

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Personnel & Management Services Committee - 12 February 2001

REPORT ON: Employee Newsletter

REPORT BY: Director of Personnel and Management Services

REPORT NO.: 62-2001

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

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2 1.1 To make recommendations on the future of the corporate employee newsletter (Feedback).

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:-

- 2.1 Feedback continues to be distributed to all employees on a quarterly basis;
- 2.2 the feasibility of producing an Intranet version be investigated;
- 2.3 the responsibility for editing and producing the newsletter continues to lie with the Personnel and Management Services Department;
- 2.4 the newsletter be 8 pages on recycled stock, in 2 colours.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The cost of implementing the above recommendations will be £1,800 for an issue of 8 pages.
- 3.2 It is estimated that income of approximately £4,000 will continue to be generated through advertising and this will be offset against production costs. All costs will be contained within the Personnel and Management Services Revenue Budget.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The newsletter will be printed on recycled paper and will be used to promote Local Agenda 21 issues.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The newsletter will continue to be used to communicate corporate issues to all employees. It will, therefore, update employees on any equal opportunities issues.

6 BACKGROUND AND PROPOSALS

6.1 Background

6.1.1 A proposal to introduce a bi-monthly corporate newsletter was approved by the Personnel and Management Services Committee on 11 October 1999. The proposal followed the introduction of the Corporate Communications Strategy. This recommended that a newsletter to be distributed to all employees to update them on corporate initiatives and what is happening outwith their workplace. This was to help consistency of communication. It was agreed to review the format and impact of the newsletter after 1 year. The newsletter was given the name Feedback.

6.1.2 A team of correspondents was established to generate regular input to Feedback. This team consisted of representatives from each department and from trade unions and they were tasked with encouraging employees to contribute. Contributions were also sought by means of posters in each department.

6.2 Review

6.2.1 During the first year, 6 issues were produced. There was a high level of contributions from employees allowing each issue to be at least 8 pages long. One issue contained 12 pages. This increased the cost of each issue which originally was budgeted on the basis of 4 pages per issue. The breakdown of contributions per issue was as follows:

Issue 1 - 19 articles	Issue 4 - 31 articles
Issue 2 - 19 articles	Issue 5 - 16 articles
Issue 3 - 22 articles	Issue 6 - 18 articles

6.2.2 Feedback has been used as a vehicle to communicate a number of corporate issues. A standardised format was established to give it a recognisable structure, and to encourage departments to contribute. Regular columns included:-

- Information on new technology within the Council;
- Useful hints on using the computer and the Internet;
- Historical snippets;
- Information on individual and team achievements.

6.2.3 Feedback was budgeted to cost £1,343 for Issue 1 and £1,203 for each subsequent issue. The actual cost of Feedback for the first year was £11,451 in total. Additional costs were incurred because of the greater than anticipated input and the cost of a reader survey. In addition, Feedback was used to update all employees on issues such as Single Status. This would normally have been done by means of employee briefing sheets and the savings from not producing these should be offset against the costs of producing Feedback.

Approximately £4,000 of income was generated through advertising and, when this is offset against production costs, the net cost of producing Feedback was £7,451. The positive reaction from management, employees and trade unions clearly suggests that this represents good value for money and it is proposed that production should continue.

6.3 Evaluation

- 6.3.1 A questionnaire was issued to all staff with Issue 5 to assist in the review of the newsletter. Trade unions were also contacted for their views.
- 6.3.2 85% of respondents wanted the newsletter to continue, although 62% felt that bi-monthly was too often. The majority of respondents felt that a quarterly newsletter was most appropriate. Most of the respondents found the newsletter interesting to read and felt it kept them up-to-date on corporate information and what is happening outwith their departments.
- 6.3.3 Employees were also asked what kind of information they would like to see more of in Feedback. 80% of respondents asked for more information on what other departments are doing. Other suggestions included:-
- Interviews with Directors;
 - Quiz/Crossword;
 - Focus on a department or team;
 - A day in the life of...;
 - Regular comment on the Council's performance.
- 6.3.4 Any negative comments received were mostly regarding the perceived cost of production. The appearance and design gives the impression that it is expensive to produce. However, employees are unaware of the cost of producing Feedback. The paper used is recycled in accordance with Council policy. The nature of the newsletter and the use of photographs dictates that a "better quality" recycled paper is required. This allows photographs and text to be produced cleanly and clearly. Cheaper paper would cause problems in the printing process and would produce an inferior print job.
- 6.3.5 Trade union views were in line with those of employees. Respondents felt that the newsletter was an excellent means of communication. They also felt that the newsletter should continue on a quarterly basis, with more features on what other departments are doing.

6.4 Proposals

- 6.4.1 Feedback should continue to be edited by the Personnel and Management Services Department and designed by the Public Relations Department.
- 6.4.2 The frequency of the newsletter should be reduced to quarterly. This will reduce overall costs. It will be possible to use the Intranet to communicate other employee issues during the period between publication of Feedback and this will be pursued.
- 6.4.3 The perception that Feedback costs a lot of money needs to be addressed. The newsletter could be printed on a lighter stock without compromising the quality of the print. However, this would not make any significant reduction in overall cost. Employees should be made aware that Feedback is being produced in the most economical way. An article will be included in the next issue to make employees more aware of this issue.

6.4.4 The newsletter should continue to address 3 main themes: Management, Working Parties and Employee Input. However, more effort should be made to include information on what other departments do. In each issue of Feedback, there should be an article on a department, team or individual.

6.4.5 The current correspondents group should continue with regular quarterly meetings to review the previous issue and discuss material for the next.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Director of Support Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report, as have the trade unions.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Corporate Communication Strategy Report (August 1999).

8.2 Employee Newsletter Report (October 1999).

9 SIGNATURE

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Date