

General -
6c Public Relations

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to advise the Board of the progress of ongoing discussions with Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Futures (ACSEF) regarding Public Relations contracts and to request permission to tender a series of options to ensure best value.

- Background

Board Members may recall previous discussions regarding Nestrans Public Relations. Currently Nestrans public relations are carried out by a consultant, BIG, with a contract due to expire at the end of July 2012.

Previously Nestrans has looked at ways of trying to ensure that it receives best value in the implementation of its public relations. This has involved consideration of:

1. Continuing to tender for services in the current manner
2. Joining with ACSEF to have a single contract for both organisations
3. Should a single contract be agreed the possibility of having this done in-house

Previous proposals have not been able to be implemented until now for a variety of reasons including existing contracts timescales. However both Nestrans and ACSEF's current contracts are due to terminate at the end of July this year.

Discussion with ACSEF has concentrated on the overlaps between the ACSEF message of economic development with transport as a high priority in achieving sustainable economic growth and the Nestrans transport message which is in essence very similar as transport is an economic development enabler.

These discussions have also looked at the possibilities for sharing a contract. The current Nestrans contract was amended from the previously tendered form to reduce duplication and increase complementarities with BIG being the consultant for both ACSEF and Nestrans. This resulted a significant saving on the Nestrans contract from the previously tendered price.

Bringing together the Public Relations budgets for both Nestrans and ACSEF also opens the possibility of considering having these services carried out in house with the possibility of further savings. This could not be achieved by either organisation on its own as neither budget alone is big enough to support a member of staff. There has been a considerable amount of discussion on this issue with advantages seen with both ways of moving forward. Aberdeenshire Council have indicated a willingness to carry out these services.

The advantages and disadvantages of providing the services either in house or by consultant are considered to be:

In house		
	Advantages	Dedicated member of staff
		Possibility of being cheaper
		On hand staff availability for events organisation
	Disadvantages	Possible conflict of interest with Aberdeenshire Council views
		Independence of voice particularly for ACSEF issues
Consultant	Advantages	Backing of consultancy firm experience
		Contacts of consultancy firm
		Perception of independence from Councils
	Disadvantages	Likely to be more expensive
		Limited time availability of staff

The ACSEF Management Team recently considered a report on these issues. A copy of the report is attached as Appendix A.

Consideration of the current contracts, which are being operated as a single joint contract, has shown that this joint contract has produced significant savings and offers better value for money over the previously separate contracts.

- Proposal

It is proposed that Nestrans and ACSEF jointly issue a tender for services from 1 August 2012. This tender would be constructed in such a way that the tenderer would be required to submit a price for:

- A combined ACSEF/ Nestrans contract

It is also proposed that Aberdeenshire Council should be invited to tender to supply services in house as this will highlight any differences in cost and service as described in the table above.

This proposal will permit a consideration of the benefits and disadvantages of each contractual situation to permit an informed considered view of the best option for both ACSEF and Nestrans in procuring public relations services.

- Recommendation

That the Board approve the tender proposal included in the report.

RGM 27 Mar 2012



ACSEF MANAGEMENT TEAM MEETING

ACSEF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Management Team will recall that the role of ACSEF Communications Coordinator has been delivered for the past five years by an external agency. This contract is managed by the Development Manager and processed by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce and was secured through and Invitation to Tender by AGCC (three consecutive tenders being issued to cover 2007 through to 2012). On each occasion the successful bidder was The Big Partnership.
- 1.2 The current contract expires on 31 July 2012. Both the ACSEF Board and Management Team have requested that planning for renewal of any further contract is undertaken well in advance of the expiry date of the current contract.
- 1.3 The current contractor attends all Management Team meetings and provides a monthly update to Management Team. Additionally the terms and conditions of the contract require a 6 month review and analysis of the effectiveness of the communications contract. To date both the Board and Management Team have agreed that the current contractor provides an excellent service and achieves best value.
- 1.4 ACSEF is now at a crucial stage in the delivery of the Economic Development Plan. The partnership has just completed a detailed review of all the priorities previously identified and is working on the delivery of the next 5 years of the plan.
- 1.5 Many of the projects have now moved into delivery phase which necessitate a more proactive approach to the marketing and promotion of ACSEF than was previously the case where raising awareness of ACSEF was the priority. This has been largely achieved and is still a requirement but the focus of any future contract must be on the proactive marketing and promotion of ACSEF and management of ACSEF related events.
- 1.6 Additionally, in the ongoing challenging environment for the public sector, and the corresponding reduction in the 2012/13 budget allocation for ACSEF, Management Team has to be confident that any future contract that may be awarded will continue to deliver best value.

