

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

### **Report of Tim Leader, Deputy Chief Executive – Cabinet Portfolio** **Policy Development & Review Panel 2 – 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2008**

#### **OPTIONS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF BRECKLAND VOICE**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report provides information that will enable members to discuss the various options for distributing the Councils' Community magazine, Breckland Voice, and make recommendations for change if appropriate.

##### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council continue to deliver Breckland Voice with the wheelie bins, but pay an additional £650 per edition to provide postal delivery to properties sharing a bin. This cost could be met from within the existing budgets for the remainder of 2008/09; subsequently additional funding would be required. This would have to be met by either a virement from another existing budget, or a growth bid put forward into this year's budget process.

**Note:** In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

##### **3. Information, Issues and Options**

###### **3.1 Background**

- 3.1.1 At the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008 meeting of the Policy Development & Review Panel 2, members discussed the merits and drawbacks of the current arrangements for distributing Voice, and asked for a report to be prepared giving information about alternative methods of distribution.
- 3.1.2 Research has shown that there is a very strong relationship between how well informed residents feel about what their Council is doing, and their overall satisfaction with the organisation. As 'Breckland Voice' is the principal vehicle through which the Council communicates with its residents, it is important that Voice is seen as a high quality, informative publication, that the magazine reaches every resident and that as many residents as possible choose to read it.
- 3.1.3 As the principal vehicle communicating Council messages to residents, it is important that Voice is viewed as a high quality publication. The current method of distribution, whilst cost effective, has raised questions in terms of sending a negative message by association, and in terms of possibly increasing wastage. There is no evidence to support either assertion and, as alternative methods of distribution are significantly more expensive, research would need to be undertaken to obtain an accurate picture before changing to a delivery method that would incur significant additional cost. Should subsequent research confirm these assertions, members would need to balance the issues of image and wastage with those of cost.
- 3.1.4 It is clear from the Breckland Voice survey carried out earlier this year that residents rate Breckland Voice as highly informative, interesting and easy to read, and state that it is their preferred method for receiving information about Council Services and benefits.
- 3.1.5 The tone and content of the publication is clearly right for residents, this report looks at a number of different options for distribution.

## 3.2 Issues

### 3.2.1 **Past and current delivery arrangements**

3.2.2 Breckland Voice has been delivered with the wheelie bins for approximately 10 years. Before this, Voice was delivered by Royal Mail, using the door-to-door service. This proved to be very unreliable in our district and, after a Royal Mail delivery when a large number of households were omitted, the distribution method was changed and since then Voice has gone out with the wheelie bins.

3.2.3 55,000 copies of Breckland Voice are currently delivered by Serco to Breckland households. The publication is normally secured under the bin lid or rolled up and put through the handle. The magazines are polywrapped to protect them from weather and handling. For households sharing a bin, a bundle is left with the shared bin.

3.2.4 The delivery of Voice 4 times per annum is met as part of the Serco contract which runs until 2015. Although the cost of Voice deliveries is not specified in the contract recent discussions with Serco have determined the cost as 3p per copy. Should Breckland change the method of distribution, this would entail negotiating an amendment to the Serco contract.

### 3.2.5 **Delivery arrangements for other Councils' community magazines**

3.2.6 Having contacted 5 Councils who produce and distribute a residents' magazine, it is apparent that most have looked into the issue of distribution and made a decision based on a trade-off between cost and achieving a high readership.

3.2.7 Of the 5 Councils contacted, most use Royal Mail, taking advantage of bulk delivery discounts. Those using Royal Mail use Boundary Match - the 'door-to-door' service supplemented by direct mail to the split-postcode addresses. Although Breckland experienced problems with the 'door-to-door' service in the past; it appears that the service is more reliable now as current users reported only occasional problems. One Council contracted the delivery to a specialist agency.

