

At the last Council meeting it was agreed that members would email the Clerk with their ideas about a newsletter which would be collated into a report from myself.

At the time of writing this report [14/2/23] only two Members have replied. To be able to take matters forward it is important that ALL members respond so that some assessment may be made as to the decisions the Council will need to take. The matter should therefore be deferred at this time to allow Members further time to contribute their thoughts. The following may assist Members to respond to what seems like a simple issue but has a number of potential pitfalls.

### **Format:**

#### **EMAIL**

In these days of electronic communication, the seemingly obvious solution would be to create a 'virtual' newsletter which could be whatever size is required to contain the news items. This would be emailed out to residents.

#### Advantages:

After assembly of the material into a suitable publication, distribution would be at the click of a mouse.

Potentially every elector could get their own copy.

#### Disadvantages:

- Members of the public would have to provide their email addresses - sign up to receive the email – involving the Council in GDPR issues of data protection.
- This assumes that everyone has an email address, and that they would be willing to 'sign up'.
- Those who for whatever reason did or could not sign up, would either be left out of the communication OR would have to receive a hard copy, BUT distinguishing which households have had an electronic copy, and which have not, and then supplying the hard copy, would be akin to one of the Labours of Hercules.

It therefore follows that while an electronic copy of the newsletter could be included on the Council's website, the logic is that the newsletter must be hard copy delivered to each residence in the Council's area, rather than one per elector.

#### **Hard Copy.**

News items would have to be assembled into a suitable format (which may also impact on distribution costs - see below). The amount of copy would need to be considered: to be able to inform, without overwhelming with detail, alerting to issues where appropriate, and being honest about the aim to communicate with, and not to, the public. This should not be seen as propaganda (see below). It may not be possible to maintain a strict total word count, since the amount of news to be communicated may vary but will impact on the number of pages.

Should this be a simple black and white publication or a full colour production? B&W is the cheaper option, colour provides a potentially more attractive product but is more expensive and may need a higher grade of paper.

Simple copyright free clip art illustrations can be used to break up text and make the production look more inviting. Photographs could be included (b/w colour?) Adding photographs increases the cost.

Paper quality is also a matter for consideration as this too affects the costs. Newsprint may be the cheapest option, but also may impact on the perception of the publication. On the other hand, full glossy may look very professional, but might be seen by those receiving it as wasting public money.

Size is also a matter for consideration.

An A3 page folded once produces 4 x A4 pages available for copy.

An A4 folded once will produce 4 x A5 pages – half the size.

A gatefold (folded twice) will provide 6 columns (including front) which can be a more attractive layout which is easier to slip through a letterbox.

Typography may need to be considered in relation to the other issues above. The type face to be used and the font size will impact on the space taken up on the page. 10 point type may allow more text, but possibly at the cost of readability.

The Council may also need to consider its obligations in respect of DDA and the possibility of making any newsletter available to persons with visual difficulties.

A careful evaluation of the quantity needed should be undertaken. There are c. 3752 electors, and assuming an average of 2 per household, around 2,000 newsletters would need to be printed.

The cost of printing the newsletter would therefore depend on the factors outline above:

- B&W/Colour
- Graphics/Photographs
- Size and quality of paper
- Number of pages
- Folding
- Quantity

It would be important to create a template for the newsletter which can be used for each edition so that the look and feel of the product is consistent across the various issues.

**Distribution:**

While the cheapest method of distribution would be for Councillors to deliver on their 'patch' this is time consuming but does enable Councillors to 'walk the ward' meet people and demonstrate their commitment to their role. Often it can be a way of picking up issues which might not otherwise be reported and/or noticing matters which should be reported which have become so familiar that residents have stopped seeing them.

If the alternative is to use a distribution company then (as with printing) three quotations for the work need to be obtained.

In connection with this report I made preliminary (without obligation) enquiries of Royal Mail, who can deal with distribution for the whole Parish Council Area on a ward basis. The cost for delivery would depend on the quantity and format of the newsletter. For example, A4, up to 20gms weight, 5mm thickness was initially quoted as £200 +VAT, but this could be increased to £431+VAT per delivery. The system seems to rely on a booking being made, with contact from the boundary match team whereupon a price can be generated.

Further enquiries would have to be made with other agencies to ascertain their ability to guarantee delivery (ringfenced to the Parish Council Area) and the cost involved so as to obtain a like-for-like comparison.

**Propaganda:**

In the recent past Council 'Newsletters' have received criticism from a number of quarters, not least the Government as being nothing more than 'propaganda on the rates'.

There are regulations in place which prohibit Councillors from using Council resources for Party Political Purposes, and it would be expedient for the Council to check with SALC as to the latest legal position for a Parish Council newsletter and what can and cannot be included in it. Please see Editing below for further comment.

**Editing:**

The assembly and arrangement of text and any illustrations will depend on a number of factors including the amount of space available for the text submitted. The finished product needs to be attractive and readable.

Potentially this could be outsourced to the printing firm commissioned to produce the work, but if contributions are to be solicited from all Councillors then someone will have to be responsible for reading submissions and possibly re-wording them to achieve some consistency of language and approach, as well as agreeing the layout and final proof.

This should NOT be the clerk. The Clerk already has a considerable work-load, and should not be placed in the position of sorting material, some of which may not be included if a consistent size of newsletter is to be agreed on. (This could impact if there is an accepted quotation for example say 2,000 newsletters, A4 gatefold, three times in one year if one issue needs to be A3 gatefold to include everything submitted).

Realistically, as one with a huge experience of newsletters both for Council and work-related issues, it is often the case there is too little material as contributions can be few and far between!

I would respectfully suggest that were the Council to proceed, then some mechanism for assembly and editing would have to be created, with some careful consideration of what if any, delegated powers might be given.

I would further suggest at that stage, an Editorial Committee of three persons, with one as Editor to be responsible for the creation of a draft newsletter, if possible, avoiding the old adage that 'a camel is a horse designed by committee'. There might need to be provision for

some kind of 'proof reading' to ensure that no content even by accident could bring the council into disrepute or potential legal action.

Members are invited to consider this report and respond directly to me by email.

Councillor M Bennett