

REPORT TO	ON
CABINET	6 th September 2017

Jan 2017



TITLE	PORTFOLIO	AUTHOR
Communicating with residents and businesses	Leader	Joanne Platt Interim Corporate Improvement Manager

Is this report a KEY DECISION	No
Is this report on the Forward Plan ?	No
Is the request outside the policy and budgetary framework and therefore subject to confirmation at full Council?	No

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To propose the establishment of a cross party member working group to review the way the Council should communicate with residents and businesses in the Borough in the future.

2. MEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That a cross party member working group is established to review the way the Council should communicate with residents and businesses in the Borough in the future as outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Clean, green and safe		Strong and healthy communities	
Strong South Ribble in the heart of prosperous Lancashire		Efficient, effective and exceptional council	✓

4. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

In March, 2017 a Communications' Strategy was approved by the Cabinet. One of the objectives in the medium-term action plan was to undertake a rigorous and evidence-based review of the Forward newspaper, to review its effectiveness, cost, demand on resources and ways to simplify the process.

To this end, a review has been undertaken by staff, the key elements of which are set out below.

5. SUMMARY

5.1 Cost of production

The cost of producing two editions of Forward Newspaper is just under £30,000 per annum. In addition to Forward, the Council also produces an Investment newsletter for prospective investors to the Borough at a cost of approximately £3,500 per edition.

In the March 2017 Residents' Survey, only 12% of residents said that they preferred to find out about the Council and the services it provides from Forward newspaper, compared to 28% who preferred the council website and 36% who preferred leaflets, flyers and public notices.

Forward previously featured advertising to help pay for production. The advertising was sold by an external company who would sell the advertising space, design the artwork and collect the revenue and then pay the Council a proportion of the advertising revenue raised to offset the costs of production.

Unfortunately this became no longer economically viable for the small sums we were drawing in as the advertising wasn't covering the cost of the space they were being printed on, so the company withdrew and it wasn't possible to find anyone who would offer a similar service (due to a general decline in newspaper advertising in favour of social media advertising).

Consultation with staff who are also residents in the Borough showed that 62% (based on 77 responses) did not read Forward, and many who do, only do so to see who they know.

5.2 Other councils

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council has recently re-introduced its Shuttle newspaper, working in partnership with local newspaper The Lancashire Telegraph and Ribble Valley Borough Council continues to produce a council newspaper. Chorley has an events-led publication called 'What's Happening in Chorley', but the news element is minimal.

When we consulted members of the Lancashire Communications Group, none of the other authorities who responded currently produces a Council newspaper.

South Ribble's Communications team is very small when compared to similar-sized district councils in the county with just 2 FTE posts. For example, Chorley Council has 5 posts (including events management and some tourism). Blackburn with Darwen Council (including Rossendale) has a total of 12 posts.

5.3 Other options

The advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of communication are set out in the table below.

Media	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Printed (Forward, Invest, leaflets, posters etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach everyone (although no evidence that it is read once received) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive to produce • News is out of date by the time it is received by residents / businesses • Evidence suggests it is not valued by the majority of residents (based on survey of staff living in the Borough)
<p>Electronic (Social media, e-mail marketing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can issue news very quickly • Can respond to questions / concerns • No cost (for social media) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May disadvantage some elderly and disadvantaged residents with no access to e-mail / internet • Subscription required for e-mail marketing tool (estimated to be £12k per annum if you use market leader GovDelivery, but other providers are available)

Options for the future include:

- Continuing to produce Invest (for business) and Forward for residents, supplemented by existing social media channels (no change)
- Merging the two publications as a new product aimed at both businesses and residents, supplemented by existing social media channels
- Continuing to produce the Invest newsletter, but to distribute Forward as an e-newsletter with the option for residents to select areas / services they are most interested in hearing news about, supplemented by existing social media channels
- Cease all production of paper newsletters in favour of electronic means

6. Next steps

Whilst some members are keen to retain the use of Forward as the main means of communicating with residents, it appears that it may not provide value for money in terms of the people it reaches.

With the next edition of Forward being due in the early autumn, it is suggested that a cross party member working group is established to review all the options and to make recommendations to Cabinet on the best way to communicate with residents and businesses in the future.

7. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT AND THE OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

Consultation with residents and staff has taken place. Members' views were expressed on the use of Forward when the Communications' Strategy was considered by both Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet in March 2017.

8. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Members need to consider all options and to make their own recommendations on the way forward to the Cabinet.

9. IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
PEOPLE AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS	There are no people and cultural implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
ICT	There are no ICT implications associated with the recommendations in this report.
PROPERTY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	There are no property and asset management implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

There are no risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT

The recommendations in this report have no impact on equality and diversity.

12. RELEVANT DIRECTORS' RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That a cross party member working group is established to review the way the Council should communicate with residents and businesses in the Borough in the future.

13. COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

There are no financial implications as a result of accepting the recommendation presently within this report.

14. COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Generally speaking it is a matter for the discretion of the Council to decide on how best to communicate with its residents and businesses.

15. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS AND APPENDICES

Background documents

Communications' Strategy 2017-18

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