

## DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
CORPORATE SERVICES	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	13 SEPTEMBER 2021	4
<b>UNFUNDED REVENUE BUDGET INCREASE - COMMUNICATIONS, MARKETING &amp; PUBLIC RELATIONS RESOURCE</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

### SUMMARY

The report sets out the rationale for the provision of additional resources in the communications service so that it meets the demands of modern-day public sector requirements. Communications has undergone significant change over the last few years which has been accelerated by the pandemic, the dominance of digital and social media has transformed demand, expectation, and engagement. The range of skill sets, knowledge and experience required to deliver an effective and holistic communications service that accommodates the diverse functions delivered by the local authority is extensive. Several factors are driving the need to increase the communication resource which include:

- A service fit for purpose to meet the requirements of a 21<sup>st</sup> century council.
- Meet the expectations and requirements of all stakeholders.
- A pro-active service that informs and enhances the reputation of the community.
- Delivers a presence across all forms of media – traditional print to social media.
- Includes the range of skills, knowledge, and experience to resource the team.
- Resource for appropriate level marketing, promotion, and branding.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council be requested to approve an unfunded revenue budget increase of £54,084 per annum (full year costs – with part year costs for the current year pro-rata depending upon the recruitment dates) to finance the two new corporate support posts of Marketing & Social Media Officer and Press & Media Officer
2. That Council be requested to approve an unfunded budget increase of £15,000 per annum from 2021-22 onwards for the provision of additional communication specialist services including photography, videography, social media market segmentation targeting.

### SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

None

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Economy – To create a vibrant and healthy economy	✓
Environment – To deliver services customers expect	✓
Efficiency – By spending money in the most efficient way	✓
Tourism – To create a great place to live and visit	✓

## REPORT

1. The present communication resource has been in place for several years, during which time the council and the demands on communications have changed and increased significantly. The need to commission significant additional external resource has been evident for some time with circa £180,000 spent on additional communications, marketing, and media related activity during the pandemic, as well as the secondment of internal employees to keep pace with demand. The limited resource at Fylde has been highlighted by the pandemic and changes in the diverse platforms through which communication is delivered and consumed. Whilst numerous new digital platforms have emerged the traditional means of engagement have been retained. The local authority cannot choose to operate online only, the needs of every citizen and stakeholder must be met.
2. Analysis of similar district authorities to Fylde in Lancashire revealed that there is an average of 3.5 full time equivalent posts dedicated to communication activities such as online content, press, social media, branding, website / intranet, public relations, promotions, advertising, print support, digital media, and marketing. Fylde has one dedicated post with undefined 'as and when' support from other posts in the corporate team and ICT. Any additional support is from well-intended colleagues whose primary skill, knowledge and experience is not communications.
3. The service requires a diverse set of skill, knowledge and experience that is not available in a single post with the demand over 7 days a week 365 days a year making it impossible to be covered by a single dedicated post. The internal communication demand alone can accommodate a full-time position, most of which is currently covered by supporting resource from the well-intended colleagues.

### **The Current Corporate Team (including Communications)**

4. The corporate team currently has three full time posts; the communications role; the corporate policy & support role; and a post that provides supports to both functions though not formally qualified in either area, essentially providing 1.5 full time equivalent to each area of responsibility. The corporate policy and support role covers the following responsibilities and activities that fully accommodate the 1.5 full time resource:
  - Advice, support and development of all corporate policy and procedures
  - Client function for HR, payroll and health and safety – link between employees and provider
  - Performance management systems, analysis, and reporting (including Corporate Plan action monitoring and support)
  - Performance management framework including appraisals and benchmarking
  - Corporate engagement, research, data provision and consultation
  - Employee training and development administration including iPool modules – to ensure employees across the organisation are compliant with statutory requirements in areas ranging from health and safety to GDPR and infection control
  - Process re-engineering, VFM (Value for Money) and service reviews to ensure that historical procedures and practices across service areas are regularly reviewed and streamlined to reduce inefficiencies and maximise efficiency i.e. time lean and self-sufficient service models
  - Liaising with external auditors to ensure that the Council achieves a sound VFM assessment in its use of resources
  - Corporate project support particularly in change management and continuous improvement behaviour
  - Organisational development, culture, and customer research (including internal customer)
  - Co-ordinate and administer apprentice levy and apprenticeship support arrangements across the organisation
  - Corporate liaison with unions and employee relations
  - Management and implementation of Job Evaluation

- Corporate audit, risk management and freedom of information support
  - Workforce and succession planning advice and support
  - Support to senior management on projects, strategy development and policy work
  - Health & safety workplan advice, support, and monitoring
  - Monitor and evaluate all corporate performance e.g. absence rates; FOI's; H&S reports
5. It is essential that the level of corporate policy and support resource is retained to deliver the functions to ensure the organisation is compliant with statutory requirements as well as providing valuable support across the council to all service areas, managers, partners, and external stakeholders. Post pandemic these activities will need to be delivered by the resource that has been supporting communications.

