

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report To: Executive – 27 May 2009
Subject: Helping Hands Communications Campaign
Report of: Sara Tomkins, Director of Communication

Summary

The Helping Hands campaign promotes Manchester City Council's response to the current economic recession. Its aim is to connect residents and businesses in the city with advice, information and services which can help them 'weather the storm', as well as encompassing new activity as the Council and partners adapt services and create new ones in response to local needs.

The campaign falls into four broad themes – employment, business, money and debt, your home, whilst also promoting information about free activities and services under the 'free stuff' banner and where possible will share useful tips and success stories from residents and businesses via the website.

Recommendations

To approve the objectives of the campaign.

Wards Affected:

This city-wide campaign covers all wards

Community Strategy Spine	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
Performance of the economy of the region and sub region	Gross value added - keeping businesses well advised and residents in work will support the wider economy Boosting Average incomes - information on developing skills intended to drive activity which ultimately boosts average income, and average resident wages. Overall employment rate and worklessness agenda - Focus on keeping/ getting a job, skills, apprenticeships, support through unemployment to back to work when the job market improves

Reaching full potential in education and employment	The employment strand focuses on keeping/ getting a job, skills, apprenticeships, support through unemployment to back to work when the job market improves, as well as skills and grants available for people wanting to start their own business.
Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect	The employment strand of the campaign encourages proactivity in acquiring skills. One element of the campaign is also designed to boost access to leisure facilities / open spaces / free events and activities that contribute to wider resident wellbeing.
Neighbourhoods of Choice	Overall population / how often people move– keeping businesses well advised and residents in work will support the wider economy, lessening the risk of economic migration driven by jobs outside the city. Home ownership – driving resident towards advice on managing finance and debt, and last resort solutions has potential to minimise repossessions.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

A bid for £160,000 has been made to the Manchester Partnership Innovation Fund, and has been approved.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Media plan
- PR Plan
- Examples of campaign material

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The credit crunch is a global phenomenon, with daily news bulletins chronicling the financial crisis in detail – all things which most individuals can't do anything to change or influence.
- 1.2 The aim of this campaign is to challenge the idea that the scale of what is going on means we're all helpless. There are lots of ways in which everybody could save a little, be more confident that they aren't missing out on what help is available, or improve their own chances of getting through the crunch unscathed. There are also lots of things they could do to make them feel better, including getting something for nothing, and activities which make you happier, fitter, and help you not focus on the things you can't change.
- 1.3 The campaign promotes relevant advice, information and services provided by Manchester City Council and its partners under clearly defined subjects in a very practical way.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Mancunians are famously resilient, as illustrated by the spontaneous chorus of Monty Python's 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' by the gathered crowd when news that the city's Olympic bid had been unsuccessful in 1993, a fact which gained positive coverage at the time and which still features as a 'city fact' on many websites today. This activity hopes to appeal to, and help to practically support, that resilience and can-do city attitude (which in turn was illustrated through the successful Commonwealth Games in 2002). This campaign aims to tap into and support that resilient city characteristic.
- 2.2 Similarly, the city has a legacy of partners working together effectively during times of crisis. This campaign spans a range of partners, and elements such as the Timebank initiative highlight the responsive and innovative way in which businesses and the public sector galvanise activity in times of need.

3.0 Objectives

To make all residents and businesses aware of the help that is available through Manchester City Council and its partners during these difficult times.

- What help is available to them, what they are entitled to, and how they can help themselves.
- Run a local message alongside the national 'real help' initiative.

3.1 Target audiences

All residents of Manchester, including but not exclusively:

- Older People, younger people, struggling families
- Homeowners, first time buyers, renters
- People facing or being made redundant, or already unemployed finding competition for jobs is steeper
- People with mounting debt or getting behind in mortgage or rent payments

- Those who find themselves in new jobless or debt-laden circumstances, who previously would not have sought the state's help
- Manchester businesses under stress – such as house builders with unsold stock or financing issues mid way through projects, businesses failing or about to fail, small businesses struggling with finance, cash flow, bad debt and drop-off of trade

3.2 Key topics

A general 'catch-all' message of help is very broad, so the message is usually focused on one of the following four topics

Jobs and employment

Money and debt

Businesses (mainly small businesses)

Your home

An additional strand of information on the website captures free activities and events, contributing to a sense of wellbeing in financial tough times.

