

Tewkesbury Borough News review

2017



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Introduction / Background

Tewkesbury Borough News is the council's main proactive communications method, which reaches all households in the borough.

Following a member workshop held on 10 October 2016 to gain feedback on corporate communications, it was agreed that an Overview and Scrutiny to review Tewkesbury Borough News would be worthwhile.

The overview and scrutiny review working group was made up of the following members:

Cllr Blackwell; Cllr Dean (chair); Cllr Foyle; Cllr Hillier-Richardson; Cllr McClain; Cllr Stokes.

And the following officers:

Head of corporate services; policy and communications manager; finance manager; economic development and community manager; Joint Waste Team officer.

The review took place over three sessions, as described within this report.

The review session 1

The first review session took place on 5 June.

It was agreed that the scope of the project would include:

- The format of the publication.
- The frequency of the publication.
- Reducing the cost – or stopping it altogether.

The policy and communications manager presented the working group with information about Tewkesbury Borough News, including its background, current formatting and costs. Members were informed that:

- Tewkesbury Borough News is currently issued three times a year in newspaper format to each household in the borough.
- A 2017 snapshot survey (using Citizens' Panel) revealed 86% of respondents read it in part or in full.
- It promotes all council services
- It provides a significant level of cost-avoidance e.g. Joint Core Strategy and waste and recycling promotion.
- It costs us £23,977 per year.

During the session, a member showed the group a copy of the Cotswold Lion (the magazine of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and suggested a similar format would be an attractive option for Tewkesbury Borough News.

The communications and policy manager had received a quote from a local authority designer (referred to as Designer 1) and circulated examples of their work. The quote was £2891 per edition, with £1200 received back in advertising. The member indicated that the designer for Cotswold Lion (referred to as Designer 2) would also offset costs through advertising.

A member made clear it was important that we had a good understanding of what residents wanted from Tewkesbury Borough News – do they want a glossy magazine or are they happy with just a basic publication?

Another member suggested that we could do this through the Citizens' Panel and also ask them to give their opinions on what they find valuable information and what edition was most important.

As part of the meeting, the working group heard from three services areas. The economic and development manager explained that his team uses Tewkesbury Borough News as an important vehicle for communicating news in tourism, community sports, health and funding. He also added that people often contacted his team as a direct result of articles in the borough news, such as business grants and community funding.

The Joint Waste Team had submitted a briefing noted detailing why the newspaper is an effective communications method for them, and helped offset significant costs as a result of not having to do alternative marketing.

The finance manager, who reiterated that savings have to be made through this review, made the financial implications of this review clear to the group.

Following the first session, it was agreed:

- To carry out a survey with the Citizens' Panel.
- To bring back information on cost avoidance.
- To bring back detailed costings for Designer 1 and Designer 2, as examples of what indicative costs would be.

The review session 2

This meeting, held on 3 July, opened with the communications and policy manager revealing the outcomes of the survey to the Citizens' Panel.

The responses (60 residents) indicated that:

- The most valuable news was considered to be community news, waste and recycling, and community funding. Followed closely by JCS updates and tourism news.
- Respondents would also like updates on services not run by the council, including transport and crime, as well as ones we are responsible for such as major planning applications.
- The most important edition was considered to be spring (43%) then winter (30%) followed by summer (21.7%).
- There was a split in terms of preference for a magazine (46.7%) or newspaper (53.3%).

The group debated how many editions of Tewkesbury Borough News should be produced in future. Several members felt two editions would be sufficient – spring and winter.

Members agreed that, in terms of format, it would be crucial that the publication remains available online and promoted more prominently than it currently is.

The communications and policy manager took the group through the quotes obtained at this stage, which was for three editions per year.

	Magazine - design, print and delivery	Newspaper - design, print and delivery
Current designers	n/a	£8500 (£25,000)
Designer 1	£9175.10 (£27,525.30)	£5511.24 (£16,533.72)
Designer 2	£9830 (£29,490)	£6910 (£20,730)

Following a discussion, it was agreed that the next session would look at refined quotes for two editions and whether they would both offer a reduction for advertising income, as Designer 2 had not offered that upfront.

A member asked whether advertising could be sourced in-house and the communications and policy manager advised that, while it could be, it is extremely time consuming. The head of corporate services indicated that the majority of businesses advertising in the publication are not based within the borough, and the economic and community development manager suggested his team could help with this through their business contacts.

The working group agreed that cost avoidance is a major benefit of Tewkesbury Borough News. By delivering it to all households in the borough, the council does not have to pay for additional marketing and leaflets.

