

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEDIA AND ADVERTISEMENTS

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Economic Development and Corporate Issues Scrutiny Panel in relation to a review of council media and advertisements.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 25 June 2008, council considered a report of the Economic Development and Corporate Issues Scrutiny Panel in relation to a review of council media and advertisements.
- 2.2 The report was approved by council and referred to cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 The panel completed this review in May 2008. It was carried out -
- To examine the feasibility of generating income from the council's various media.
 - To gather views and reach conclusions about whether this would be a beneficial move.
 - To speak to other councils and agencies who have considered these matters and to learn lessons.
 - To seek the views of current users of the council's website and readers of Direct Magazine.
 - To consider other potential uses for the website and Direct Magazine.
 - To make recommendations to cabinet.

2.4 The panel made a number of detailed recommendations. A copy of these are attached as an appendix to the report along with its conclusions.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

6.1 The panel consulted other scrutiny members and officers and other relevant organisations in relation to the preparation of the original report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That the appropriate officers and cabinet member prepare an action plan for submission to a future meeting of cabinet.

SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – Nil

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

We are aware that a far-reaching review of the council's use of IT and technology is under way. A Digital Development Group comprising officers from across the council is currently drawing up a digital inclusion strategy. This will set out practical measures for the use of technology to improve residents' lives, provide more customer-focused services and to enable better access. The panel was impressed with the scope of the work under way, and would like to praise the group for its comprehensive, long-term vision.

Recommendation 1: The panel recommends that ongoing and co-ordinated support be given to the work of the Digital Development Group.

The council has been moving in this direction for several years. For example, it took the decision in 2005 to move its job vacancies from the traditional local and national newspaper-based approach to concentrate its advertising on its website. This has resulted in an impressive 70% saving to the council over the period 2003/04 to 2006/07. The council also achieved over a thousand responses in five weeks to a recent public web-based consultation on the future of the Baths Hall.

Advertising on the council's website

The panel has carefully considered the costs and benefits of advertising on the council's website. It believes that the potential income estimated by Lincolnshire county council would certainly provide much-needed resources. However, Lincolnshire County Council covers a much larger area and population. As such, it is clearly a much more attractive option as far as both local and national advertisers are concerned. It is estimated the level of income for North Lincolnshire Council would be maybe less than a third of the £50k figure.

There would also be initial set-up costs to enable the website to handle advertisements. If either council employees or an external company sold the advertisements, this would reduce the level of income generated.

Given the strong feelings by members of the public, and the limited revenue, the panel does not feel the council should adopt this course of action in the short term.

Recommendation 2: The panel recommends that the council should not pursue non-council web-based advertisements based on current public perception.

Despite this, we believe that it would be foolish to rule the option out completely. If Lincolnshire County Council raise incomes above expectations without a subsequent dip in public satisfaction, then it might be wise to re-evaluate the situation.

Recommendation 3: The panel recommends that dialogue with Lincolnshire County Council be maintained, and the situation be reviewed in the summer of 2009, taking into consideration income levels and website satisfaction levels.

Advertising in *direct* magazine.

Similar arguments exist when considering the situation with *Direct* magazine. Despite this, other councils do utilise advertisements in their printed media and the public consultation showed a shift in acceptability (see page 10)

Again, any income is likely to be limited and would almost certainly entail in-house or externally commissioned staff selling the space to advertisers.

After carefully considering all of the evidence, the panel believes, at the present time, the current approach is the right one. The panel is concerned about the potential for being seen to endorse specific products and the possibility of duplication of council-provided services. Members are also aware that local residents hold *Direct* magazine in very high regard.

Recommendation 4: The panel recommends that *Direct* magazine should not carry commercial advertisements.

Other advertising

As part of the review, members considered the costs and benefits of using council media to promote community or public sector organisations, in order to help address the shared ambitions for North Lincolnshire. As the council media is very well-utilised, this is a role the panel would like to see strengthened. As links between the council, health services, police, the voluntary and community sectors and others become closer, the panel feels this provides an opportunity for a more co-ordinated approach. Local people are, quite rightly, unwilling to accept the barriers that exist between public sector organisations and the voluntary and community sectors as an excuse for a lack of joined up services.

There are a number of examples where this could prove beneficial. Some fictional examples are listed below, for illustrative purposes.

- Local, non-profit making, sports and community clubs could highlight important dates or events that would be of interest to the public.
- Details of neighbourhood policing, priorities and community meetings could be published.
- If the council is working jointly with the fire service to tackle arson, this could be given space on the website and in *Direct*.
- An article in *Direct* magazine jointly written by the Primary Care Trust and the council could provide information to older people on how to prevent falls.

Clearly, there would be a need for some editorial guidance and for a mechanism to co-ordinate usage. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) brings together all key agencies, including the voluntary and community sector, so it would be sensible to utilise this group to co-ordinate content.

That said, it should be borne in mind that the magazine is first and foremost a publication for council services, paid for by the council taxpayers. The council must

maintain editorial control and the final decision on what does and does not appear in the publication.

We believe that, as there are wider benefits to the community, it may well be appropriate to offer free or heavily subsidised rates for not-for-profit or voluntary sector organisations placing information in the council's media.

In making this point, the panel recognises that the magazine already offers two pages in each edition for voluntary groups as part of the popular "What's on in North Lincolnshire" section.

Recommendation 5: The panel recommends that a more co-ordinated and inclusive approach to utilising council media is adopted, seeking guidance from relevant bodies if required.

Review

The panel gives notice that it will be revisiting this subject in 12 months' time to monitor progress on our recommendations.