

Report to: Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development

Date of meeting: 16 April 2018

By: Assistant Chief Executive

Title: Publication of *Your County* magazine

Purpose: To ask the Lead Member to authorise the cessation of ESCC's printed magazine *Your County*

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to agree to cease publication of the printed magazine *Your County* after July 2018

1 Background

1.1 *Your County* magazine is published three times a year by East Sussex County Council and is delivered to almost every home in the county. It keeps residents informed of services, news and information from the council and celebrates the county's landscape, culture and people.

1.2 The cost of producing and distributing the magazine is partially offset by selling advertising in its pages but there remains a net annual cost to the council of around £69,000.

1.3 The Council has a statutory duty to keep residents informed of its services and activities but no channel or publication is specified.

2 Supporting information

2.1 Research suggests *Your County* has been valued and effective. Recent annual surveys have shown 80 per cent of residents have read the magazine regularly and successful advertising campaigns in its pages (for example, to recruit providers of supported lodgings for care leavers) help the council make savings many times greater than the magazine's cost.

2.2 However ceasing the printed magazine will result in a saving of £54k and help the Council meet its agreed savings targets in the 2018/19 budget. At the same time there are opportunities to keep many residents informed through less expensive digital channels and work is underway to expand digital communication with residents of East Sussex and adapt to their increasingly digital lives. Surveys shows that more than 90 per cent of East Sussex residents are regularly online.

2.3 The Council's services departments and communications team will also continue to use non-digital ways of informing and updating residents who are not online. An Equalities and Impact Assessment of the effect of the overall shift to digital communication has already been carried out and is attached as Appendix 1.

2.4 The existing *Your County* website is being replaced with an upgraded version to offer residents better access to online stories and features, with onward links to services. The new site is a key part of our digital communication with residents, integrating with social media, email marketing (including an existing *Your County* newsletter) and the council's main website. Work is also being done to identify the most effective forms of printed communication and other non-digital channels where these are still needed.

2.5 This approach is consistent with the recommendations of a board of the Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee which reported to Cabinet in January 2016. The board recommended prioritising a shift to digital communication as one of two sustainable future models for communications. The board recommended retaining *Your County* if it were possible to make the publication self-funded. Options to make the magazine self-funding have been carefully explored but this has not been possible to achieve. The main reason is that the advertising to editorial ratio

needed to offset printing and delivery costs would demand a magazine dominated by adverts with little space left for the Council's content: readership would inevitably decline sharply and the magazine would become much less effective as a result.

2.6 A final edition of the magazine in July would highlight the new website and include a range of other features, as usual.

2.7 If *Your County* were retained as a printed publication, savings of £54,000 would need to be found elsewhere to meet budget requirements.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Lead Member's approval to cease publication of the magazine would allow formal notice of contract termination to our printer. The final edition of the magazine would be distributed in July 2018.

3.2 Other channels will continue to help meet our statutory obligations to inform residents and in our move to digital communication channels will continue to support the Council's priority outcomes.

PHILIP BAKER
Assistant Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Warwick Smith
Tel. No. 01273 481354
Email: Warwick.smith@eastsussex.gov.uk

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

EQIA on the move to digital communication