

**JOINT GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY  
& AGMA EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING**

Date: **24th February 2017**

Subject: **Report of the GM Joint Scrutiny Pool's Task and Finish Group on Communications**

Report of: **Tony Lloyd, GM Interim Mayor, Councillor Angeliki Stogia, Chair of the Task & Finish Group and Andrew Lightfoot, Deputy Head of Paid Service**

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

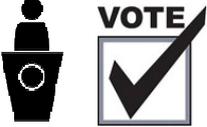
This report sets out the findings of the GM Scrutiny Pool's task and finish group on GMCA communications convened by Cllr Angeliki Stogia (Manchester). These findings have been reviewed, and unanimously adopted by the Scrutiny Pool at their meeting on February 10th 2017. The Pool requested that the report's findings and recommendations should be considered by the GMCA/AGMA Joint meeting on the 24th February.

The report's findings offer valuable insights into the way that the GMCA's work is perceived by internal and external stakeholders where, during this time of rapid change, effective and consistent communication is vital part of GMCA's relationship with our residents. Some of the report's recommendations anticipate activity already being taken forward by the newly convened GM Communications Team. However it is hoped that task and finish group's findings will inform thinking about the development of communications products for elected members and residents and be built into future work planning and decision making about GM communications. It is anticipated that the GM communications team overseen by the GMCA and the deputy head of paid service will ensure that the recommendations are progressed and provide updates back to GM Scrutiny.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The meeting of the Joint GM Combined Authority and AGMA Executive Board are asked to agree and support the following recommendations:

<p><b>1. Leadership of</b></p> <p><b>GMCA</b> <small>GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY</small></p> <p><b>Communications</b></p>	<p>The GMCA should</p> <p>1.1 Review the current leadership arrangements for communications as soon as possible to ensure that the GMCA's lead member for communication (and lead chief executive) have the capacity to effectively oversee and drive:</p> <p>a. the <b>development of the GMCA's high level messaging</b></p> <p>b. the <b>refresh the GMCA's strategic communications plan</b> (draft to be reviewed by Scrutiny Pool in March 2017). The plan should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set out agreed principles of communication including a commitment to foster meaningful participation with a broader group of stakeholders and actively engage in the</li> </ul>
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	<p>co-production of key messages. Thus allowing GM to benefit from engaging with a broader range of stakeholders and groups, some of whom may be overlooked or excluded by conventional methods of consultation and engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have clear objectives and milestones</li> <li>• set out the governance arrangements for communications</li> <li>• include commitment to develop and maintain a forward plan of proactive communications</li> </ul> <p>c. <b>Review the resources (staffing and funding) and skills</b> needed to deliver an expanded GMCA/Mayoral communications function, noting how the new integrated team will approach their dual responsibilities (March 2017)</p>
<p><b>2. Mayoral Elections and beyond</b></p> 	<p>That the GMCA should</p> <p>2.1 Continue to provide Mayoral candidates accurate information about GM's key messages about the GMCA and devolution developed as part of 1.1 (March 2017)</p> <p>2.2 Commission a campaign that focuses on '<b>what devolution can do for you</b>' to harness public interest and provide opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to engage the public in the democratic process;</li> <li>• to dispel myths and misconceptions around devolution;</li> <li>• to bring alive the possibilities for jobs and transport, health and social care.</li> </ul> <p>The campaign should utilise the GMCA's emerging branding strategy and should be concise, highly visual, use plain language and deliver key messages on key policy areas (first products available before start of pre-election period March 2017)</p> <p>2.3 Develop a 'Greater Manchester elects' website with full facts in plain English describing what the Mayor of GM and GMCA/AGMA each can do (as soon as possible).</p> <p>2.4 Provide briefings on the main policy areas of the GMCA's work including local examples to 'bring this work to life' to elected members, staff, residents and media outlets (March 2017).</p> <p>2.5 Develop and agree protocols for communications between GMCA and the Mayor's office (June 2017).</p>
<p><b>3. Member and staff engagement</b></p> 	<p>That the GMCA should</p> <p>3.1 Provide ongoing training and support to enhance member and staff confidence to communicate the devolution process (part of strategic communications plan)</p> <p>3.2 Proactively engage elected members and staff of public services organisations in the development of GMCA's key messages for emerging policies/areas of work and the tailored communications products (key milestones to be set out in communications plan).</p> <p>3.3 Provide clear information to elected members, the public and communities of interest to show how they can provide input into policy-making and engage in the scrutiny/challenge the decision-making process (ongoing - part of recommendations included in 1 and 2 above).</p>