2. ACSEF REQUIREMENTS FOR 2012/2013

- 2.1 That a dedicated internal resource or contracted external resource take on responsibility for the delivery of the ACSEF Communications Contract, in order to proactively promote ACSEF, its objectives and strategy; and inform the business community and the general public about progress on the implementation and delivery of the projects.

The contract will have two key elements as follows:-

i) PR and Marketing

It is proposed that responsibilities will include:

- Informing/engaging relevant stakeholder groups, creating new groups where appropriate.
- Determining a proactive campaign to reflect the role and remit of ACSEF and its delivery objectives.
- Working directly with editors of key publications (regional, national and sector specific) e.g. Property Monthly, Holyrood Magazine to secure editorial and feature content for ACSEF related activities.
- Coordinating two media dinners per year for ACSEF Board members with business editors of regional, national and sector specific newspapers and publications.
- Facilitating a dedicated programme of media visits for key industry sectors-bringing editors of key publications to Aberdeen City and Shire to present ACSEF priorities and securing editorial coverage in key publications.
- Writing and issuing press releases following Board meetings and other media relations activity related to implementation of the strategy.
- Maintain and establishing contact with political representatives and senior civil servants at Holyrood and Westminster to promote the ACSEF strategy and influence Scottish Government policy implementation.
- Creating an annual communications plan – the scope for media, stakeholders and specifically the wider business community in the Aberdeen City & Shire region.
- Implementing elements of the communications plan.
- Producing an ACSEF e-newsletter to be issued to an agreed list, internally and externally, at least twice a year.
- Co-ordinating communications between partners and their PR departments to their 'member' organisations on ACSEF matters.
- Liaising with ACSEF development manager and co-ordinator on communication issues.
- Attending relevant meetings for direction on communications matters.
- Advising on content and providing press releases for publication on the ACSEF website.
- Provision of a detailed analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the PR and marketing that has been achieved in relation to media coverage.

ii) Event Management

A very important additional element of the remit is the event management of a number of receptions and events, both scheduled and unscheduled, throughout the duration of the contract.

Scheduled events

Scheduled events will include the organising of exhibition space and stand decoration at planned events such as All Energy, Offshore Europe, Heavy Oil Congress, the ACSEF Economic Summit and the ACSEF Youth Summit.

Unscheduled events

The contractor will be expected to respond to requests from Board members e.g. council leaders to organise briefing sessions and receptions e.g. at Holyrood and Westminster to present projects to political representatives.

The Communications Co-ordinator will be expected to prepare a monthly report, including a timesheet, indicating activities undertaken, meetings attended etc. It is anticipated event management, printed material design and production etc. will be charged separately on an item by item basis.

Any additional, chargeable work undertaken out with the remit of the contract must be agreed, along with proposed costs, with the ACSEF Management Team prior to any invoice being submitted.

3. JOINT COMMUNICATIONS ACSEF AND NESTRANS

- 3.1 The Big Partnership currently provides PR and communications services to both NESTRANS and ACSEF. These arrangements were put in place prior to the current level of collaboration between the two organisations and when Nestrans had specific PR objectives. Additionally the NESTRANS Director is now a member of the ACSEF Management Team.
- 3.2 Now that the two are fully aligned and one of ACSEF's priorities is to deliver Nestrans' transport strategy, it makes sense to combine two contracts to ensure a fully joined-up approach and to benefit from cost-savings.
- 3.2 Given that both organisations currently pay for an agreed number of days per month to deliver similar objectives, the approach is to seek to deliver maximum outputs for less consultancy hours.
- 3.3 This will involve a fresh approach that is prioritised to which both organisations can subscribe. ACSEF's transport priority is largely to see delivery of the AWPR and the Regional Transport Strategy. It therefore makes sense for ACSEF and Nestrans to work more collaboratively on securing maximum coverage for the "infrastructure" type announcements.
- 3.4 In addition to the ACSEF requirements outlined above, any joint contract that is issued which covers both ACSEF and NESTRANS could be managed as follows:-