3.2.8 Two of the Councils contacted had used the wheelie bin option in the past, but had changed to postal delivery.

### 3.2.9 **Summary and evaluation of various delivery options**

3.2.10 A detailed analysis of the pros and cons of various options is shown in Appendix 1.

3.2.11 Briefly, the current method of delivery is the only option that is both reliable and affordable. It has huge advantages in terms of both cost and flexibility. The issue of properties sharing bins not always receiving an individual copy can be overcome for the relatively small additional cost of £650 per edition delivery. Against this are possible increased waste and negative associations with wheelie bin delivery.

3.2.12 Alternative methods have the advantage of through-the-door delivery, but are significantly more expensive and are much less flexible because changes to deadlines cannot be so easily accommodated. Assuming the current frequency of Voice (10 issues per annum), even the cheapest of these options, Royal Mail door-to-door delivery, would increase the annual distribution cost by over £12,900 per annum. The cost would almost certainly be more as any changes to schedules incur substantial cancellation charges. This alternative is also not suitable for a number of other reasons. Door-to-door gives blanket coverage by part-postcode. As Breckland shares many of its postcodes with neighbouring authorities, copies of Voice would be also delivered to non-residents. With door-to-door, deliveries have to be booked up to 6 months in advance and changes to deadlines cannot be accommodated.

- 3.2.13 The Royal Mail option offering the best balance between cost and achieving the correct boundary coverage is the Boundary Match service. This service uses direct mail for postcodes that split over Council boundaries, and door-to-door for the remaining households. However, this would increase costs by £4,885 per delivery (£48,850 for 10 editions).
- 3.2.14 Whilst it is possible that some residents may think less of the publication because of its association with the delivery of the wheelie bins, this needs to be balanced with residents expectation that the Council should seek cost-effective solutions when spending council taxpayers money

#### 4.1 **Recommendation**

- 4.2 It is recommended that the Council continue to deliver Breckland Voice with the wheelie bins, but pay an additional £650 per edition to provide postal delivery to properties sharing a bin. This cost could be met from within the existing budgets for the remainder of 2008/09; subsequently additional funding would be required.

#### 4.3. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 4.4 This option will ensure delivery of Voice to all Breckland residents whilst demonstrating that the Council seeks the most cost-effective solutions when spending council taxpayers' money.

### 5. **Risk and Financial Implications**

#### 4.1 Risk

- 4.1.1 The recommended option does not carry any significant risk
- 4.1.2 If members wish to pursue an option that would entail dropping delivery of Voice with the wheelie bins from the Serco contract, there is a risk that Breckland may not be able to re-instate delivery if the alternative does not work out. This risk has major financial implications, but can be mitigated by ensuring that any amendment to the contract allows Breckland to re-instate delivery on the same terms as before.
- 4.1.2 If a significantly more expensive option is chosen, Breckland may be accused of wasting Council Tax payers money unnecessarily. This risk could potentially have major negative impact on the Council's image but it can be mitigated by undertaking research. If research shows that current arrangements lead to negative perceptions and increased wastage, then the Council can explain and justify its actions.
- 4.1.3 If a less or less comprehensive reliable method of distribution is pursued it is likely that there will be problems with the delivery of Voice and there will be negative publicity and feedback from residents. It is not possible to mitigate these risks other than by not pursuing such options.

#### 4.2 Financial

- 4.2.1 Proforma B. Attached.

### 6 **Legal Implications**

- 6.1 Delivery of Voice with the wheelie bins is part of the Serco contract. If wheelie bin delivery is dropped, the Serco contract would have to be amended. Serco may or may not agree to such an amendment. However, Initial discussions have indicated that Serco would be agreeable.

**7. Other Implications**

- a) Equalities: None
- b) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998: None
- c) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006: None
- d) Human Resources: None
- e) Human Rights: None
- f) Other: [e.g. Children's Act 2004] None

**8. Alignment to Council Priorities**

- 8.1 Breckland's community magazine, Voice, is the principal vehicle through which Breckland communicates to residents how it is delivering against all Council priorities.

**9. Ward/Community Affected**

- 9.1 Affects all wards

Background Papers

None.

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Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

*This is not a key decision.*

Appendices attached to this report:

*Appendix 1; Detailed analysis of pros & cons of different distribution methods.*

*Appendix 2 Cost of producing Breckland Voice*