

Title: 'Civic Centre Project'
Discussion Paper - Communication & Consultation

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Note:

The communications suggestions made in this paper should only be considered in the context of initial and largely internally focussed pr suggestions. However, there is a need to start 'drip feeding' information to residents to ensure they are 'informed' about the initiative.

This paper should not be considered as a substantive or overarching communications strategy. As the project progresses, a full communications plan should be developed for both internal and external audiences.

Background:

Integral to Brent Council's Vision of a new Wembley (launched in November 2002) is a new civic building – an iconic building for Brent's residents and a true community asset. A building which will not only provide a long term secure location for council services – most being delivered from one location, but also provide unprecedented levels of public access. A new civic centre will offer Brent's residents a better service and it will deliver better value for money. It will also provide a better working environment for council staff, ensuring the council attracts and keeps the best staff.

In April 2003, the Executive agreed to commissioning feasibility studies to examine the viability of new a civic centre for Brent. Since then, two independent financial appraisals have been undertaken, architects have been commissioned to investigate best practice in the UK and Europe and suggest some concept ideas. Work has also been undertaken in valuing the Brent Town Hall site and some consultation with staff has already taken place.

Brent Council is now actively pursuing proposals for a new civic building – a building which will not only enable the council to deliver its services from one place and provide a space for Members to meet and work, but one that could also provide unrivalled facilities for local people. Brent will also need to jointly deliver services with the Primary Care Trust and other partners in order to respond to the requirements of the Children Act – there will be opportunities to co-locate some of their offices with Brent's new building.

A new civic centre can be expected to bring a whole range of community benefits that could not be achieved otherwise. An opportunity exists of developing a facility that better reflects the modern and multi-cultural character of the authority and provides a new type of meeting space for the community.

Building a new civic centre will provide the council with an opportunity to develop a site that meets the principles of sustainable design. This will not only provide a saving in running costs in the longer term, but also provides a good example to the community about how to build responsibly.

However, for the council to maintain a real presence in all its communities and be able to deliver services at a local level, many local facilities including, One Stop Shops, will remain and some will even need enhancements and improvements.

Location...Location...Location

The Wembley regeneration area is a logical place to site Brent's civic centre, both because it is geographically central and links the diverse north and south of the borough. It is also an area with unrivalled public transport links, connecting both parts of the borough easily.

The redevelopment of the Wembley area represents a 'once in a life time' opportunity to become part of what will be a thriving and exciting local, national and international destination. A building within this new development will add value to the regeneration and enable the council to give Brent's residents a direct stake in the area which will otherwise be dominated by major private sector leisure, sport and entertainment providers.

Long term financial viability

According to the feasibility study undertaken by Jonathan Edwards Consulting during 2003, ***A new civic centre is the best value solution for Brent Council.***

Moving to and occupying a new civic centre will provide the council with opportunities to save on occupancy costs over a long term versus continuing to occupy a dispersed and ageing property portfolio. A number of options will be explored before any final financial model is agreed.

Co-locating with another public service partner offers cost saving opportunities and retail spaces can be used to offset costs with rental income.

As well as being a more financially prudent option, building a new civic centre will enable Brent Council to look at achieving the efficiency gains outlined in the Government's recent public sector Spending Review (Gershon).

The move is backed by the council and is expected to be agreed in principle by the Executive in July 2005.

Objectives - internal:

- To mobilise and increase staff awareness of the project and reasons for the move
- To secure buy-in from staff across the service areas
- To shift perception away from fear of new working practices to recognising change as a positive aspect of working for a modern, multi-cultural local authority
- To give relevance to joined up council services, able to offer more efficient and better value services for Brent's residents
- To engage all staff to participate in the 'debate' to shape the new building, new ways of working, technology requirements and staff facilities

Objectives – external

- To increase awareness of the project and reasons for the move
- To secure buy-in from Brent's residents
- To encourage Brent's residents to participate in the 'debate' to shape community facilities available in the new building
- To communicate benefits to residents of delivery of joined up council services
- To shift perception that residents will have to pay for the new building through large increases in council tax bills
- To communicate to residents the principle of adding value to the regeneration of Wembley/taking a direct stake in the area which will otherwise be dominated by leisure, sport and entertainment facilities

Scope: Internal communications

- **Brent Intranet** – develop new pages within Brent’s intranet communicating key issues, benefits to staff. Web polling asking staff for suggestions and invite ‘debate’ via a discussion forum (bulletin board), encouraging staff to participate and engage with initiative.

Note: due to technological limitations, this bulletin board cannot be moderated – messages posted will go ‘live’ immediately

- **Brent Council Staff Seminars** for staff with key speakers – similar in format to the Improving Brent seminar which took place in February 2005
- **Staff internal focus group research** to explore employee hopes, fears, trust and aspirations of working from one building
*This research will form a key plank in the future communications strategy
- **Personal email to all staff from Anna Woda, project director**, setting out key issues, what it means for staff and what steps are being taken at what time... ‘personal reassurance email’
- Regular articles in **Insight, Members Bulletin**
- Internal web polling (Q&A) asking staff for efficiency suggestions (exercise ensuring staff voices, ideas and concerns are involved)

Scope: External communications

Respect Festival

- In order to clearly communicate the key messages of the new civic centre, including its location, consider a presence within the ‘Delivering a new Wembley’* marquee at Brent Council’s Respect Festival on Sunday, 17 July.
Consider an interactive activity, encouraging participation from young people. For example, an electronic ‘game’ to build a new civic centre.
*** Proposal currently being considered jointly by Brent Council, Wembley National Stadium Limited, Quintain Estates & Development plc, The London Development Agency and Transport for London.**
- Public consultation exercise once key issues agreed and site identified
- Leader’s Press briefing for local press
- Press statement to all relevant media
- Communication briefing and Q&A: prepare background briefing with agreed responses to key questions for all spokespeople to draw on in answering questions from a variety of audiences including Members, residents and media

Getting the message across:

- Recruit a team of 'civic centre champions' (Civic Centre Steering Group members) to act as ambassadors to help get positive messages across to all staff
 - Define favourable, positive key messages to promote the project. Repeat and stick to key messages using carefully defined positive language.
 - Use examples/case histories (**personal human interest**) of change to get message across in marketing materials (pledge cards, posters). Perhaps from other local authorities and public sector bodies
 - Overcome trust issues in relation to change in working practices by painting positive picture of how delivery of **joined up** services will help to delivery **better value** services to Brent's residents.
 - **Use pictures and graphics** to get message across of how service areas will look and operate under '**one roof**'.
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Timing:

1. Set out key dates (timeline) to staff
2. Create a communications calendar of regular staff events, exercises
3. Identify key messages for communication in mediums identified