As the campaign develops, some materials are featuring a friendlier, lifestyle element, with handy hints and tips on saving money, and facts and figures how the pennies saved in deferent way can add up to a lot. Also examples from residents and businesses of what they have done to combat the recession or how the services they have used have made a difference.

3.3 Tone of voice

Simple, helpful, enabling, practical and up-beat.

This is a difficult time in many residents lives, we want to help them focus on how it can be better, and how we can all weather the storm.

3.4 Desired outcome

- Raise awareness of advice services, entitlements and benefits available to residents and businesses in Manchester, and create the perception that they are nearby and easy to find
- Raise awareness of knowing who to call and where to go - a clear call to action (microsite website and 'guide', featuring national and regional help lines and web links to council and private services)
- Empower people to help themselves and allow them to feel there is much they can actively do to better their situation
- Enhance the perception that Manchester City Council understands the stresses people are under at this particular time and is proactively helping us all get through it.

4.0 Timebank

This initiative is an innovative partnership between the private sector, the Chamber of Commerce and the Council. It matches top industry experts (e.g Price Waterhouse Cooper, KPMG and Ernst & Young) with local businesses needing advice, and launched as part of 'Helping Hands for Business' on 28 April.

Around 50 people attended the event at Manchester Art Gallery, and the launch attracted positive coverage including the Manchester Evening News business section, Crain's online and print, North West Business Insider, the Municipal Journal and perhaps most notably in the Financial Times. We placed adverts in the Manchester Evening News business section on Thursday 30th and Crains (4th May issue) will also be featuring Timebank prominently in the next edition of Manchester People as part of a helping hands overview and a full page will be in the NW Business Insider's June issue.

The Chamber also sent an e-alert to their 830 Manchester business contacts (7th May) and we have 'free' editorial content in a GMPTE newsletter to businesses planned in the next few months.

Feedback from the Chamber suggests that responses so far have all been from companies likely to qualify for the help which Timebank offers. A number of offers of additional help and advice from companies in Manchester have also been made.

5.0 Campaign overview

The campaign is currently planned to run for one year. The broad plan of activity is as follows:

Stage 1: Awareness building

Activity to date:

Launched Employment strand of campaign with newspaper wrap in North and East Manchester Advertiser and South Manchester Reporter.

Timebank launched to businesses and media 28 April. Website went live, featuring information across campaign and links to information on a host of partner sites. Press advertisement in the Manchester Evening News Business Pages and Crain's support.

Launched Money & Debt with a wrap in the North East Manchester Advertiser and South Manchester Reporter Ins. 21st May

Launched Homes the following week with a full page ad in the North East Manchester Reporter, South Manchester Advertiser and Wythenshawe World, Ins. 28th May.

Young people/ school leavers can be targeted about Jobs and training through Facebook from mid May. Support for this audience will be added to the Helping Hands website.

Stage 2: Inspire - June 2009 onwards

A big month as we move into the second stage. All topics will have been launched the guides will be ready to go out with Manchester People.

PR will play a major part backing up all the media, Success Stories will be used to supporting all topics and we can really start to 'prove' our message and demonstrate 'you can do it too!'

Press advertising will start to use smaller space ads with Outdoor (48 & 6 sheets) can target specific areas where we need to push particular themes.

The website will be more interactive and the call to action will be a simple... look out for your guide and visit the website, with the interactive elements of the site working we can quickly gain new stories as we move into July.

July 2009

A tactical month to reflect / gauge interest on the website/ Manchester advice and the guides, main media support will be press as and when required.

August 2009

Once again a big month with FREE STUFF high on the agenda, schools are off and parents can be targeted through press and 6 sheets (Arndale) the website will really come into its own here, highlighting free things to do in the school holidays.

Mid to the end of August we focus on the Back2School message through supermarket 6 sheets.

