



**Prosperous Communities  
Committee**

**24 October 2017**

**Subject: Review of the County News**

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To agree a way forward for the format for communicating with residents

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

- a) Members agree that WLDC ceases the hard copy County News currently delivered in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council and replace the County News with a digital newsletter.

## IMPLICATIONS

**Legal: None**

**Financial: FIN-84-18**

- The current residents magazine budget for hard copies to every home is £21,500.
- The digital newsletter option is is £3,828 annually

**Staffing: None**

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out – please see attached document.**

**Risk Assessment:**

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None**

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

**Yes**

**No**

**x**

**Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

**Yes**

**x**

**No**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 West Lindsey District Council partnered up with Lincolnshire County Council five years ago to produce a county magazine – complete with eight pages of news from the district council. It costs £21,500 per year and was initially published four times a year.
- 1.2 Lincolnshire County Council reviewed the process due to pressure to make savings. The magazine was reduced from four to three editions to make savings in 2017/2018. There was a lot of uncertainty as to whether a hard copy would still be produced and the council explored alternative models to deliver the news. The County Council have confirmed they are continuing to produce a hard copy County News.

## **2. Consultation**

- 2.1 WLDC carried out consultation in the summer of 2016. It was printed in the summer edition of the magazine, sent out to members of the council, parish councils and to the Citizen Panel members
  - A total of 969 members of the Citizen Panel responded to the survey giving a return rate of 71.7%.
  - 36 Parish Councils out of 85 responded to the survey
  - 11 out of 36 councillors responded to the survey.
- 2.2 The results showed a large percentage of people wanting news delivered in an electronic format. A break down can be seen below:
  - 35.5% of respondents wanted news on the council website,
  - 33.7% wanted news via email alerts,
  - 17% through social media,
  - 43.2 % through an e-magazine and
  - 30.4% through local newspapers.

The consultation also collated 262 comments on how a magazine could be delivered in future. These were mixed many saying they like it and not to go digital compared to those who think in light of services nationally being cut it should go and we should stop doing paper copies. Although a lot of people said they like the format and that it is easy to read in its current format.

## **3. Benchmarking**

1. East Lindsey District Council has more than 14,000 subscribers as they used the changes to the garden waste to encourage as many people to sign up to the newsletter. It is mobile responsive so reformats the

newsletter for the size of screen. They do six newsletter (bi-monthly) and they do not do hard copies.

2. North Lincolnshire Council has created a digital newsletter, which comes out weekly. So far it has about 4,300 people signed up, although they still produce a resident's magazine called News Direct.
3. North Kesteven District Council spend about £30,00 in total to produce four editions a year and they are looking for a digital solution.

### 3.3 **Pilot**

The council has subscribed to a digital newsletter for a year called GovDelivery. This is currently being developed to trial new ways to communicate to residents. The council can email updates to residents and business the latest information. Residents can sign up to news that they want using the software. This will help them access information where ever they are as it is mobile responsive. This will all link back to the council web pages and social media pages to drive engagement.

- 3.4 The data collected from users will help the team gather insight. It will also help segment audiences to make sure the right people are getting the right news rather than a blanket sweep of communications. It will help to leverage social networks to strengthen our direct connections and amplify our social content with our social connectivity. The system could also help reduce inbound call, emails and face to face meetings from customer services because we can get info out more timely via the digital newsletter.
- 3.5 It costs £3, 828 a year and if it is chosen as the preferred channel of communication it would help the council make a substantial saving. The project relies on people to sign up and a lot of work will need to go into this over the next few months to build up subscribers as we do not have any data to transfer so we are starting from a zero data base. From a General Data Protection Regulations compliance people can subscribe and unsubscribe when they want to. It puts people in control of what information they receive. The council do not have to keep updating the data base.

## 4 **Finance**

- 4.1 Cost of County News in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council is £21,500

Cost of the Pilot for the first year £5,359, Gov Delivery Platform, training etc and £3, 828 on-going yearly costs.

Potential saving by replacing the CountyNews with the digital newsletter is £17,672 – depending how many editions the county council agree to print each year, 3 or 4.

## 4.2 Governance:

There is an Editorial Board which is an advisory panel, which make story suggestion for the County News and checks the content prior to it being published. Members of the advisory group include: Cllr Giles McNeill, Cllr Di Rodgers, Cllr Mick Devine and Cllr Angela White. The group agrees to meet virtually with all documents being sent to them to view.

4.3 If a decision is made to use the digital platform, the editorial board role will still be key to the service. One of the proposals is that if we do a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter, the board can still discuss news items and make sure we have a good political balance.

## 4.3 Advantages and disadvantages of each option

Platform	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>County News</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Template set up</li> <li>• Recognised partner</li> <li>• Delivery and procurement carried out by LCC</li> <li>• Gets delivered to every house in the district</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing costs            Reduced number of editions – makes it harder to get relevant news items in. (Lincs Show, awards etc miss the deadlines)            No way of really knowing if people read it-like it.            It's a one way communications channel – we have never received any calls from the publication of this.</p>
<b>GovDelivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More regular updates</li> <li>• Can measure signups and how many people open the email and what they are interested in</li> <li>• Link it back to the website</li> <li>• Pull automated data from the website</li> <li>• Residents can sign up to news that they want using the software. This will help them access information where ever they are as it is mobile responsive.</li> <li>• The data collected from users will help the team gather insight</li> </ul>	<p>Not a hard copy            Not delivered to every home in the district            Not everyone has good internet access</p>

	<p>into comms and the impact we have – to make sure this is adjusted accordingly to drive improvements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will also help segment audiences to make sure the right people are getting the right news rather than a blanket sweep of communications.</li> <li>• It will help to leverage social networks to strengthen our direct connections and amplify our social content with our social connectivity.</li> <li>• The system could also help reduce inbound call, emails and face to face meetings from Customer Services.</li> <li>• Financial savings not at the expense of news.</li> <li>• Better use of website</li> </ul>	
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**5. Recommendation**

5.1 Members agree that WLDC ceases the hard copy County News currently delivered in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council and replace the County News with a digital newsletter.