

# HEREFORDSHIRE MATTERS SURVEYS FOLLOWING TWO PILOT EDITIONS

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

17TH JULY, 2003

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

To give views on the future of the newspaper published in two pilot editions (Herefordshire Matters).

### Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

### Recommendation

**THAT the continuation of the publication of Herefordshire Matters be approved on a quarterly basis in line with the first two editions and taking on board comments following consultation via Herefordshire Voice.**

### Reasons

Last year it was agreed that two pilot editions of Herefordshire Matters be produced and, following evaluation, a decision would be taken in relation to the future of the magazine.

### Considerations

1. Herefordshire Council has been involved in the "Connecting with Communities" initiative since January 2002. This initiative, supported by Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Audit Commission and MORI, looked at best communications practice among eight local authorities and explored the ways this best practice could be put to use in six authorities which faced particular communication challenges. An on-line communication toolkit was produced.
2. It concluded that Herefordshire Council has a good story to tell, but isn't telling it. One of the key recommendations was that the authority needed to establish a regular newspaper or magazine for its residents. Other recommendations included the establishment of a Council-wide Communications Network and the development of the Council's key messages. These have been achieved.
3. In June 2002 two focus groups were arranged to determine what people would want from a regular Council publication. These groups were drawn from members of

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
John Burnett on (01432) 260224.

Herefordshire Voice, the Herefordshire Partnership's 1,000-strong citizens panel. The panel is broadly representative of the population of the county and is used to gauge feedback on a wide variety of issues and is managed independently on behalf of the Herefordshire Partnership by Birmingham-based BMG.

4. On the basis of the feedback from these two groups (one of whose membership ranged from 18 to 44, the other from 44 years of age and upwards) two pilot editions were published – the first in September and the second in December 2002.
5. Early feedback was good with the vast majority of comments favourable about the style and layout of the magazine, its content and the cost of production and distribution.
6. The two editions were evaluated by a further two focus groups in February 2003 (same age groupings) and a questionnaire sent to all members of Herefordshire Voice. A summary of the questions asked and the key findings are included at Appendix 1 to this report.
7. The production and distribution cost for each of the first two editions of Herefordshire Matters stands at £21,510. A breakdown of these costs is laid out as follows:

ACTIVITY	QUANTITY	COST
• Printing	(76,000)	£ 5,075.15
• Postage	(76,185)	£11,869.62
• Polybag/maillort	(76,185)	£ 4,565.39
<u>Total cost:</u>		<u>£21,510.16</u>

8. Advertising could be sought to offset some of the costs of future editions – it is suggested that a maximum of 10 per cent of magazine (equivalent to 1.5 pages) be allocated for advertising. This would ensure that the impact of Council messages is not lost in a sea of adverts. Strict criteria would have to be drawn up to ensure any external advertising is from organisations with the same ethos as Herefordshire Council.
9. At this level advertising would bring in a maximum of £1,500 per edition if taken from organisations external to the Council (@ £1,000 per page). Internal adverts placed by directorates/divisions would be given a discount.
10. Should Cabinet approve the establishment of Herefordshire Matters the next edition would be produced September 2003.

## Risk Management

Not continuing with Herefordshire Matters will compromise efforts to improve public awareness and perception of the Council. This could, in turn, have a negative impact on the Council's next CPA in 2005/6.

Satisfaction levels with the Council and its services were measured three years ago the figure then stood at 59%. This will be measured again in the autumn this year - the Council's target is 70% but based on national trends this is unlikely to be achieved.

There is a well-established link between satisfaction and information provision. To cancel the production of Herefordshire Matters would only hinder the authority's bid to raise satisfaction

levels – although our Connecting with Communities’ consultant’s advice is that in the current climate nationally even a break-even figure would be considered a satisfactory achievement.

## **Consultees**

Consultation was carried out via two focus groups consisting of members from Herefordshire Voice

These took place in February 2003 and were conducted on behalf of Herefordshire Council by BMG, which runs Herefordshire Voice.

The first group consisted of 16 to 44-year-olds and the second of 45-year-olds and upwards

The general questionnaire went to all members of Herefordshire Voice

## **Background Papers**

None identified