

Report of the Chief Executive

Improved direct communications with residents

Purpose of Report

1. This report asks for Members' approval to proceed with the production of a new bi-monthly (six issues a year) council publication designed to improve direct communications with residents.

Background

2. The link between overall satisfaction with the council and the amount of information residents receive about council services, has been noted in previous reports to the Executive, with both indicators falling in parallel for some years. The most recent figures from the council's surveying of residents, found that only 47% of people were satisfied with the amount of information provided by the council. It was proposed to address this by improving direct communications with the people of York through a new council publication delivered to every household, replacing the existing quarterly Your City. Initially the council investigated working in partnership with an outside provider supplying print, design and distribution, with the council supplying the editorial content. The publication would have been financed through diverting the spending on some or all of the council's local recruitment advertising into the costs of production and distribution.
3. However, as a result of the deteriorating economic climate, the financial basis for producing a publication this way has changed. Instead of using advertising to fund the new publication the new proposal is to concentrate some of the existing directorate spending on communications into one pot, which would allow for a bi-monthly 4-page A3 sized publication (the same size as Schools Out).
4. This option would multiply the space available for city-wide direct communications by three - from 16 pages of A4 to 24 pages of A3, equivalent to 48 pages of A4 annually.

Options

The costs for print and distribution in the following options are detailed in Annexe 1.

5. **Option 1:** A3 4-page full colour, 170gsm gloss art paper.

A3 4-page full colour, 170gsm gloss art paper (80% recycled), delivered to 87,000 households six times a year, four times with Your Ward and twice through a separate distribution.

Advantages

- The higher quality paper (the same as the 'Ascot special' Your City) gives a cleaner, more magazine feel.
- The higher quality paper will send a message of quality to some people.

Disadvantages

- The paper will be (and will look) more expensive
- The higher quality paper will send a message of profligacy to some people
- The long lead in times involved in the six week distribution required by Your Ward will mean that news in the publication could be up to eight weeks old by the time it is received, for the four issues distributed that way.
- The change in format for the new publication means that Your Ward and Your City might not be able to be inserted into each other at the printers as they are now. This will have some implications for the council's in-house distributors and the costs of the distribution, as the two publications (Your Ward and the new publication) would probably need to be manually inserted by the distributors.
- If distributed with Your Ward the publication would not be truly bi-monthly but sporadic as indicated below.

Timing

With Your Ward distribution:

- December/January
- April/May
- June/July
- September/October

Extra two:

- February
- November

6. **Option 2:** A3 4-page full colour, newsprint (similar to Schools Out).

A3 4-page full colour, newsprint (70gsm) paper (100% recycled), delivered to 87,000 households six times a year, four times with Your Ward and twice through a separate distribution.

Advantages

- Cheaper
- More recycled

- The more newspaper style paper will give the publication a more ‘newsy’ and immediate feel to some people
- By using cheaper paper (and cheaper looking paper) the council will be less at risk of being accused of profligacy

Disadvantages

- The long lead in times involved in the six week distribution required by Your Ward will mean that news in the publication could be up to eight weeks old by the time it is received, for the four issues distributed that way.
- The change in format for the new publication means that Your Ward and Your City might not be able to be inserted into each other at the printers as they are now. This will have some implications for the council’s in-house distributors and the costs of the distribution, as the two publications (Your Ward and the new publication) would probably need to be manually inserted by the distributors.
- If distributed with Your Ward the publication would not be truly bi-monthly but sporadic as indicated below.

Timing

With Your Ward distribution:

- December/January
- April/May
- June/July
- September/October

Extra two:

- February
- November

7. **Option 3:** A3 4-page full colour, newsprint (70gsm - similar to Schools Out).

A3 4-page full colour, newsprint paper (100% recycled), delivered to 87,000 households six times a year through six separate distributions.

Advantages

- Separate distribution will allow for a much shorter lead-in time, giving the opportunity to respond more quickly to events and run less risk of the council being late to present its own news to residents.

Disadvantages

- The separate distribution is a more expensive option
- The council could be accused of not being joined up

- The existing distribution method (using council staff) is proven to work – a new separate distribution (if an in-house option is impossible or too expensive) may be more problematic.

Timing

Six distributions

- Early December (with budget consultation)
- February
- April
- June
- August
- October

Distribution options

These are contained in Annexe 1

Producing the new publication

8. At present marketing and communications put out on average 60 press releases a month from every part of the council - news and information that the council would like the public to be aware of. Very few of those releases make the pages of *Your City* because of the long gaps between publications. These can then only be communicated through the media or the council's website, and those people who do not regularly make use of the city's written or broadcast media remain unaware of the contents in the press releases.
9. Although the existing publication covers some of the council's biggest priorities, there are many campaigns in the council with a year round need for publicity which would benefit from the extra space available. These include: benefits take-up; benefits fraud tip-offs; activities and services for young people; publicising the York Contact Centre and the website; promoting Park & Ride; recruitment of foster carers and adopters; anti-litter messages and initiatives; road safety issues; Active Leisure activities; recycling; home carer recruitment; arts & leisure services; libraries; Register Office services. In addition to year round information the publication could also be used to promote one-offs such as voter turnout and importantly explain the council's reasoning on major projects, such as the planned move to a new HQ.
10. The existing *Your City* brand is in need of an overhaul, being around five years old. This might include renaming the paper and choosing a different visual style. There is likely to be some initial costs involved in this design and branding work of around £1,000.
11. The publication would be edited by a Communications Officer overseen by the Senior Communication Officer and supported by a part time Communications Assistant, who together will make up a new press and publications office. This restructure has already been started in response to the 2009/10 budget round. This team would handle the council's dealings with the media and external publications.