One press office for all media enquiries regarding Nestrans and ACSEF

A major part of the work of both organisations is dealing with media enquiries about developments in the region. Instead of supplying individual quotations, a more in-depth comment from the most relevant organisation will be used to communicate a single message. This will save time but may dilute the various identities.

One major transport announcement per month (or a joint release) which communicates a key message or project related to transport. This will replace a large part of the pro-active work currently undertaken whereby there is a response to topical issues with comment from the organisations, saving consultancy time and maintaining the level of coverage by focusing on one major story, rather than working on three or four smaller stories.

Public Information Campaigns e.g. Get About

The Communications Coordinator will continue to work pro-actively on public information campaigns through the implementation of a PR plan with agreed and prioritised activity.

Revised Activity

The easiest way to reduce consultancy hours without impacting on output is to reduce the amount of administration and attendance at meetings.

Administration and Attendance at Meetings

One monthly report, one set of cuttings and two six monthly annual media evaluations, one PR meeting with both Nestrans Director and ACSEF Development Manager together and attendance at the ACSEF MT. Within the fee, the consultant would not attend every Nestrans board meeting or have regular, separate PR meetings.

There will however be work on the Nestrans board papers in advance to highlight any issues that could be picked up by the media and to pro-actively develop stories in advance of the board meeting on any positive issues.

The Communications Coordinator will require to support and guide the work of Nestrans through:-

- General media relations in support of Nestrans.
- Positive promotion of Nestrans and its role as a Regional Transport Partnership.
- Providing strategic advice on communications.
- Event organisation for Nestrans, e.g. press conferences, media events and meetings.
- Informing/engaging local stakeholder groups including communities of interest and business champions.
- Attending occasional Nestrans meetings when required.
- Liaison with Nestrans partners' public relations sections.

Targets and performance measures for these tasks will be agreed with the appointed contractor.

4. IN HOUSE PROVISION OF PR AND MARKETING SERVICES FOR ACSEF AND NESTRANS

- 4.1 Previous discussions at Management Team have raised concern about the potential duplication of effort in the delivery of PR and Marketing activity from NESTRANS and ACSEF and the appropriateness of public sector funded bodies employing an external contractor.
- 4.2 Management Team asked that consideration be given to the provision of an internal PR and Marketing service provided to ACSEF and NESTRANS from one of the partner organisations.

- 4.3 Aberdeenshire Council has offered to provide this service with the appointment of a PR and marketing professional on a full time, two year fixed term contract. The person appointed will be expected to develop and deliver PR and marketing strategies for both ACSEF and Nestrans.
- 4.4 The post holder will sit within the Corporate Communications Team at Aberdeenshire Council and be managed directly by Communications Team leader. Management support and guidance will be provided by the Head of Corporate Communications for Aberdeenshire Council.
- 4.5 As part of a further discussion, on this subject, at the 22 February 2012 meeting of Management Team; it was recommended that should Management Team agree to issue a new contract for PR and marketing services from August 2012, that Aberdeenshire Council would be included in the list of organisations who would be invited to tender.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Management Team agree that any future contract for PR and Marketing Services will be a single contract providing a joint service to both ACSEF and Nestrans.
- 5.2 Management Team receive a further report for their approval, which will outline the content of the tender, the value, the proposed timetable for processing and issuing the contract and the list of companies who will be invited to tender.
- 5.3 Advice and assistance will be sought from the Joint Procurement Unit of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Council in the drafting of this tender.

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19 March 2012