

**COLOUR PUBLICATIONS  
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**REVIEW OF COLOUR PUBLICATIONS**

**AND**

**THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW OF THEIR  
PRODUCTION**

**DECEMBER 2006**

## **REPORT FROM:**

### **THE COLOUR PUBLICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

#### **Forward**

I am pleased to present for the Board's consideration the report from the Colour Publications Task and Finish Group.

This topic emerged following consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as to potential items for Scrutiny during the Municipal Year 2006/07. The rationale for the Review was that concern had been expressed that many external and internal documents were produced in full colour and this need was questioned and whether adequate corporate control was being exercised over their production. The Review was, therefore, an opportunity to consider whether our present practices were the most appropriate and economic and also an opportunity to improve upon corporate policing of printed material.

Given these objectives, I feel that the Task and Finish Group has successfully undertaken its task and has arrived at several recommendations for your consideration.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Task and Finish Group, Councillors Hedley and Hendry for their contribution and the Officers who supported the work of the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor J W Potts  
Chairman  
Colour Publications Task and Finish Group.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting in April 2006, had a debate as to those items that should be included in its provisional work programme for the Municipal Year 2006/07. One of the topics identified was “The publication by the Council of “glossy” information brochures and publicity material”.
- 1.2 In June 2006 following the election of Councillors and the appointment to the Council’s various Boards and Committees, the Board reconsidered its provisional work plan and, as a result, it reconfirmed the item around “glossy” publications.
- 1.3 At its meeting in July 2006, the Board considered a Scrutiny Review Scoping document for the topic and it was decided that the Review would be best dealt with by a Task and Finish Group and Councillors Hedley, Hendry and Potts were appointed to serve on the Task and Finish Group. A copy of the Scoping document is attached to this report at Appendix A.
- 1.4 The Board agreed that the concern expressed over the extent of the use of full colour in producing both external and internal documents was a sound rationale for review, together with the need to ensure that there was adequate corporate control exercised over their production. Following on from this, consideration as to whether our present practices were the most appropriate and economic and whether it was possible to improve upon the corporate policing of printed material, were set as the Review’s purpose and objectives.
- 1.5 Potential indicators of success for the Review was seen as a reduction in costs of printed material and the introduction of greater corporate control.

## **2. Evidence Gathering**

### Initial Meeting of the Task and Finish Group

- 2.1 The initial meeting of the Colour Publications Task and Finish Group took place on Tuesday 3 October 2006, the initial item of business was the election of a Chairman for the Task and Finish Group and Councillor J W Potts was duly elected. Minutes of that meeting are attached at Appendix B.

### Consideration of base information

- 2.2 As their base information, the Task and Finish Group received two schedules comparing results of a survey of divisions as to their printing activity for promotional items and secondly a table showing spend on external and internal printing.
- 2.3 It will be apparent from the Minutes that several questions were asked over the appearance of several instances of significant overspending.
- 2.4 The Members also noted that currently there was no template or checklist by which items of print could be judged as being necessary and approved for publication. It had, however been discussed in the context of performance planning and it was intended that a form of template be included in the performance planning framework which would ensure that a discipline was placed on service managers in planning their print requirements over the coming months.
- 2.5 Members did suggest that all printing budgets should be stripped from departments, centralised and control exercised by the Communications Division. The head of that section expressed some concern in that whilst a service manager had budget responsibility he/she was likely to exercise some control, whereas if the budget was to be placed elsewhere there was the danger that the divisional demands would

increase significantly. An alternative to this approach in addition to a template mentioned previously was the introduction of an overarching protocol, which would set down in writing several ground rules to producing printed material.

- 2.6 Members commented that additional information was required from the Divisions to supplement the information already derived from the recent survey.

As a result of this initial meeting Members decided that:-

- A template or checklist should be drafted.
- The financial summary should be resubmitted excluding school printing budgets / expenditure.
- The financial statistics should be benchmarked against other similar Councils.
- An overarching protocol to be developed.
- With regard to the printing activity report:-
  - (a) Outstanding information to be chased;
  - (b) Significant differences in the financial report to be challenged;
  - (c) Printed material to be marked as being statutory / necessary / desirable;
  - (d) Solprint unit rates to be supplied;
  - (e) Members to consider at a future date the success of the outcomes of this review; and
  - (f) The next meeting of the Group to be held late November 2006.