Central Library 6 sheets can be used as directional signage to Manchester advice. 48 sheets can be booked for end of August and early September to support the jobs or Money message as the summer comes to an end and everybody realises it is time to start working and saving for Christmas.

5.1 **Media and PR activity**

A note of PR activity supporting the first phase of Helping Hands is attached. The PR campaign is a work in progress and further relevant events/initiatives will be weaved in as they are identified. Phase 2, from July to August, will focus on inspiring people through success stories while Phase 3, which runs up until the new year, will maintain momentum with topical releases tied in with calendar events e.g. the return to school, the pre-Budget statement and Christmas.

The PR campaign will also 'piggyback' on relevant releases issued by partners - for example a paragraph summary of Helping Hands and a link to the website is being included in a news release which University Hospital of South Manchester are issuing about the success of a project they run to help find jobs at Wythenshawe Hospital for workless residents.

5.2 **Internal communications**

Manchester City Council's employees, most of whom live in the city, are seen as important ambassadors for the campaign. To encourage their understanding and ownership of the campaign, broadcasts have kept them updated on high profile media activity, and the intranet offers a chance for them to share ideas and suggestions, whether it's a service or activity which could be part of Helping Hands, a case study of someone turning their life around through seeking advice and information, or simply sharing a credit-crunch tip.

Staff briefings – both written and face-to-face – have also taken place with key groups of customer facing staff. Ward co-ordinators have received a briefing, and ways in which they can help to promote the campaign will be explored in more details at a forthcoming ward co-ordinators' meeting.

5.3 Website

The website is a key tool in this campaign, being a one-stop-shop for Manchester residents - the best single place to go to find sources of advice and information on a huge range of topics related to the campaign themes (of employment, money and debt, Your Home, Free Stuff and Business).

The website also offers interactivity, allowing the capture of requests for help from the Timebank initiative (as well as offers of help). It is planned to develop this to make it more of a community for residents to share information, tips and experiences of getting through the crunch.

Statistics on web use are being monitored and suggest that most users are finding the site by entering the correct web address rather than through search engines (suggesting that advertising / communications / PR activity featuring the web address has led them there). They also suggest that internal communication is driving access to the website by staff, and that featuring it at the top of the homepage of the Council's website is also driving peaks of activity.

6.0 Wider activity

The campaign offered an opportunity to provide an umbrella brand for a variety of disparate activities being carried out by partners and directorates all designed to help people through the credit crunch.

To this end, information was placed on the intranet encouraging staff to come forward with initiatives with they felt may fit in with Helping Hands. Links were also forged through communication officers in services, and with parts of the Council providing business support and services through the Economic Development Unit.

As a result, a variety of activities are now coming under the Helping Hands banner, including:

- The city-wide Benefits Bus
- The North Manchester Information Bus
- North Manchester Jobs Fair
- Selected corporate jobs fairs
- South Manchester Regeneration Information and Advice supermarket events
- Commercial Library 'Beat the Downturn' events

6.1 A joint meeting of the communications team with the Economic Development Unit and a variety of external services and partners who deal with businesses helped to raise awareness of the initiative. Web content capturing all the services which are provided is now being gathered, and further sessions to explore in more detail who the target audience for business support is are planned.

Liaison with partners including Business Link, JobCentre Plus, Manchester Advice and the NHS has helped to gather information on all the relevant services to feature in Helping Hands.

It is also hoped that data held by Business Link may be able to be used to provide extremely targeted communication to businesses showing the early signs of difficulty.

6.2 Our approach to the task

A Weekly task force meets to get intelligence and update each other on areas across the council what it is doing in PR, in the media and on poster sites, on the web and internally.

7. Key Policies and Considerations

(a) Equal Opportunities

The campaign supports equal opportunities by ensuring that information is simple, accessible and available in different formats (print media delivered to homes as on the web). It aims to put vulnerable groups in touch with useful information and services which can help them.

(b) Risk Management

A risk workshop has been held, and a risk log is in development.

(c) Legal Considerations

In compiling information and sources of advice, we are taking care to ensure that the campaign does not involve or imply the direct offering of financial advice. All advice offered is from reputable organisations and local / national authorities in the particular field.