

Strategy and Resources Committee
28 November 2017

Borough Insight

Report of the:	Head of HR & Organisational Development
Contact:	Mark Rouson/Riquita D'Souza
Urgent decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	N/A
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	None
Other available papers (not attached):	None stated

Report Summary

This report sets out the benefits of producing the Council's magazine Borough Insight for our community. It seeks approval from the Committee to continue with the production of the magazine in the current formats and frequency.

Recommendation (s)

That:

- 1 Borough Insight continues as a printed magazine delivered to households and venues in the Borough three times a year.**
- 2 The Council continues to produce e-Borough Insight in-house and continues to endeavour to increase views and subscription numbers.**
- 3 The above to be produced within an annual budget of £27,000**

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 Communications with residents about the work of the council, especially in the context of service delivery changes, is highly important.
- 1.2 The Council's key priorities all require messages to, and engagement with, our community if services are to be successfully delivered.
- 1.3 The majority of our service plans include a communications aspect with residents – Borough Insight is a principle tool used to meet this requirement.

Strategy and Resources Committee

28 November 2017

2 Background

- 2.1 The government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (the 'Publicity Code') sets out provisions in relation to our communications. These provisions include seven principles, namely that publicity should be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity (eg elections). Borough Insight meets the requirements and the stipulations of the Publicity Code.
- 2.2 Information given by us to third parties (eg the press) for residents is likely to be interpreted and edited – Borough Insight content is totally within our control.
- 2.3 There has been a decline in local media across the UK. Members are well aware of the merits and otherwise of the local media currently available to borough residents. Borough Insight is one of the ways we can ensure our news can be delivered to residents, some of whom we cannot reach in any other way.
- 2.4 Borough Insight has been produced in different formats since 1992. Since its inception, we have introduced a colour magazine, recycled paper and advertisements. We introduced an electronic, monthly, version in 2014 to supplement the printed magazine.
- 2.5 The printed magazine is delivered to the majority of homes in the Borough. Additional copies are bulk delivered to community hubs (our venues, libraries, GP surgeries, etc). Advertising is used as a way of decreasing our costs
- 2.6 We deliver the printed version to 32,000 addresses. The magazine is printed and distributed three times a year.
- 2.7 The delivery target is 98%. Some homes specify no junk mail etc. and Borough Insight is not delivered to those properties. Delivery to blocks of flats can also be problematic. The most effective and cost efficient delivery method has proven to be via postcode areas. There are a few streets where the postcode is shared between this Borough and another Borough/District. Where the majority of households in a street lie outside the Borough, the magazine is not delivered to any households in that street. Conversely, if the majority of households are within the Borough, all households in that street, including those not technically within the Borough, received the magazine. This is the most cost effective/cheapest option. Officers maintain a small mailing list of residents who do not receive the magazine as a result of this but have requested copies.

Strategy and Resources Committee

28 November 2017

- 2.8 The contract for the magazine is regularly reviewed to ensure best value for money. Costs of the physical magazine, have been
- 2016-17: £23,247 (23p per copy)
 - 2015-16: £23,278
 - 2014-15: £22,747
 - 2013-14: £23,382
- 2.9 Advertising revenue is around £5,400 a year
- 2.10 Delivery accounts for 50% of costs.
- 2.11 As part of their efforts to reduce expenditure, many councils have chosen to terminate their physical magazines. This includes Surrey County Council who wound-up Surrey Matters earlier this year (the digital version is still produced).
- 2.12 Since production of hard copies of Surrey Matters ceased, the Council's Comms team has received a significant increase in requests from the County Council for information to be shared via this Council's comms channels. In the four week period commencing 17 September, this Council was asked to promote the following issues:
- Get on-line week (Surrey libraries)
 - Stoptober (Healthy Surrey)
 - Apply for your Blue Badge online
 - Countryside car park charge survey
 - Adoption week
 - Renew library books online (Surrey libraries)
 - Surrey Information Point website (social care)
 - Eat Out Eat Well this half term (trading standards)
 - The Annual Architecture Lecture (Surrey University)
 - Halloween clothing CE marked (trading standards)
 - Winter Wellbeing (Health Surrey)
 - Roadworks matters (Surrey Highways)
 - Food recycling (Surrey Waste Partnership)
 - Winter wellbeing (Surrey Prepared)
- 2.13 Not producing a physical magazine presents challenges in reaching certain demographics as the digital alternatives have not been adopted by some (principally older) and others do not want our information as part of their social networks. However there is also no guarantee that the printed version is read by those who receive it.
- 2.14 The monthly digital version of Borough Insight has four core objectives:
- To be able to provide up-to-date information around the tri-annual printed version