12. Responsibility for the publication's overall production will rest with the Media and Publicity Manager and the Head of Marketing and Communications. This will require these officers to adapt the way they currently work.
13. In order to create the capacity to produce the new publication, the m&c team will need to change its priorities and look at new ways of working with the rest of the council. Given this we anticipate there would be no extra staff resources required.

Editorial policy

14. The new publication would be governed by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 1988 and by the council's media protocol, which reflects the Code. Paragraph 12 of the Code states, *"Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both"*.
15. The media protocol refers specifically to the content of council publications, saying they will abide with paragraph 12 of the Code and that councilors will not be featured in photographs. The exception to this is simple 'head and shoulders' photographs that allow the public to identify councilors. The Lord Mayor can be actively featured in council publications (with an overlap of two months when Lord Mayors change to allow for the lead in times in publications).
16. An editorial board made up of one chief officer from each directorate and the Head of Marketing and Communications, will be established to help plan each publication, sourcing content and liaising with the wider council. Final editorial control will rest with the Chief Executive advised by the editorial board.
17. A bi-annual external advisory board, possibly drawn from the talkabout panel, will also be established to advise on the content and style of the new publication.

Timeline

18. The m&c team expect to produce a trial issue of the new publication before the first issue is distributed to residents. In producing this, the reactions to any new identity can be tested, along with approval processes.
19. The m&c team would hope to work on the new design, consulting members, officers and residents, during July and August, with the trial issue published in September. The aim would be for the first issue of new publication to be early October, with a second issue budget consultation/Christmas copy ready for early December.

Implications

Financial

20. Funding available for the new publication will not be taken from frontline budgets – it will be diverted from existing communications spending in the directorates.

Directorate	£,000	Communication spend diverted from...
Chief Executives	15	From the existing <i>Your City</i> budget and funding to promote democracy
Neighbourhood Services	10	From existing publicity budgets for recycling and waste minimisation
City Strategy	25	From planned publicity spend on major projects
HASS	9	From local job advertising
LCCS	10	From existing publicity budgets
Resources	12	From existing publicity budgets and annual budget consultation
Totals	81	

Human Resources (HR)

21. The human resources implications for marketing and communications are outlined in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12.
22. There are human resources implications should option 3 be chosen using the in-house method of distribution, with an extra cost of approximately £13,000 (including on-costs) for half of an administrative post to organise the extra six distributions. This figure is based on the cost involved in administering the present system.

Equalities

23. The publication will be printed with the existing 'language box' which goes on all council publications. The wording explaining the availability of large print versions of the publication will also be included in a minimum of 14-point type, with the body text as large as practically possible.
24. As with the existing *Your City*, taped or CD versions of the publication will be available for anyone with a visual impairment – a long-standing arrangement with the York Blind and Partially Sighted Society. The cost for this will be met out of the photography and taping budget mentioned elsewhere in this report.

Sustainability issues

25. If option 2 or 3 is chosen the publication will be printed on 100% recycled paper.
26. The opportunities provided for improved communication on environmental issues could lead to improved recycling and greater awareness of climate change.

Legal

27. As with all council publicity, the new publication would be governed by the council's media protocol and by the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

28. Past legal advice is that public notices could not be included in the paper although the situation will be monitored for changes in the legal position.

Crime and Disorder

29. Improved communications with the people of York through a new publication could play their part in reducing the fear of crime and other perception issues related to crime and disorder.

Information Technology (IT)

30. There are no IT implications in this report.

Property

31. There are no property implications in this report.

Other

32. All other implications have been covered in the report.

Risk Management

33. The main risks are as follows:
- that the council does not adequately communicate its work and engage with residents, businesses and all of its communities
 - that distribution will be unreliable, meaning that important information does not reach residents.

Consultation and engagement

34. The council's Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the options outlined in this paper.
35. Members of the public will be consulted on how the new publication should look and what it should contain, as part of the process of producing a pilot issue. Representatives of the public will also be engaged bi-annually (see paragraph 17) for their views, with the option of using the talkabout panel for further research if required.

Recommendations

36. Members are asked to approve option 3 as the most effective and timely method of improving direct communication.

Contact Details

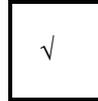
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**Report
Approved**



Date

12/6/09

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For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Exempt annexe 1 – print and distribution costs