#### **Additional Resource**

6. The communication resource is responsible for every aspect of internal and external communication which includes support, advice, monitoring, evaluation, and implementation of; marketing; public relations; press coverage, media responses, social media; branding; digital media; web & intranet content; and reputation management. The communication function has diversified requiring more and different specialisms from the traditional penned press release to immediate response digital media at any time of day. Prior to the COVID pandemic and before a new approach being taken to the communication function the 1.5 full time resource operated to full capacity with many specialist assignments having to be commissioned from external providers. The resource was never required or recruited to deliver marketing or digital media which have become more prevalent as primary platforms for many stakeholders.
7. The additional resource requirement is in two communication specialisms; social media, and marketing working alongside the existing postholders with shared knowledge and responsibility for generic tasks such as media enquiries; publishing material; proof reading; branding; etc. to allow for appropriate cover for absence (holiday and sickness) and diverting resource to meet a spike in demand for a particular activity e.g. a dedicated campaign. The limited resource currently in place does not allow for adequate, if any, cover when the full-time post is absent for any reason. The additional resource will also increase the ability of the team to respond out of 'normal working hours' which has become more and more necessary as society changes customer expectation and to stay ahead of modern media.

#### **Impact on current resource**

8. The current Communications Officer will be the senior post responsible for strategic planning, resource allocation, and the development and improvement of the service, as well as the lead liaison with senior officers, external partners, and elected members with accountability for the performance of the team. The existing resource is insufficient to cover both the increased demand as well as the increased diversity, some of the new requirements are not specialisms they possess (marketing / digital media / graphic design) and therefore cannot be delivered to the standard required. The additional resource will deliver marketing, digital design etc. where specialist skills are required but do not currently exist, it will also reduce the volume of work pressure on existing employees to allow the capacity to plan work loads through proper resource allocation, the right person with the right skill set doing the job.
9. A full time Marketing & Social Media Officer will be responsible for marketing of commercial facilities, events, the council, local initiatives (i.e. In Bloom) and other opportunities to a range of stakeholders across all media channels. Although the focus will be on marketing activity, the role will provide support and resilience to the whole of the council's communication activities.
10. A full time Press & Media Officer will be responsible for providing dynamic and creative press as well as managing communication across the Fylde brand. They will ensure the appropriate and consistent delivery of core messages, provide comments to press, manage internal stakeholders, and create content which is distributed across all media channels.

#### **Financial Implications**

11. The full-year unfunded revenue cost of the additional posts that the committee is asked to consider is outlined below:

- Press & Media Officer (Scale 5/6)\* £29,426 (£23,541 salary plus 25% on costs top of scale)
- Marketing & Social Media (Scale 3)\* £24,622 (£19,698 salary plus 25% on costs top of scale)

Total unfunded revenue budget request for both posts = **£54,048 per annum**

\*posts are subject to evaluation and moderation – the job description will include the requirement to exercise flexibility and operate weekend and out of hours if / when required under the time off in lieu policy.

Costs in 2021-22 will be pro-rata depending on the recruitment dates to the newly established posts.

#### Additional revenue budget requirement

12. There has recently been the need to produce video footage and other digital based products for use in marketing, promotion, and general communication across social media. The demand for this type of content significantly increased during the COVID pandemic and recovery period. To produce an appropriate professional quality product to represent the council it will be necessary to procure external partners who have the equipment and facilities to produce video and high-end media. These products used during the pandemic hit a large volume of the target audience and enhanced confidence in the council. It is proposed that an annual revenue budget of **£15,000** is included for the team to procure specialist support for high end campaigns.

13. The total annual unfunded revenue increase for the additional posts and the support budget that the committee are asked to approve is **£69,084 per annum**, with 2021-22 staffing costs being pro-rata depending upon the recruitment dates.

#### Selection Process

14. The changes proposed are new additions to the establishment with no adverse impact on existing posts or postholder and no employee at risk. The council's established recruitment and selection procedures will be implemented. The focus on competencies in the selection procedure is consistent with all recruitment and selection in the authority. The competencies are consistent with the behaviour required to support the culture necessary to sustain a high level of performance.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The report recommends that Council approve a recurring unfunded revenue budget increase of £69,084 per annum in a full year (with current year staffing costs being pro-rata depending upon the recruitment dates) in order to finance the additional resources set out in the report. If approved, the next update of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy will be updated to reflect these additional costs.
Legal	There are no legal implications because of this report
Community Safety	There are no community safety implications because of this report
Human Rights and Equalities	There are no human rights or equality implications because of this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	There are no sustainability or environmental impact implications because of this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	There are no health and safety or risk management implications because of this report

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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
None		

