

STAFF REPORT

TO: Chair & Members, Communications Subcommittee

FROM: Communications Adviser

REFERENCE: C797

SUBJECT: **Communications Report – July 2010 – RFN10-07-01**

The contract for communications services has been signed between the Council and Dry Crust Communications. It is for a period of two years with a right of renewal for a further year. As the first contract from an open tendering process the Council has taken the opportunity to introduce comprehensive performance measures. The performance measures have two purposes:

- a) to ensure the efficacy of the communication services provided; and
- b) to provide a transparent means of informing the decision to take up or offer the right of renewal.

The contract identified a number of initiatives that needed to be put in place which now commence. Key within, the relationship is the development of the Council Communications Strategy. The Strategy, provided in draft form within the tender process, will be brought back to the Subcommittee for ratification.

As elements of the Strategy, a number of related policies will be reviewed or created as the needs warrant. Included in these are policies related to media relationships, events and advertising.

A related issue is the management of the interaction between Council staff and Dry Crust. In an effort to fully identify and quantify the costs associated with projects and the communications activities supporting them, a new job management system is to be instigated. The system will be introduced to the Subcommittee when finalised.

The new year's programme will also include a review of Newline. Comprehensive in its scope the review will include the editorial policy, the content selection, its relationship with the communities it serves, the balance between 'information and entertainment', delivery methods, design and appropriateness of the concept and cost. This review will also examine the communications relationship the Council shares with the District's community associations and community boards. In discussing other subjects with the former groups a number of opportunities for sharing of information and using each other's communications vehicles have been uncovered. These will be followed up during the review to identify cost effective means of communication with all residents within the District.

Concurrently Dry Crust staff and I will be interviewing the second and third tier managers to develop a work programme communicating the key projects to be delivered by Council over the coming year. Through this process we will identify the key messages we need to deliver and a programme for putting out these messages.

Interviews for the NRB Communitrak Residents Survey were carried out in June. The Communitrak Field Manager has advised interviewing is completed with no issues with the process reported. Over 400 questionnaires were completed through telephone surveys, with the data currently being processed. Of notable interest to this Subcommittee will be the results concerning sources of Council information, i.e. Newsline. The results of the survey will provide valuable information to the Communications Strategy and inform the internal communications strategy and tactics.

I am currently working with a few other Council staff on the development of an internal communications strategy. There are a number of initiatives being developed to support the Council's external brand and reputation. The strategy will be reported to the Subcommittee when it has been developed.

June has been a busy time for Council in terms of media communication. A number of releases have gone out around the Annual Plan outcomes, rates changes and the effect of the GST rise. There has been ward specific news on the Mapua/Ruby Bay draft planning changes, on the Motueka water supply and a number of general releases. All of these news stories have been picked up by the relevant papers generating a considerable number of column inches.

Much production time in June and July has been concentrated on the finalisation of the Annual Plan. An article on the Annual Plan will be included in the 9 July Newsline.

June was a busy month for publications with Newsline, Boredom Buster and Jam all being published. The format for Jam is being investigated in light of the fact that youth audiences are increasingly more comfortable with/engaged by digital media. Dry Crust is currently investigating how Jam could be presented digitally and will report back in July. The proposal will look to link in a digital version of Jam using Dry Crusts Buzzit 2.0 platform and a Facebook site enabling readers to become part of an on-line community that actively helps to create and critique content as well as read it. The proposal will also look at the cost savings that can be made by taking the publication on-line.

Dry Crust is currently working hard on getting Council's many and varied brochures and forms into a format that is suitable for loading to Council's new website. The deadline for this work is mid July 2010.

As an adjunct, but also supporting the needs of the Tasman District, I have been seconded onto a national communications team to devise a strategy to explain the role and value delivered by Regional and Unitary Councils as part of the Local Government Sector. The draft strategy will be delivered shortly to Chairs/Mayors and CEO's of relevant Councils.

Chris Choat
Communications Adviser