

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Contacts magazine

Date: 30 September 2024

Author: Communications and Marketing Manager

Purpose

To provide an update on the production and distribution of the Council's magazine, Contacts.

Recommendation:

THAT the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Notes the report and discusses any outcomes arising from the report

1 Background

1.1 The Council's Communications and Marketing team has produced a three yearly magazine, Contacts, for many years as a way to inform residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the Borough about the work of the Council. One of the key objectives of the Council's Communication's Strategy is to keep residents informed about what the council is doing, the magazine is a key action from that strategy.

1.2 55,000 copies are printed and distributed to households through two companies, Phase Print and The National Leaflet Company (TNLC).

Both companies were appointed following a procurement process last year and are in contract with the council to produce the magazines for the next year and could be extended if the council wishes to do so.

1.3 The Communications and Marketing team produce the magazine, including writing, editing and design. The service has an allocated budget of £36,000 per year for the three editions. This budget is for the

print and distribution and does not include officer time, which is estimated to be around £10,000 per edition.

Since 2017, the magazine cost has increased from around £27,000 per year to £36,000, an increase of 33%, and costs are rising due to increases in the cost of paper and delivery charges.

The Communications and Marketing team sell advertisements in the magazine, which contributes towards the cost but this return is reducing year on year as businesses reduce the need to advertise in printed magazine and move more to online sales. Over the last two quarters, the magazine sold £1,800 of advertising.

The Council continues to use a multi-channel approach for its communications and engagement, including more traditional methods of communications like print media. However, more and more is being done online and take up of online channels continues to grow. The Council's email newsletter has over 40,000 subscribers, spread across several topics. Over 14,000 residents are signed up to receive the Latest News email.

- 1.4 The Communications and Marketing team allocate three months to produce the magazine, below is an example of a timetable for the production of the magazine.

Contacts 66 – winter edition timescales

- **Call out** – Monday 29 July
- **Deadline for articles** – Friday 16 August
- **Writing** – Monday 12 August – Friday 6 Sept (4 weeks)
- **Ad booking deadline** Wednesday 4 September
- **Design** – Monday 9 September – Friday 11 October (5 weeks)
- **Ad artwork deadline** – Wednesday 25 September
- **Print** – Friday 11 October – Friday 25 October (2 weeks)
- **Delivery admin** Monday 28 October – Friday 1 November (1 week)
- **Distribution** — Monday 4 -15 November (2 weeks)
- **Online** - Monday 4 November

- 1.5 The magazine is available as a PDF to view on the council's website and it is also promoted on social media and through the Council's email newsletters, which is sent to over 14,000 residents.
- 1.6 The Communications team has carried out several surveys to establish the benefits of the magazine. In 2016, a survey received over 500 responses with 80% saying they read every edition, 89% said it was good or very good and easy to read but only 29% said they would prefer a paper magazine.
- 1.7 The last survey took place in 2023 but there were only 45 responses, which may indicate that the number of people reading the magazine has reduced.
- 1.8 The magazine is distributed through the National Leaflet Company. They distribute it through two avenues, the first one is through the Royal Mail, who deliver to certain postcodes in the area. Any postcodes that are not on the Royal Mail's postcode list are delivered by hand, through 'Teams' of the National Leaflet Company who deliver by hand.

The Council is aware of some properties not receiving copies due to their location, mainly on the borders of the borough and some of the more rural areas. The Communications Team has been working with the distribution company to establish a way to ensure these residents receive a copy, one of the options is to introduce an addressed mailing system for those properties, which would increase the cost of distribution by £3,000 per year approximately.

Any issues of non-delivery are raised with TNLC who investigate accordingly. They use GPS trackers to show where their staff deliver to and can provide comprehensive updates on any issues where the magazine has not been delivered.

2 Future options for the magazine

Many other Councils are reconsidering how they produce a residents' newsletter in terms of being able to assess readership, address rapidly increasing expenditure during the current cost of living crisis and support their climate change commitments.

The agreed approach will help inform how other communications activities could be delivered, where online facilities are already well established and utilised, such as bin calendars.

A short analysis of options is provided below, which would all be subject to Senior Leadership and Cabinet approval:

Option 1 – Continue with existing arrangements to produce and distribute a printed copy newsletter to every property in the Borough. This will require the existing budget plus an estimated 10% increase, year on year to improve the distribution to every household in the borough and to take into account increase costs in paper and distribution.

Option 2 - Continue to produce a printed newsletter but reduce the number of editions from three to two per year. This would reduce the cost of the magazine by £12,000 per year while ensuring residents are kept informed about what the council is doing. The proposal would be for a summer edition in May/June and a winter edition in November/December. This would also free up time for the Communications Team to work on other projects.

Option 3 - Adopt a digital approach to the newsletter, encouraging residents to sign up to our weekly email bulletins rather than producing a printed newsletter. This would reduce the budget significantly but may make it harder for people who do not have access to the internet or who has not signed up to Gedling Borough Council's newsletter service to receive council information.

3 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4 Legal Implications

There are no legal implication arising from this report.

5 Equalities Implications

There are no equality implications arising from this report.

6 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

There are no carbon reduction/environmental sustainability implications arising from this report.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer