
Decision Maker: **EXECUTIVE**

Date: **Wednesday 18 October 2023**

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: **OUR BROMLEY MAGAZINE**

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Chief Officer: Director of Human Resources, Customer Services & Public Affairs

Ward: Borough-wide

1. Reason for decision/report and options

1. This report sets out the background behind the launch of the Council's resident magazine – 'Our Bromley'. It outlines the rationale behind the magazine and why it was necessary to launch such a publication, to ensure that all residents, including the most vulnerable, are better able to access the Council's services. It also outlines proposals for a permanent magazine going forward.
2. The demise of printed local media in Bromley in favour of digital media has left a challenging landscape in which to deliver information to everyone in the Borough including those not digitally enabled.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 Agree that the Council produces a regular paper magazine called 'Our Bromley' three times a year to be distributed to all residents. There is flexibility to move to four editions a year, but for the moment, three is recommended as a more viable option.
- 2.2 Note that the financial implications are envisaged to be cost neutral, with the total expected spend of £180K over three issues, at current prices, being anticipated to be covered by advertising revenue.

- 2.3 Note that after a period of a year, there will be a review on the impact of the publication before continuing in future years.
- 2.4 Note the change of name of the Council's e-mailed newsletter for residents from 'Update' to 'Our Bromley'.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: N/A
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Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority (*delete as appropriate*):
 - (1) For children and young people to grow up, thrive and have the best life chances in families who flourish and are happy to call Bromley home.
 - (2) For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence and making choices.
 - (3) For people to make their homes in Bromley and for business, enterprise and the third sector to prosper.
 - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
 - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: The costs for the pilot edition were £58,710 made up of printing and distribution costs, with 14 pages of advertising attracting advertising revenue of £56,850
 2. Ongoing costs: At current prices, each edition of the magazine will cost £60k, anticipated to be covered by advertising revenue. It is anticipated that the magazine will be published three times per year. It should also be noted that any Council advertising will be drawn from existing budgets.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: HR, Customer Services and Public Affairs
 4. Total current budget for this head: £
 5. Source of funding: Advertising
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (*current and additional*): 1FTE
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: As with all Council communications, there is a requirement for the Magazine will be produced in line with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: None
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Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: None
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Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: N/A
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Impact on the Local Economy

1. Summary of Local Economy Implications: N/A
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Impact on Health and Wellbeing

1. Summary of Health and Wellbeing Implications: N/A
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (*current and projected*): Bromley residents.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not applicable.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 Local authorities have a duty to communicate with residents about what they are doing, so they can access services, and also show how they are spending residents' Council Tax payments.
- 3.2 In recent years, in particular, there has been a steady decline in the printed local media which has meant that it is difficult to reach everyone in the Borough, especially those who are not digitally enabled. In the past, local publications printed and delivered door-to-door would have featured Council press releases and stories as well as carried paid-for advertising booked by Council services with a need to reach people in the borough with their service offer. The need for printed communication was brought into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic, when it was necessary to produce printed material that was distributed door-to-door in order to ensure that people in the Borough received important information about the pandemic locally from the Council.
- 3.3 Prior to the start of the pandemic, there were three local newspapers, which were highly established within the Borough. Whilst they were operating within a challenging and changing commercial environment, they were nevertheless continuing to publish printed newspapers on a weekly basis. Now, only one of these newspapers is being published, with its limited printed distribution focussed on 'pick up' locations rather than directly through residents' doors.
- 3.4 Bromley Council has a number of successful communications channels which reach the majority of residents, including the website and other digital communications methods, such as social media. Channels also include the successful e-newsletter which is emailed to more than 70,000 residents who have signed up. These channels are not yet able to replace a method where all residents receive information directly in a printed, pro-active way and used alone could lead to digital exclusion for some residents. Outdoor advertising can potentially help bridge this gap, but this format does not enable more complex messages to be shared and, therefore, the potential is limited.
- 3.5 Many other local authorities in London already produce their own newspaper, newsletter or magazine, in a variety of formats, including some with the support of advertising. There are many different approaches to this, with a variety of designs and frequency of publications, but all distributing their printed product direct to residents. Bromley has not needed to consider this option in the past, especially given the historic strength of the local media, but now this has changed, it is time to consider future options to communicate widely with residents.
- 3.6 A 32-page pilot magazine was produced and distributed to all households across the Borough in the summer of 2023. The magazine included both editorial content, about the Council's services, and paid-for advertising, with the support of individual council services that need to generate wide understanding of their services, such as fostering and recruitment. External commercial advertising was also secured, including with other public sector partners. 'Our Bromley' magazine was also written and designed to signpost to other online content for further reading should residents want more information on a topic.
- 3.7 The name of the magazine, 'Our Bromley', was chosen as a title that encapsulates the ethos of shared responsibility and pride in the Borough, with the publication designed to have a 'quality' look to both attract sustained advertising interests and to encourage extended readership.
- 3.8 It is recommended that the name 'Our Bromley' is also adopted for the Council's e-newsletter, currently Update, with the emailed newsletter complementing the magazine and providing an opportunity for further communication with residents. More than 70,000 residents are signed up to the Council's e-newsletter with this being either through an approach to customer services or directly through the Council's website.

Pilot Issue Advertising Revenue

- 3.9 Even in the conceptual pilot edition, the proposition attracted enough advertising to broadly cover the costs and it is envisaged that future editions will also cover costs. It should be noted, however, that the pool of potential local external advertisers who can afford to buy into this proposition is limited. It is not envisaged that companies that are part of wider national chains will want to take space due to their more centrally generated advertising strategies, hence the revenue must come from locally based companies and organisations. It is recognised that this local advertising market will inevitably continue to evolve over time and this revenue stream will be uncertain. There will, however, also continue to be a need for public sector organisations to communicate widely, using door-to-door printed communications, such as 'Our Bromley' magazine or a similar vehicle and this needs to be considered alongside the local advertising market.

Options

- 3.10 There is potential to publish the magazine four times a year which many councils do, but by limiting the initial publications to three times a year, costs are controlled with all residents receiving regular communications from the Council, with an option to extend further if needed at a later date.

Preferred Option

- 3.11 Following the pilot magazine, it is recommended that going forward, Our Bromley magazine will be produced three times a year.

- The suggested schedule would be:
- Spring – delivered in the run up to Easter
- Summer/Autumn – delivered prior to August Bank Holiday
- Winter – delivered pre-Christmas

- 3.12 Consideration is also being given to an electronic version of the Magazine to enable it to be shared electronically as required.

Looking to the Future

- 3.13 Going forward, we will continue to evaluate the Magazine and seek further feedback as well as consider how the publication interacts with other communications mechanisms for residents.
- 3.14 It is envisaged that Our Bromley Magazine and Environment Matters will be integrated over the coming year.
- 3.15 Currently, the Council's waste contractor Veolia is contracted to deliver the Environment Matters newsletter twice a year including a waste calendar. Mutual agreement between the Council and Veolia will bring the publications together with the potential for savings to be made.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The costs for the pilot edition were £58,710 made up of printing and distribution costs, with 14 pages of advertising attracting advertising revenue of £56,850
- 4.2 At current prices, three editions of the magazine will cost £180k, anticipated to be covered by advertising revenue. It should also be noted that any council advertising will be drawn from existing budgets.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None – business as usual.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

As with all Council communications, the Magazine will be produced in line with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

7. WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS

- 7.1 Feedback has been received about the initial pilot edition of Our Bromley magazine, including positive comments and questions about the costs of producing the magazine. Whilst this is welcomed, it is recognised this feedback is limited and it is still too early to evaluate the impact on individual services, to gauge the success of the communication.

Non-Applicable Headings:	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[List any documents used in preparation of this report - Title of document and date]