

WIRRAL COUNCIL

EMPLOYMENT AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

19 NOVEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

PRESS & PUBLIC RELATIONS – FINANCE DEPARTMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report as approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 November 2007 recommends the creation of the post of press and public relations officer with specific responsibility for issues relating to the Finance Department.
- 1.2 It has been agreed to fund this post from two sources: 50% contribution from the Pension Fund and 50% from the Insurance Fund, both areas of activity that will benefit significantly from appropriate media management.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Cabinet received a report on 16 August 2007 regarding the actuarial review of the Insurance Fund. In it I stated that further development of the insurance and risk management strategies of the Authority would be enhanced by increased public relations support. I also stated that the Pensions Committee on 2 July 2007 had identified funding for 50% of this post from the Pension Fund. I went on to recommend that the balance of 50%, up to a maximum of £16,800 could be found from the Insurance Fund.

3. WORK OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

- 3.1 The proposal is to establish a dedicated press and public relations officer for the Finance Department in line with all other Departments of the Council. The rationale for the proposal is:-

- (i) Strategic communications -
 - (a) Each department except Finance has a communications strategy feeding into Corporate Services. Given that the Finance Department is responsible for the following high-profile customer-facing functions, the lack of a dedicated press officer is a significant shortfall:
 - Council Tax
 - Customer Services
 - One Stop Shops
 - Call Centre
 - Housing and Council Tax Benefits

- Benefits Counter Fraud
- Merseyside Pension Fund
- Business Rates
- Insurance Counter Fraud
- Freedom of Information/Data Protection

(b) A dedicated press officer for the Finance Department would be able to effectively reflect improvements in customer service and ensure that the Department, and Wirral Council, is seen as delivering good value for money overall.

(ii) Media management and media relations –

(a) A dedicated press officer would enable the Finance Department to increase positive media activity and ensure the Department is seen to be giving value for money.

(b) Finance is at the core of many challenging media management enquiries and there is also the annual influx of inquiries about Council Tax. A need has also been identified to publicise action being taken around enforcement, for example Housing Benefit Fraud and Insurance Fraud.

(iii) Publications –

The Finance Department currently produces and distributes a wide range of publications. It is important that these are branded correctly, are of excellent quality and of an appropriate corporate style. A dedicated press officer would ensure appropriate standards are maintained and safeguard resources that may otherwise be invested inappropriately.

(iv) Internal communications –

Finance is a large Department and it is important staff receive clear, regular and appropriate information, about their service areas and the Council as a whole.

(v) Member support -

Where appropriate and requested, press officers can supply information to Members and prepare dedicated Members Briefings. These may focus on particular areas of interest or on issues that have already hit, or are at risk of hitting, the press. There is no dedicated press officer currently undertaking this in Finance.

(vi) Websites and emedia –

A dedicated press officer is needed to take responsibility for the Finance web pages which are some of the most important to our customers, dealing with the issues that are important to residents as outlined above.

(vii) Advertising –

The Finance Department undertakes a range of advertising, from one stop shops to recruitment. A press officer would act as quality controller and co-ordinate all requests for advertising support, avoiding duplication and ensuring a coherent, co-ordinated cost-effective approach.

4. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 In keeping with the overall approach to media management it is proposed that the day to day management and supervision of this post is undertaken by the Head of Marketing in the Corporate Services Department. Accordingly the post holder will be located with the Corporate Communications Team but will liaise with officers of the Finance Department to agree the approach to on going media relations and strategies.

5. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The workload outlined above cannot be undertaken by the existing resources in Corporate Services.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the post is graded at scale PO2 (26,928-29,010) using the Press and Public Relations Officer job description in line with other similar posts within the team.
- 5.3 The salary costs at the top of the grade for a post at PO2 plus on costs = £36,495 and these will be funded by contributions from the Pension Fund and the Insurance Fund.
- 5.4 The reduced contributions to the Insurance Fund of £400,000, which were approved as an efficiency for 2008-09 by the Cabinet on 6 September 2007, assume that this post is created.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATONS

- 6.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report.

9. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are no specific implications for any Member or Ward.

10. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report.

11. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are no specific implications arising from this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None

13. RECOMMENDATION

13.1 That an additional post of Press and Public Relations Officer PO2 (£26,928-29,010) with specific responsibility for the Finance Department be established in the Corporate Services Department.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE