

REPORT TO	ON
CABINET	17 October 2018



TITLE	PORTFOLIO	REPORT OF
Communicating with residents and businesses	The Council Leader	Chief Executive

Is this report a <b>KEY DECISION</b> (i.e. more than £100,000 or impacting on more than 2 Borough wards?)	No
Is this report on the <b>Statutory Cabinet Forward Plan</b> ?	No
Is the request outside the policy and budgetary framework and therefore subject to confirmation at full Council?	No
Is this report confidential?	No

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To propose the way the Council will communicate with residents and businesses in the borough.

## 2. PORTFOLIO RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet approve the production of two Forward newspapers the first produced in October 2018 and the second produced in February 2019 alongside a Forward Christmas newsletter detailing Christmas events in South Ribble.
- 2.2 Cabinet approve a delivery method of the paper editions of Forward and newsletter via Royal Mail delivery.
- 2.3 Cabinet approve the evaluation of both the paper edition of Forward and e-mail newsletter with a report of the evaluation being presented to Cabinet at a future date.

## REASONS FOR THE DECISION

A Communications Strategy was developed in 2017 that would transform how we communicate with our key stakeholders. One of the objectives in the medium-term action plan was to undertake a rigorous and evidence-based review of the Forward newspaper. The report sets out below the recommendations for the delivery of two editions Forward newspapers alongside a Forward Christmas newsletter this financial year and the development of a new way of communicating via an electronic mailing system.

## 3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Excellence and Financial Sustainability	✓
Health and Wellbeing	
Place	

Projects relating to People in the Corporate Plan:

People	
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#### 4. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

- 4.1 In March 2017 a Communications Strategy was approved by Cabinet. One of the objectives in the medium-term action plan was to undertake a rigorous and evidence-based review of Forward newspaper, to review its effectiveness, cost, demand on resources and ways to simplify the process.
- 4.2 On the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017 a proposal to establish a cross party member working group to review the way the Council should communicate with residents and businesses in the borough in the future was approved by Cabinet.
- 4.3 The cross party group met to discuss the options for the future which were:
- 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
- 4.4 A presentation was made to the group detailing the current position in relation to communicating with both residents and businesses. This included the methods and costs of existing mechanisms. Information was also provided on current communication trends nationally and resident preferences identified in the 2017 Residents' Survey.
- 4.5 The cross party working group agreed the following course of action:
- Invest in e-mail distribution software paid for from the existing PR budget (following an appropriate procurement process). This will enable the production of a monthly e-mail version of 'Forward' for residents who sign up for this, in addition to a weekly member newsletter and staff newsletters for staff who don't have access to Staff Connect.
  - Produce an annual paper edition of Forward to provide a roundup of key messages that have been distributed throughout the year via e mail distribution. This will be delivered to every property in the Borough.
  - Seek feedback on the value of Forward in the next scheduled residents' survey in September 2018.
  - Ask residents in the next paper edition of Forward if they wish to continue to receive it.
  - Evaluate the impact of e-mail distribution via the analytics provided by the software and in the residents' survey and feedback referred to in actions above.
  - Report the outcome of the evaluation referred to above to Cabinet at a future date (in 2019) for a decision on whether to continue with Forward newspaper in the longer term.

## **5 PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 A full investigation was undertaken into email newsletter distribution software, which enables organisations to issue attractive newsletters (based on simple templates) with links to more detailed information. This approach facilitates quick and effective evaluation through access to statistics on how many recipients have opened the newsletter and how many have clicked through to more information. This can subsequently be used to target future communications more effectively and enables newsletters to be customised to very specific audiences, e.g. small businesses as well as to a general audience.
- 5.2 Following this investigation and recommendations of the cross working party, new email distribution software was purchased.
- 5.3 The Council's website is integral to this process as the electronic newsletters will be accessed via the website. The website is currently being reviewed to ensure that it can be accessed using mobile technology and once this is in place the distribution software can be used to communicate with our residents.
- 5.4 As the Council is not in a position to go ahead with the electronic newsletter due to the web site review, it is proposed to produce two printed copies of the Forward Newspaper; the first edition produced in October 2018 and the second produced in February 2019 alongside a Forward Christmas newsletter detailing Christmas events in South Ribble.
- 5.5 As part of the Council's priorities of being an efficient, effective and exceptional Council it is prudent to consider the costs :
- The cost of production for the newspaper is £5,190 for 49,000 copies and 13p delivery charge per copy. Total cost £11,560 per edition
  - The cost of production of a newsletter will be lower with an estimated cost of £2,500 and 13p delivery charge per copy. Total cost £8,870
- 5.6 The Communications team will continue to seek feedback on the value of Forward newspaper and views will be sought from our residents in the next scheduled residents' survey and in the paper editions of Forward when residents will be asked if they wish to continue to receive it.
- 5.7 Once the e-mail distribution is up and running a review of both the e-mail and paper Forward, via the analytics provided by the software and in the residents' survey, will be undertaken and a report of the evaluation will be presented to Cabinet at a future date for a decision on whether to continue with Forward newspaper in the longer term.

## **6 FINANCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The production, delivery and e-mail distribution software will be delivered through existing resources within the Council's Public Relations and Place Promotion budgets.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None

## **8. HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None

## **9. ICT/TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Communications team will be working closely with the ICT team to ensure that the website is able to be accessed via mobile technology to ensure the electronic newsletter is accessible.

## **10. PROPERTY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

## **11. RISK MANAGEMENT**

11.1 A team has been established which will guide the Council's work towards delivering this project. A project plan will be developed and key milestones will be monitored by the project group.

## **12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT**

12.1 There are many positive equality implications emerging from the recommendations in this report. Every resident, regardless of demographic or geographic factors, will be able to receive current, up to date and useful information on public services and activities within their community.

## **13. RELEVANT DIRECTORS RECOMMENDATIONS**

13.1 Cabinet approve the production of two Forward newspapers the first produced in October 2018 and the second produced in February 2019 alongside a Forward Christmas newsletter detailing Christmas events in South Ribble.

13.2 Cabinet approve a delivery method of the paper editions of Forward and the newsletter via Royal Mail delivery.

13.3 Cabinet approve the evaluation of both the paper edition of Forward and e-mail newsletter with a report of the evaluation being presented to Cabinet at a future date.

## **14. COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER**

14.1 The report considers options for more efficient and effective communication with residents and businesses. The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.

## **15. COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

15.1 There are no issues or concerns to raise from a Monitoring Officer perspective.

## **16. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

16.1 Communicating with residents and businesses: Cross Party Working Group minutes.

## **17. APPENDICES**

17.1 There are no appendices to this report

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