#### Meeting of the Task and Finish Group: 28 November 2006

- 2.7 A further meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 28 November 2006 and it received the information referred to in the previous paragraph.
- 2.8 The Group initially considered the re-submitted base information, namely, the updated responses to the printing audit and the summary of budgets and actual spend in 2005/06 on photocopying, advertising, publicity and printing.
- 2.9 It was clear from the data submitted that some staff were coding activity indiscriminately to these budget heads. Officers felt that further work could be done to more clearly define the activities to be charged to these budgets.
- 2.10 From the printing audit some of the entries were questionable as to whether that item was required or whether the outcome could have been achieved in a different way. The Group felt that whilst the survey had proved a useful exercise, it was looking back and there was now a need to look to how promotional material should be handled in the future.
- 2.11 The Head of Financial Operations submitted benchmarking information from other Metropolitan Councils. The most similar Council in terms of size was Dudley and this Council's expenditure on printing activity was considerably less than that Council.
- 2.12 Attached at Appendices C and D are the suggested printing template and draft Protocol.
- 2.13 The purpose behind the template was to achieve, through the completion of the document by all wishing to produce print, a Council-wide plan of the publications and

other printed materials the Council is going to be producing in the year ahead. This would help in providing value for money, make it possible to join up publications aimed at the same audiences and encourage officers to think ahead about how important issues should be communicated to local people and stakeholders.

- 2.14 Members appreciated the value of this document, although following discussion it was felt that the categories of printed material covered should be extended to include documents promoting strategies.
- 2.15 With regard to the draft Publications Protocol, this is intended to provide a framework for the production of publications, printed materials and promotional items.
- 2.16 The framework considers the purpose of publications, the need to exploit existing communication channels, the need to target your audience, the use of alternative formats, the use of the "Get it Write" standards and training, the need for all publications to be signed off by the Communications Division prior to printing.
- 2.17 The Group referred to the recently introduced practice of having preferred printers. Members were reminded of the fact that the Council had three nominated printers, so all externally printed material should be subject to competitive quotations made of these three companies, (there were a number of exceptions where it could be shown that by staying with an existing supplier was delivering value for money). This had the added advantage in that the three companies concerned were familiar with the Council's style and logo, which helped police these issues.
- 2.18 The Group strongly supported the approach of using a limited number of nominated printers and it was felt that this mechanism alone should achieve value for money.
- 2.19 The Group felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board should receive a report on the benefits of the approach, six months after operation, ie February 2007.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That the introduction of the printing template and guidance as appears at Appendix C be supported subject to the guidance notes being amended to include strategic documents in the list of those covered by the template;
- (ii) That the form of Protocol as drafted at Appendix D be supported; and
- (iii) The use of nominated printers be endorsed and the outcomes of this be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Management Board after six months of operation, i.e. February 2007.

Scrutiny Review Scoping Template

<b>Review Topic</b> (Name of Review)	Review of printed documents produced in full colour		
<b>Task &amp; Finish Group Members</b> (Councillors involved)	Cllrs Hedley, Hendry and Potts		
<b>Officer Support</b> (Principal Witness and Scrutiny Officer)	Roy Eaton, Senior Scrutiny Officer Julie Collison, Head of Communications Sam Gilbert, Head of Financial Operations		
<b>Rationale</b> (Key issues and/or reason for doing the review)	Concern expressed that full colour used in producing many external and internal documents and whether adequate corporate control was exercised over their production		
<b>Purpose/Objectives of the Review</b> (What the review should achieve)	Consideration as to whether our present practices are the most appropriate and economic. Improve upon corporate policing of printed material		
<b>Indicators of Success</b> (Desired outcomes - what should change as a result)	Potential reduction in costs Greater corporate control over printed material		
<b>Methodology/Approach</b> (What types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence)	Oral evidence Written reports Research of other authorities		
<b>Witnesses/experts</b> (who to see and when)	Head of Communications Finance Officer Two major print producers Communications Officer from another authority		
<b>Sources of Evidence</b> (what is required and where will it come from)	Policy issues – Head of Communications Audit of printed material – Senior Scrutiny Officer Sample of printing cost – Finance Officer Comparison with other authorities – Senior Scrutiny Officer		
<b>Site Visits</b> (Where and when)	None identified		
<b>Evidence Sources for Views of Stakeholders</b> (Consultation/workshops/focus groups/public meetings)	Through the task and finish group		
<b>Resource Requirements</b> (Person days, expenditure)			
<b>Barriers/Dangers/Risks</b> (Potential Pitfalls and weaknesses)	Lack of information from Directorates/Divisions		
<b>Projected start date</b>	6 July 2006	<b>Draft Report due</b>	December 2006
<b>Meeting Frequency</b>	Bi- monthly	<b>Projected completion date</b>	January 2007

**COLOUR PUBLICATIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP –  
Tuesday, 3rd October, 2006**

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Present: Councillors I Hedley, H Hendry and J W Potts

Officers Present:

Samantha Gilbert - Head of Financial Operations  
Julie Collison - Head of Communications  
Roy Eaton - Senior Scrutiny Officer

**1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received

**2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED**

Cllr J W Potts be elected Chairman of the Task & Finish Group.