<p><b>4. Measure and describe success</b></p> 	<p>The GMCA's communications team should</p> <p>4.1 Co-produce with local communication teams (as well as TFGM, Fire and Rescue, Health, Police and Crime Unit etc.) a clear statement of what the GMCA communications team and locality communications officers should expect from each other in terms of effectively communicating GMCA messages in the localities, taking into account the recommendations of this task and finish group.</p> <p>4.2 Develop a clear set of metrics to measure the success of the GMCA's communication strategy, building on the results of the Local Government Association survey.</p> <p>4.3 Report back on this work to GMCA scrutiny at regular intervals the first report to be in March 2017</p>
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<b>TRACKING/PROCESS</b>			[
Does this report relate to a Key Decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution or in the process agreed by the AGMA Executive Board		No	
<b>EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN</b>			
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the AGMA Scrutiny Pool on the grounds of urgency?		N/A	
AGMA Commission	TfGMC	Scrutiny Pool	
		10 February 2017	

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. In September 2016 Scrutiny Pool's meeting agreed to establish a task and finish group to investigate the GMCA's approach to communications.
- 1.2. The following members engaged in the communications task and finish group's work:
  - Cllr Cllr Kevin.McKeon (Bolton)
  - Cllr Andrew Morgan (Bolton)
  - Cllr Debbie Newall (Bolton)
  - Cllr Zahra Alijah (Manchester)
  - Cllr Angeliki Stogia (Manchester)
  - Cllr Colin McLaren (Oldham)
  - Cllr Sara Rowbotham (Rochdale)
  - Cllr David Jolley (Salford)
  - Cllr John Walsh (Salford)
  - Cllr John Bell (Tameside)
  - Cllr Pam Dixon (Trafford)
  - Cllr John O'Brien (Wigan)
  - Cllr Pam Stewart (Wigan)

## **2. SCOPE AND REMIT OF THE GMCA COMMUNICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

- 2.1. Public interest in the Combined Authority, its priorities and the role of devolution continues to grow along with a desire for a greater understanding of how this will impact on residents.
- 2.2. The upcoming election campaign of GM's first elected Mayor will give a huge opportunity to engage the public. It is vital that the key messages outlining GM's vision, and the strategy that underpin it, are effectively communicated to enable elected members, residents and the staff of public sector organisations understand the GMCA's work and its relevance to their lives.
- 2.3. The review looked at how GM's ambitions are currently communicated to communities, and, using an asset based approach, sought to understand the challenges and explore ways in which this could be improved?
  - What is the current communication to – elected members, staff, and the public
  - Who communicates?
  - What messages are communicated?
  - Are current communications fit for purpose and how can they be more effective?

2.4. The task and finish group met five times with each meeting structured as an informal discussion focused on the issues set out above.

2.5. Those who provided input into the group's meetings included:

**Internal stakeholders:**

- Donna Hall (Chief Executive of Wigan MBC, and Secretary to the GMCA, who is supporting the GMCA's work on engagement and consultation).
- Andrew Lightfoot (Deputy Head of Paid Service to the GMCA, who has oversight of the GMCA communications function)
- Shelley Wright (Director of Communications and Engagement, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service)
- Members of the GM Communication Leads Meeting (communications professionals from across GM's local authorities, and other public sector agencies including health, fire, police, and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office).

**External stakeholders:**

- Rachel Ward - Campaign Company
- Francesca Gains - Professor of Politics University of Manchester
- Ross Macrae - GMCA but formerly Better Together (working on the Scottish Referendum campaign)
- Beth Perry - Jam and Justice
- Rachael Gibbons - Reclaim Project
- Harriet Andrews - The Politics Project
- Insight team from the Greater London Authority

2.4. This review of the GMCA's current approach to communications provides recommendations which the GM Communications Team may use to inform their work across the GMCA and partner agencies.

**HEADLINE FINDINGS**

3.1. There was remarkable consistency in stakeholders' analysis of the challenges faced in effectively communicating the GMCA's work. This gives the task and finish group confidence that their recommendations, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the challenges identified. This will help GM to better communicate its key messages, which in turn will encourage greater electoral and public engagement and dialogue in its work.

**LEADERSHIP**

3.2. The complexity, breadth and fast-moving nature of the GMCA's work means that delivering straightforward communications products and messages is both essential and challenging. Since the appointment of the interim mayor there have already been some significant improvements on GMCA communications including webcasts of meetings and the publication of meeting agendas and minutes online. The interim mayor has oversight of GMCA communications, but there is no specific leader portfolio with overall responsibility for communications (which was the case until June 2016). Each thematic leader portfolio holder is responsible for communications relating to their policy area, while wider leadership team and the central communications team act to coordinate messages and campaigns. The task and finish group found that the current procedure for both internal and external communications has proved to be inconsistent, disjointed and reactive. Communications would hugely merit from a more streamlined approach where communication issues can be spotted early, dealt with effectively when they arise and a succinct communications programme where proactive positive coverage of key policies is planned in advance.

