

**HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****Decision Report**

<b>Decision maker:</b>	Efficiency Panel
<b>Date:</b>	1 November 2010
<b>Title:</b>	Public Notice Advertising Project Update
<b>Reference:</b>	2209
<b>Report from:</b>	Director of Property, Business and Regulatory Services

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## **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with an update on progress over recent months in relation to the Public Notice Advertising Project.

## **2. Contextual information**

2.1 The Efficiency Panel received a report at its meeting in May 2010 on the overall procurement improvement programme and on the opportunity for a project to be developed in the area of Public Notice Advertising. The Panel approved a recommendation that the County Council should seek “a cost effective alternative to the current approach to Public Notice Advertising and directs the project team to seek the maximum efficiency saving possible.” The Panel also required the team to undertake formal consultation around the attitudes of residents and businesses to the provision of such information.

2.2 Public Notice Advertising has been identified as an area of significant spend that is common across all councils in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Procurement Partnership (HIOWPP). Total spend is estimated at £1.5 million a year across all 15 authorities. Public Notices are adverts that are placed in local newspapers by individual councils to advertise information of public interest and, if required, generate response whether from the general public or the local business community. There are two types of public notice adverts. One is the Statutory Notice, which must be produced in any legal action resulting from the contents of the notice – for example, road closures and construction work, and the other is the public notice, such as refuse collection information. Both are carried under the same Public Notices banner in the classified section of newspapers and attract a high “rate per single column centimetre” charge as Public Notices are often the most expensive rate in newspapers. With steps being taken to reduce recruitment advertising spend by local government, increases in public notice advertising costs are likely to continue.

### **3. Progress**

#### Advice from Legal Services

3.1 The previous report suggested that the maximum possible saving would be achieved if public notice advertising was switched to an internet portal with only a limited amount of press advertising to “signpost” readers to the availability of the information on the internet. It was clear that it would be necessary to check the underlying legal position before this switch could be implemented. Legal Services have now confirmed the following points:

- There is a requirement for statutory notices to appear in newspapers “circulating” in the appropriate areas
- The legislation does not restrict councils to the use of paid-for newspapers and statutory notices could be published in the “free press” (although there does not appear to be any case law on this specific point)
- Councils should not rely on advertising solely in their own council run publications
- Currently councils may not rely solely on the use of the internet.

3.2 The impact of this advice is that while the County Council and other councils in Hampshire are free to take advantage of the lower cost of publishing statutory notices in the free press, it is not possible to rely on the electronic publication of this information without a change in legislation.

#### Customer research

3.3 The project team has worked with corporate communications to commission ICM, an independent social research organisation, to undertake a research project covering both Hampshire residents and businesses. The representative sample size selected for this project is 1,000 members of the public and 100 businesses. The public survey has recently been completed and the results from businesses are expected shortly.

3.4 The survey tested residents’ recognition of nearly 40 paid and free newspapers. The Portsmouth News and Southern Daily Echo were the two most “regularly” read papers with each recording just under 10% of the sample. However, 63% of the respondents stated that they did not read any of the papers on a regular basis and only 50% reported that they ever read any of the papers listed in the survey.

3.5 Members of the public were also asked if they would support the decision to publish information on the Council’s own website or in libraries if that were to save the Council a substantial amount of money. Some 70% of respondents indicated that they would support the decision. Over 80% of respondents also indicated that they had access to the internet and 63% used the internet on a daily basis (principally at home).

3.6 The survey provides much further information but in essence it would appear to support the idea that electronic publication with appropriate ‘signposting’ in newspapers would be an effective way forward if this were possible.

#### **4. Further actions**

- 4.1 The project team has obtained comparative costs for notices published in the paid and free press. It is clear that the cost of advertising in the free press is substantially lower, but there are considerations about coverage and circulation which need to be taken into consideration. In collaboration with other local authorities across Hampshire preparations have been made to undertake a tender exercise for the publication of notices. This exercise is expected to be complete early in the new year and will form the basis of the County Council's plans until any wider changes in the legislative environment make further moves towards electronic publication viable.
- 4.2 The project team has not yet been able to estimate the savings that may be achieved through this approach, but it is likely that there will be in the region of one-third of the gains possible through electronic publication. This would potentially equate to around £120,000 annually.
- 4.3 The project team has worked with IT Services to produce a portal for public notices and this has attracted strong interest from other councils in Hampshire. This facility will bring the notices to the attention of a wider audience and will position the portal effectively to become the principal source of information should it become possible to reduce or end physical publication of the notices.
- 4.4 Discussions have been held with the Executive Member for Communications and Efficiency regarding an approach to government to encourage a change in the legislation and the team will be pulling together supporting information to facilitate this over the next 5-6 weeks.

#### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1. In line with the previous report to the Panel advice has been taken on the legal position and in the light of that advice work has commenced on a tender exercise for the publication of notices in the printed press. There is strong support for this initiative from councils in Hampshire and it is expected that this will deliver substantial efficiencies. However, it will not be possible to maximise the savings until there is a change in legislation.
- 5.2. The survey requested by Members has been undertaken and in general terms, the results support the planned direction of travel.
- 5.3. In parallel with work on the tender exercise the project team need to collect further information in order that effective representations can be made to government.

#### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 That the Panel notes the progress made on the public notice advertising project and the completion of the opinion survey.
- 6.2 That the Panel approves a proposal to make representations to government in order to advance the case for a change in legislation.

**CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:****Links to the Corporate Strategy**

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>OR</b>	
<b>This proposal does not link to the Corporate Strategy but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:</b>	

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
<u>Title</u> Procurement Improvement Programme Update	<u>Reference</u> 1657	<u>Date</u> 24 May 2010
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:**

### **1. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

1.1 Race and equality impact assessments have been considered in the development of the proposals contained in this report. No impact has been identified.

### **2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:**

2.1 The County Council has a legal obligation under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to consider the impact of all the decisions it makes on the prevention of crime. No impact identified.

### **3. Climate Change:**

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

No impact identified

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

No impact identified