**3. CONSIDERATION OF BASE INFORMATION**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer submitted two schedules of base information. Firstly, the results from a survey of departments as to their printing activity for promotional items and secondly, a table showing spend on external and internal printing. An additional sheet showing the printing activity of Financial Operations was circulated at the meeting.

A question was asked on financial controls in that there appeared to several instances of significant overspends. The Head of Financial Operations explained that budget holders are responsible for their budgets as a whole so there could be underspends in other areas to compensate for these overspends.

In response to a question as to whether there was any co-ordination of printing requirements, the Head of Communications stated that the decision on the requirement for print is taken by the budget holder however the document should pass through the Communications unit before it is printed. At this stage the question may be posed as to why a document is required or advice offered as to its format or style. Currently, no template or checklist existed by which items of print could be judged. This had however been discussed in the context of Performance Planning and it was hoped that a form of template would be included in the Performance Planning Framework which will ensure that a discipline is placed on Service Managers in planning their print requirements over the coming months.

With regard to the financial summary Members asked that school printing budgets/expenditure be stripped out of the table in view of the devolved budget status for schools.

Under questioning, Officers commented that they had no idea whether the total sums spent on printing were realistic for this type and size of organisation. It was suggested

that these figures should be benchmarked against other similar Councils.

A Member suggested that all printing budgets should be stripped from departments, centralised and controlled exercised by the Communications Unit. The Head of Communications expressed some concern with this in that whilst a Service Manager had budget responsibility, he/she is likely to exercise some control, whereas if the budget was to be placed elsewhere there is the danger that departmental demands would increase significantly. She continued that alternative to this type of centralised control and in addition to the template mentioned earlier, an overarching protocol could be developed which would set down in writing several ground rules to producing printed material.

Officers also referred to the fact that training was now offered to staff on induction and a specific course giving good practice guidance on producing printed material.

Officers also referred to the recently established printing procurement contract through which all external printing should be going through three nominated printers. In the fullness of time, reports from those printers could be compared to financial records offering a further management check.

Some concern was expressed against specific printing jobs referred to on the schedule. Whilst generally Members agreed that the consideration of this issue should remain at the strategic level, it was felt that those officers who had not responded to the original request for information should be chased, significant difference between the activity report and financial report should be challenged and responders should be asked to categorise the printed material as being Statutory/ Necessary / Desirable. A Member also asked that the unit rates used by Solprint be supplied.

A Member commented that based on the information submitted thus far he was of the opinion that money was being wasted. Budget holders need to prove to his satisfaction that the budgeted sums for printing are being used wisely.

A comment was made that following the implementation of outcomes from this review, it would be desirable for Members to consider how successful the changes had been.

Members indicated that they would like to hold a further meeting at the end of November 2006 with a view to any recommendations being considered by OSMB on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and the cabinet Member on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

#### **RESOLVED**

- i) A template or checklist be drafted;
- ii) The financial summary be resubmitted excluding school printing budgets/expenditure;
- iii) The financial statistics be benchmarked against other similar Councils;
- iv) An overarching protocol to be developed;
- v) With regard to the activity report;

- a) outstanding information to be chased
  - b) significant differences with the financial report to be challenged
  - c) printed material to be marked as being Statutory/ Necessary/  
Desirable
  - d) Solprint unit rates to be supplied;
- vi) Members to consider the success of the outcomes of this review; and
- vii) The next meeting of the Group to be held late November 2006.

**Publications, Printed Materials and Promotional Items**

Description of the publications, printed materials and promotional items you are planning to produce (please include the purpose of the publication (A-E) – see notes below*)? Include both internal and external publications.	The audience and the methods you will use to ensure you reach them.	Quantity	Cost (please estimate)	Lead person

\* Purpose:

- A: There is a statutory duty to produce this
- B: To explain that something has changed
- C: To tell people about something new (including for example temporary works)
- D: To get people's views
- E: To meet a business need: e.g. to reach a new audience; to maintain public confidence; to make sure people can access services

## Guidance notes on Publications, Printed Materials and Promotional Items

It is very important that we have a Council-wide plan of the publications and other printed materials we are going to be producing in the year ahead. This will help us identify if we are providing value for money, whether we are able to join up publications aimed at the same audiences, and encourage us to think ahead about how we are going to communicate important issues to local people and our stakeholders.

