



COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY PLAN

**LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR WOKING
15 OCTOBER 2002**

KEY ISSUE: The Local Committee needs a Communications and Publicity Plan in order to raise, improve and maintain the profile of Surrey County Council's Woking Local Committee.

SUMMARY: The Woking Local Committee has now been established for six months. Although we have not undertaken any specific market research to establish this and while press coverage appears to be increasing, there is a general feeling that further promotion is required to get our message across and show the public how they can use the Local Committee to achieve what they need.

We have therefore drawn up the following Communications and Publicity Plan for consideration.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to adopt a flexible Communications and Publicity Plan to take account of unpredictable events.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. Surrey County Council introduced Local Committees in April 2002 to put government into the heart of the community. Woking Local Committee demonstrates that the council is trying to meet Woking's special needs, because one size does not fit all.
2. In order for the Committee to be effective and because the development is relatively new, there is a need for a communications and publicity plan to raise the Committee's profile and differentiate it from other local decision-making bodies, such as Woking Borough Council. Members of the public will only call on the Committee's services if they know it is there and what services it can deliver.

OBJECTIVES

3. The objectives of the plan are therefore to:
 - increase the visibility of the Local Committee
 - increase the credibility of the Local Committee
 - encourage local engagement
 - create and maintain the perception that the Local Committee has a vision to make Woking a better and safer place
4. Our main audiences are:
 - Woking residents
 - Woking businesses
 - the media
 - partnership organisations (such as the Borough Council, Parish Councils, Residents' Associations, the police)
 - Surrey County Councillors and officers

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Media

5. It is vital to develop and maintain a good and interactive relationship with the local press and radio. Much of this will be done by the Local Media Adviser, but it is important that Committee Members also present a positive image of the Committee in their dealings with the media.
6. Though to a certain extent the plan can be linked to the Local Committee's Forward Plan, the nature of the Committee's work means that press activity will be ad hoc or reactive to specific events and enquiries, therefore the plan must be flexible. However, it should specifically include:
 - a press release issued three weeks prior to each Committee Meeting highlighting the most important and interesting items on the agenda and inviting members of the public to attend. This can also remind

them of the possibility of posing a question in advance and explain how to do so.

- media contact following each Committee Meeting focussing on the most newsworthy items and positive outcomes
 - a rolling programme of press contact in between meetings to keep the Committee in the public eye, for example by following up decisions taken by the Committee and highlighting their successful outcomes
 - proactive work to highlight the work of the Local Transportation Group and other Surrey County Council local services in conjunction with the Communications Team
 - monitoring the local press for relevant stories and letters to the editor which may require a response
 - regular communication between the Local Media Adviser and members of the local press to monitor the interest, appropriateness and timeliness of the material we are providing including background information
 - regular radio features/interviews about the work of the Local Committee in general and specific events in particular.
7. Our aim is for one message to appear somewhere in the media each week, while at the same time taking care not to inundate the press with unnewsworthy or irrelevant information. The best opportunity provided for positive publicity and one upon which we will focus much time and effort will be the Members' allocations, which can be highlighted at the time they are approved by the Committee and then provide a series of excellent human interest stories. These features will emphasise the very local essence of the Committee's work and usually generate very good photo opportunities.
8. Because there is no guarantee of a press release being used, pre-meeting publicity is uncertain, especially if there are no particularly exciting or controversial items on the agenda. We are therefore also considering paid-for advertising prior to each Committee Meeting to guarantee its appearance in the press. However, it will be necessary for the success of this to be monitored (mainly by an increase in the number of people attending) to justify the cost involved.

Promotional materials

9. The following materials will also be available to promote the Committee's work:
- a regular newsletter (audiences to be confirmed but to include residents, the business community and partners), to be produced quarterly in electronic form but also to be available in hard copy for those without easy electronic access
 - a general leaflet outlining the role and membership of the Local Committee (currently in production and to be available shortly)
 - a generic poster for publicising Committee Meetings and other events
 - a local web page on the Surrey County Council website, currently in existence but to be extensively developed to incorporate topical stories and the facility to receive feedback

10. We will also be investigating the extent to which local buildings and noticeboards in the borough can be used for publicity activity.

Public engagement

11. Members are being asked to consider the successfulness of our engagement with the public and what means we might use to improve it. For the following suggestions the buy-in of Members and officers is necessary and some budgetary implications may be involved.

12. Possible ways of improving our communications with the public are:

- "Meet your Local Committee" evenings
- piggy backing on other meetings/events such as Fire Station Open Days
- issue-based evenings
- liaison with traders' associations/business forums etc
- Councillors' surgeries
- Councillors speaking to local groups
- consideration of standing orders to allow more public participation
- consideration of moving the Committee venues around the borough to go to the people rather than expecting them to come to us.

13. This plan covers only the current financial year, but the spring and summer months afford excellent opportunities to get closer to the public in a less formal way by participation in carnivals, summer fetes and similar events. We will be putting together a promotional display package that can be produced quickly and easily for this type of event and will be injecting fun into our presentation, for example with competitions, balloons and possibly wine tastings (and even the possibility of dressing up!).

Monitoring success

14. We will be monitoring the success of our plan by:

- media monitoring (press and radio) focussing on **positive** messages
- attendance levels at meetings, both by the public and the press
- face-to-face encounters with the public
- good interactive relationships with the media
- possibly market research, but this is very dependent on available budget

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:	None
