated a 33% response rate (business-to-business marketing response averages are between 10 and 15%), with 100 key investors and developers attending the event (33% response rate).

The Agency's work in support of regeneration was highlighted in the Audit Commission's final Corporate Assessment report:

***“A sophisticated and successful approach to marketing the borough has secured £120 million of a projected £600 million investment and 10,000 new jobs for the borough over the next 10 years.”***

**(2.4.2)** The Foster Carers 2006/7 recruitment campaign set out to recruit new foster carers and to attract carers back from the private sector, to ensure children and young people can be looked after in their home town. The year-long campaign aimed to add up to 20 new carers.

At the end of the campaign, Bolton had 15 extra foster carers already approved, with many more being assessed or in training. The campaign produced record recruitment figures for Bolton and children are now being fostered in Bolton who would previously been sent out of the borough at a much higher cost. Since the campaign, far fewer children are being fostered through private agencies.

The recent Joint Area Review highlighted the effectiveness of the campaign :

***“The council has halved the number of children placed outside the borough from 79 to 38 as a result of a successful campaign to recruit more foster carers.”***

***“The council has reduced the number of expensive out-of-borough-placements for looked after children as a result of a successful drive to recruit more foster***

***carers locally. The fostering initiative has produced considerable savings and enhanced the local provision of care.”***

## **2.5. Media coverage and evaluation**

The Agency, as part of its drive to improve the strategic planning of media and to constantly evaluate a direction of travel, monitors all print, radio and TV coverage of the Council and Bolton as a whole.

This coverage is evaluated and monitored in a number of different ways. The evaluation includes the number of press releases issued per month, type of publication whether local, regional or national; the tone of the coverage; the position of the article within the publication and the total equivalent advertising value of the coverage. The analysis also includes the percentage of all Bolton-related coverage generated by the Agency. This report analyses the media coverage received over an eight month period between May and December 2007.

**(2.5.1.) Coverage by Publication**      The split between local coverage of Bolton Council and regional or national coverage, averages at **69% for local** and **31% for regional and national**. As the Agency has worked more strategically to profile service development and regeneration, the regional and national coverage has reached a level of up to **43%**. This coverage helps to drive Bolton’s profile in terms of inward investment and perception of place. The increase of regional and national coverage is not at the expense of local titles – the Agency’s core objective is to ensure positive profile locally, as a priority, but to also add value to this through the development of further coverage regionally and nationally, and through specialist media.

**(2.5.2.) Coverage by Tone**      The media coverage on Bolton Council and Bolton is also analysed by tone, divided into four categories - positive, negative, balanced or neutral towards the Council.

Over the last eight months, the Agency has developed a robust and productive dialogue with media contacts, to ensure that the average amount of positive, balanced and neutral media coverage on Bolton Council has remained very consistent. Bolton

averages a total of **92% positive, balanced or neutral per month**, whilst the negative coverage averages only 8% per month.

**(2.5.3.) Coverage by Position** The Agency also analyses coverage received in the media based on a series of categories including feature; front page; lead article; full page; half page; quarter page; comment piece, small piece; nib (very small piece); letter and online coverage.

Overall, over the last eight months, **25%** of articles were front page or lead articles and **28%** were features, full, half or quarter page stories, meaning that in total **53% of all editorial coverage was of a significant size and position within the publications.**

This is as a direct result of regular dialogue between the Agency and its media contacts, enabling the development of better leverage to ensure prominent positions for strategically important stories.

**(2.5.4.) Equivalent Advertising Value** The Agency also evaluates and measures all editorial coverage generated on behalf of the council. This does not include adverts, advertorial coverage or sponsored supplements.

This calculation is based on what the editorial coverage generated by the Agency is worth – or how much the council would have paid if the copy had been placed as advertising, rather than editorial.

Over the last eight months, the equivalent advertising value of the coverage generated has increased exponentially. From a starting point of approximately **£100,000**, the value increased to over **£250,000** for the following four months, hitting a peak of **over £540,000** in November 2007.

**The total value of the coverage over the last eight months has been £1,956,342,** with an average monthly figure of **£244,542.** This average monthly figure is also likely to increase as the Agency's media team continues to work more strategically, continually looking for opportunities to promote Bolton on a wider stage.

### **3. Working with Members and Management Teams**

**3.1 Working with the Executive** The Agency has developed regular meetings with Executive Members and attends the weekly informal meetings in each department. Representatives from both the media and marketing teams attend, and the meetings are used to review and preview communications activity. This has enabled more proactive working and has helped to develop forward plans for each of the departments. The Agency also has an agreed process for media management, agreed with the Executive.

**3.2 Working with DMTs** The Agency attends quarterly performance DMTs where it reports on work plans, budget expenditure and forward planning. The Agency has also requested a specific planning session with each DMT where a strategic forward plan is developed, to manage consultation, marketing and communication. This is done by plotting service and policy plans, as well as potential 'flash points' (where there may be a negative impact in terms of media coverage), so that an approach to managing media can be agreed well in advance.

The Agency has also proposed communication groups in certain departments (e.g. Children's Services) where partners also contribute to forward-planning.

**3.3. Working with EMT** The Agency's Chief Officer attends EMT once a month and a process is now underway to develop a strategic communication and organisational development programme plan to manage reputation. This will address the shortfall between perceptions of council services and perception of the council overall.

### **4. Future Developments**

The Agency has a number of key targets going forward, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Embed the corporate strategic plan for reputation management, driven by EMT and the Executive, across the council

2. Ensure that departmental strategic plans for service-led consultation, communications and marketing and become the norm across all departments. Cultivate ownership, in terms of priorities and budget management, at senior management level in departments
3. Develop a trading model for Agency services to external clients, including other authorities and partners within the Bolton family
4. Develop an events shared service to manage large-scale events for the borough which have an impact on public perception and the visitor economy