- 3.3. It is widely acknowledged by internal and external stakeholders that there is more work to do to inform elected members, staff of public sector organisations and residents about the work of the GMCA and devolution. This is supported by the findings of July 2016 Local Government Association funded survey of elected members and staff in public sector organisations across GM. This survey asked respondents about their understanding and views on the GMCA and its work. The survey found that the majority of staff and elected members felt positively about the GMCA, and want to contribute to making a success of the GMCA's work. However, many wanted to be better informed and felt they needed more effective communications products to help with this.
- 3.4. The group recognise and welcome the fact that work is gathering pace to improve the coordination and staffing of the GMCA's communications functions as part of transition arrangements. Whilst the new Mayor will provide a real opportunity to engage the public via a figurehead that will be clearly identified with the GMCA and devolution, the group would like to see a greater focus and a powerful GMCA communications function that has impact in the run up to the election. A more proactive approach is needed, for as one interviewee put it GM needs '*more than a 20<sup>th</sup> century comms strategy for a 21<sup>st</sup> century devolution process*'<sup>1</sup>.

### **MESSAGING AND TONE**

- 3.5. GM messages often do not resonate with people: they are perceived to be complicated and confusing with language used often not being suitably accessible. Sometimes this is because of the technical subtleties of local government processes and the nuances of political debate, but we need to remember that the GMCA and devolution are just enablers, not an end in themselves. Therefore the focus of GM's messaging should be to explain how GMCA and devolution will help drive better outcomes for the people of GM. '*What would it take for citizens of GM to understand and be able to contribute to the success of devolution?*'<sup>2</sup>
- 3.6. The GMCA and devolution are seen by some as a threat, so it is crucial to articulate what devolution is – more decisions taken locally to provide better jobs, housing, transport and social care across Greater Manchester. It is also important to explain how the checks and balances work and how elected members, the public and communities of interest can get involved providing an input to policy making (through scrutiny and by accessing information) and how they can engage with the process as well as challenge decision making..
- 3.7. Given there is considerable variability in people's understanding of the work of the GMCA and devolution we need simpler messages, in plain language about things people can readily identify with. There was a broad consensus from elected members and groups that were consulted as well as communications professionals and officers that to be effective, GM messages needed be tailored and layered. Furthermore, messages need to be made more relevant for districts/localities/neighbourhoods and for specific audiences i.e. those more informed and those who have a poor or no understanding. The GMCA needs to give a higher profile to the human interest side of its work, for instance, what would the five significant things that devolution has done/or could deliver for people locally?
- 3.8. There are some extremely positive things to tell about devolution including a number of health and social care organisations who are seen as 'vanguard' innovative at the fore front– brought about by devolution, but not necessarily connected in people's minds to devolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Action Research Collective *Jam and Justice* December 2016

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## **CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

- 3.9. Recently the GMCA has embarked on a number of consultations: two about the legislation needed to implement the provisions of GM's devolution agreements; a number relating to the GM Spatial Framework; and an open '*conversation*' about GM's future which will be used to inform the writing of the refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy.
- 3.10. Given the challenges faced in understanding the work of the Authority there was consensus from internal and external stakeholders alike that the number and technical nature of these consultations were bewildering, particularly for non-local government professionals. So an unintended consequence of embarking on a consultation that doesn't make sense to ordinary people can actually lead to disengagement and cynicism. GM needs to guard against this by having a more nuanced, strategic and long term approach where consultation is seen as a process of fostering broader and meaningful participation.
- 3.11. One way of addressing this challenge is to tailor a consultation's approach, to make it more relevant to a district, neighbourhood or group, which helps people to identify with GM messages. Experience of previous consultations indicates that this approach increases levels of engagement. The 'piggybacking' of GM messages as part of existing public engagement sessions also provides opportunities to 'drip-feed' GM messages to stakeholders.
- 3.12. Many organisations across GM struggle to engage with some so called 'hard to reach' groups and individually commission work to ensure that all groups have the opportunity to engage and participate. Feedback from elected members and groups indicated that many residents would prefer to find out about GMCA and the services it provides from a range of sources, networks and organisations. The task and finish group felt there might be value in learning from and working with these stakeholders across the GM footprint to ensure high quality engagement with all groups.
- 3.13. Finally, it is worth mentioning the Greater London Authority's (GLA) approach to opinion research is heavily focused on capturing qualitative information (rather than survey work). They have found this the most effective way to identify the 'real' issues for Londoners. This approach is extensively used to inform the communications and policy work of the GLA.

## **RESOURCES**

- 3.14. There needs to be a realistic assessment of the resource needed to deliver an expanded GMCA communications function. This is particularly important when bringing together communications professionals from a number of different organisations as part of the GMCA's transition process in advance of having adopted a clearly defined communication strategy and delivery plan. There is an urgent need to assess what skills are needed to deliver the strategy and address gaps in resources and expertise. The group were keen that individuals were supported to overcome the challenge of 'double-hatting', and to ensure that new GMCA roles, tasks and skills needed are clearly defined.
- 3.15. The group are keen to lobby the GMCA to ensure that appropriate resource is allocated to delivering an enhanced communication function going forward.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

See the front of the report.