The working group was given a range of examples of cost avoidance, including for waste and recycling, whereby the council has saved money by using Tewkesbury Borough News to advertise collection round changes (est. saving of £5000) and a food waste collection campaign (£20,000 direct mailing savings). A member of the Joint Waste Team said: "The council has the driest recycling rate in the county – this is not only due to the wide range of materials collected but also due to the

residents' awareness of our scheme, which is promoted in Tewkesbury Borough News"

JCS consultations and updates is another area of cost avoidance, and the group was informed that for the past five years it is anticipated the council saved £3000 per year in media advertising. A member of Joint Core Strategy team "Tewkesbury Borough News has been an invaluable vehicle for us to communicate complicated and sensitive messages, without having to rely on the media which charges a significant amount for coverage."

The group debated the quotes, and how they compared to current costs – and it was suggested that it would be preferable to move to two editions but to adopt a magazine format. It was felt that residents would hold on to a magazine for longer, and would give a more professional impression of the council. A member suggested that it would make Tewkesbury Borough News fit for purpose.

Members were reminded that one of the main objectives of the review is to save money – the head of finance and asset management had included a procurement saving of around £7000. It was noted that the newspaper option for both designers would generate significant savings.

The policy and communications manager then took the group through a list of pros and cons

of magazine and newspaper formats, and the key points were:

Magazine format:

Pros:

- Can look professional
- Makes excellent use of photography
- Would introduce a new style for TBN.

Cons:

- Much pricier
- Can be mistaken for junk mail magazines
- Would not stand out as much as newspaper format.

Newspaper format:

Pros:

- More cost effective
- Projects more of a ‘news’ feel
- Is our current recognised brand

Cons:

- Cannot be as creative with design
- Does not look as glossy as magazine
- Paper has a disposable feel to it

Members felt that, in addition to the pros and cons identified, a magazine might be more attractive to advertisers and people would likely keep it for longer.

A discussion took place around the circulation of Tewkesbury Borough News. It was agreed that it should continue to be delivered to all households rather than being placed in prominent locations to retain the cost avoidance benefits.

At the end of the meeting, it was agreed:

- To move from three to two editions per year.
- To continue to deliver to every household in the borough.
- For quotes to be obtained from both designers for two editions rather than three.
- Service managers to be consulted in terms of the impact of moving from three to two editions.

The review session 3

The session opened with the proposed costings for two editions per year of each format from the two designers:

Newspaper format two editions per year:

	Designer 1	Designer 2
Design, print, advertising and delivery	£5461 (£10,922)	£5885 (£11,770)
Annual saving	£13,978	£13,130

* (cost in brackets is annual cost for two editions)

Magazine format two editions per year:

	Designer 1	Designer 2
Design, print, advertising and delivery	£11,167 (£20,834)	£10,205 (£18,910)
Annual saving	£4066	£5990

* (cost in brackets is annual cost for two editions)

The working group noted there were significant savings to be made from newspaper format, with savings substantially reduced for the magazine option.

The working group was presented with mock-up front covers from the two designers in both formats, and positive feedback was received for all options. A member expressed the view that a magazine had a psychological value which a newspaper did not – a newspaper is more likely to be thrown away.

To help the group decide on which designer to go with, the policy and communications manager highlighted that while Designer 2 offers good value-for-money, and excellent design, there were concerns that there was no resilience as it is a one-man business and the designer had limited experience with gathering advertising. Designer 1, on the other hand, could call upon a full team of designers, had lots of experience understanding design for local government issues, and there was the potential for them to support the council in other areas of communications and design in the future if it was required.

Following a debate, it was agreed that the benefits of working with another local authority with the added resilience of a team, meant that Designer 1 would be the preferred designers, subject to contract.

In terms of when the two editions should be produced, it was agreed that late October and March would be the best times of year as it would capture Christmas waste/recycling collections as well as budget information for the March edition.

A discussion took place around the tendering process, and it was confirmed that the new designer would be appointed on a 12-month trial basis following which the contract would be put out to tender.

Final recommendations

Having considered all the information provided during the review, in particular the costings and the mock-up front covers, it was agreed:

- To move from three to two editions per year to be published in March and late October.
- To move to a magazine publication.
- That local-authority Designer 1 be recommended as the preferred designer.
- That the new designer to be appointed on a 12 month trial basis following which the contract would be put out to tender.
- To engage with parish councils who do not currently submit news articles.
- To work to maximise advertising income.
- To introduce a one-click PDF online.
- To ensure the magazine is placed in a prominent place on our website.
- That the Citizen's Panel be asked for its views on the publication following circulation of the first edition.
- That a report be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the implementation of the recommendations and how the arrangements had worked over the 12 month period.