You need to provide the following information:

**1. A description of what you are planning to produce.**

Please give the title of the document if known, but more importantly explain its purpose: what will it be about and why is it necessary to produce it?

Please use the following categories:

A: There is a statutory duty to produce this

B: To explain that something has changed

C: To tell people about something new (including for example temporary works)

D: To get people's views

E: To meet a business need: e.g. to reach a new audience; to maintain public confidence; to make sure people can access services

Your publication etc may fall into more than one category.

**2. The audience and how you will ensure you reach them.**

State who the publication etc is for and how you intend to make it available to people. Explain distribution methods.

**3. How many copies you will be producing.**

**4. Cost**

Even though you may not know the exact cost at this stage, you must give an estimate of how much this is going to cost. Please also state whether this is grant funded.

**5. Lead person**

Give the name of the person who will be managing the production of the publication, printed materials or promotional item .

### What does this cover?

Please include the following:

- Leaflets and brochures
- Posters
- Magazines and newsletters
- Letters for a mass audience
- Exhibition materials
- Newspaper adverts or wrap arounds
- Give aways, e.g. pens
- Book marks

This list is not exhaustive. Please include anything which you are planning on producing for large groups of people, so that we have the best possible picture of how we are communicating.

## Publications Protocol (draft)

Solihull Council's Communications Strategy, A Strong Voice for Solihull, seeks to address:

- Communications with local people – to increase awareness, interest and engagement.
- Communications with local organisations – to reflect a transparent willingness to work in partnership for the common good.
- Communications within the Council – to harness the energies of staff and Members.

One of the key ways we do this is through the written word, in particular through the production of leaflets, brochures, newsletters and magazines, questionnaires and reports.

This protocol sets out the framework for the production of **Publications, Printed Materials and Promotional Items** (all these terms are covered by the term 'publications' throughout this protocol).

The protocol covers:

1. The purpose of publications
2. Exploiting existing communications channels
3. Targeting audiences
4. Alternative formats
5. Get it Write standards
6. Sign off

### 1 **We will be clear about the purpose**

We will follow the discipline of thinking through **why** we need to communicate, **what** the message is that we need to convey, **who** we need to communicate with and **how** we will do this. It is the final stage of this process, the how, that determines the method we will use to communicate.

**Why we need to communicate.** All our publications will fall into one or more of the following categories:

- A: There is a statutory duty
- B: To explain that something has changed
- C: To tell people about something new (including for example temporary works)
- D: To get people's views\*
- E: To meet a business need: e.g. to reach a new audience; to maintain public confidence; to make sure people can access services.

\*Where we are undertaking consultation, we will follow the Council's consultation protocol and statement of required practice

### 2 **We will exploit existing communication channels**

We will use existing communication channels wherever they meet our and the audience's needs. These may be Council managed, for example, the staff and residents' magazines and the Council's website; or they may be managed by partner agencies, for example, the GP newsletter or a Parish magazine.

**3 We will target audiences in the most cost-effective and appropriate way**

We will be clear about who the audiences for our publications are, taking into account:

- where they are
- their level of knowledge
- abilities and disabilities
- age
- cultural issues

For the general public we will place our publications primarily in Council and partner public buildings to avoid distribution costs. Where we incur costs for distribution we will make sure that we are using the most cost-effective methods, suitable for the audience we are trying to reach.

When we are producing publications in 'draft' in order to seek people's views (for example, draft strategies) they will be produced in the most cost effective way, avoiding design costs by producing them as 'Word' documents.

If publications are for a limited, specialist audience, such as a Government body, they will not incur design costs but will be produced as 'Word' documents.

**4 We will provide alternative formats**

Our publications will be made available in a format that ensures the reader can access the information. This may be in the form of Braille, tape, large print, or through translation or interpretation for people who cannot read English.

**5 We will follow standards for written communication**

Our standards are set out in 'Get it Write: a guide to producing written information in Solihull Council', available to all staff through the Intranet. All staff who produce publications as part of their role will attend Get it Write training.

**6 All publications will be agreed with and signed off by the Communications Division prior to printing.**