Strategy and Resources Committee

28 November 2017

- To accommodate the volume of information provided by partner agencies which we do not have room for in the printed copy (this has significantly increased as others have stopped their magazines)
 - To meet the growing requirement for digital communications
 - To position a digital replacement for the printed magazine
- 2.15 We currently we achieve around 10,000 views per month, these are from the subscription base and from direct links from our social media activities.
- 2.16 The current cost for producing the monthly digital magazine is less than £200 per year. However, this will rise if we successfully significantly raise subscription numbers.
- 2.17 Other costs associated with Borough Insight (digital and physical) include the costs of using a image library (aprox £1000 per year).
- 2.18 We are working on a presumption that, with price increases to delivery and paper, etc, the cost of the physical issue will rise from aprox 23p to 25p over the next two years.
- 2.19 In order to better understand residents' views on Borough Insight we conducted a survey over the summer.
- 2.20 To reduce costs, and to target readers so that we received quality responses, we did not use the citizens' panel for this exercise. Over 100 people responded to the survey, representing a good range of ages (25 – 94).
- 2.21 Highlights of the findings are:
- 75% of respondents rated Borough Insight 'Excellent' or 'Good'
 - 91% of respondents agreed that Borough Insight was easy to understand
 - 50% of respondents had either attended an event or used a council service having read about it in Borough Insight
 - 70% of respondents thought that having the paper copy delivered three times a year was about right (12% responded that the Council should not produce the paper magazine)
 - 75% agreed that Borough Insight was a good way of finding out about our services
 - 87% agreed that Borough Insight 'tells me about local events'

Strategy and Resources Committee

28 November 2017

- Three in number stated that Borough Insight was a waste of money and another three in number stated it should be on-line only.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 We continue to produce Borough Insight as a printed magazine delivered to households and venues in the borough three times a year, acknowledging the cost implication (which will rise in line with postal increases and other inflation factors). Officers go out to tender in the normal way to place a new two or three-year contract for the production and delivery of the magazine
- 3.2 We also ask your approval to continue the production of the monthly e-borough insight (11 issues per year).

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 There are no manpower implications. The current communications team, who create content for and manage Borough Insight, have other communications duties if the decision was made to cease production there would be additional workload as they endeavour to promulgate council messaging.

All costs are budgeted within the medium term financial strategy.

- 4.2 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** The cost of the proposal to continue production of Borough Insight is within the existing £27,000 annual budget provided for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 Borough Insight is written to Plain English principles. Text in the printed version is minimum 11pt and the magazine is reproduced on-line on the Council's website in a format that allows the document to be increased in size by 200%. These factors are considered minimum best practice for ease of reading for those with sight difficulties.

- 5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** *There are no significant legal implications arising from this report. The legislation and guidance around local authority publicity are considered in paragraph 2.1 above.*

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 The magazine is produced within a sustainable ethos; waste is kept to a minimum, stock has Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accreditation, inks used are environmentally friendly and alcohol free, and the magazine is recyclable.
- 6.2 Borough Insight is one of the channels for Council information, including community safety communication.

Strategy and Resources Committee

28 November 2017

7 Partnerships

7.1 n/a

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 n/a

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 It is important to offer a number of channels to deliver the council's messages, especially with the continual decline of local press. Borough Insight offers an opportunity to ensure appropriate communication with each household in the Borough.

9.2 There is a cost to producing (and delivering) a physical magazine which has to be justified in the present financial circumstances.

9.3 Digital is the way forward but feedback indicates that there is a strong wish by some residents to keep the physical magazine

Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);