



## **REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

### **COUNTY LIFE: EVALUATION REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update elected members on residents' feedback to the Council's new annual publication County Life.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. County Life was introduced in April 2014 as a replacement for the previous publication, County News, which was delivered quarterly. It also replaced the twice yearly What's On guide and the Council Tax leaflet that had been produced and delivered separately with the Council Tax bills each year.
3. The introduction of the Life series, which include County Life, Family Life and Your Life, was part of a Communications and Marketing initiative to ensure activity was delivered more effectively through audience targeting and achieved better value for money that saved the Council £178,000 each year.
4. County Life costs 24p per magazine to produce, print and distribute to all 349,761 homes in Nottinghamshire. The changes to a more cost-effective Council publication have seen the expenditure on publications reduce from £301,500 in previous years to an expected £138,800 in 2015/16.

#### **Costs**

5. Costs have been kept to a minimum in order to deliver the demanding savings target that has seen the publications budget reduce significantly over the past few years.
6. This year's edition cost £84,964 to design, print and distribute which is 33% higher than the launch edition, due to a forced change in supplier for the printing after the original printer stopped trading and an increase in postage costs from Royal Mail.
7. A demanding procurement exercise will to be run to try and secure the best deal for the Council for distribution for County Life that takes into account service performance as well as cost, whilst existing frameworks will continually seek the best deal for print and photography.

## **Income Generation**

8. The magazine costs are partly offset by the sale of advertisement space. The 2015 edition generated £13,976 in income which represents a 44% increase over the 2014 edition which raised £9,711.
9. The adverts, which were all in line with the Council's Advertising and Sponsorship policy, included Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue, The Language Shop, Nottinghamshire Police, Arden and Gem (NHS), free nursery places.
10. All of the advertising was sold by the existing team to contain any costs within the existing structure and in order not to incur any additional costs that would offset any income generated.

## **Evaluation**

11. A variety of evaluation mechanisms were used to gather feedback on County Life, including a reader survey, focus groups, digital engagement and monitoring of service use.

## **Focus Groups**

12. On 17 November 2014, a focus group was carried out at the MyPlace Folkhouse in Mansfield on the first edition of County Life. Nine residents who came from different areas across the county and represented a range of age groups were asked a series of questions on the product.
13. The overall response was that County Life was "useful, informative and well-presented" with 67% saying that they felt more informed about Council services with the same percentage saying that it provided good value for money.
14. The group particularly valued the "What's On" section and wanted to see more of this type of content. This point was addressed in the second edition with three times as many listings introduced.
15. Feedback from the group also recommended a less explicit link to the Council's three values (treating people fairly, value for money and working together) as outlined in the Strategic Plan, which readers perceived as self-promotion rather than helpful. This led to a change in this year's edition.

## **Reader Survey**

16. A total of 345 surveys were completed via the online form (43%) and the paper form in the magazine (57%). The results of the survey are summarised below:
  - 89% (308) liked the look and feel of County Life
  - 56% (192) of respondents found this issue of the magazine interesting
  - The three most popular features in the magazine were: what's on (307), competitions and prize draws (273), and news (221)

- 84% of respondents knew the product was produced by Nottinghamshire County Council
- A total of 214 respondents suggested additional content that they would like to see in future publications. The top three most popular suggestions were: more localised information (29 comments), more what's on (26) and competitions (10)
- Just 12% of respondents said that they would prefer to read County Life online with 88% saying that this would not be something that they would like to see
- A total of 191 responses were completed in the "do you have any other comments" section. The top four comments were: 'good' (62), 'informative and interesting' (21), 'unnecessary cost in light of budget cuts' (18) and 'lovely size' (12).

## Service take-up

17. In addition to generating income through advertising, County Life features can also generate service take-up and enquiries in areas that will increase income or lead to cost avoidance for the Council. Some examples are detailed in the tables below:

### Rufford Weddings

Call to action	Date range	Result
Visit NCC website for more information, calls to Customer Service Centre	7 April - 20 May 2015	Bookings for weddings at Rufford in 2015/16 increased by 16% at the end of this date range from the total number of bookings in previous year (from 55 to 64 bookings)
ROI – On average each wedding generates £5,000 (gross) of which £1,500 is profit. Multiplied by the additional bookings in 2015/16 has generated £45,000 (gross) £13,500 (profit)		

### Fostering

Call to action	No. of enquiries generated by County Life	Date range	Result
Calls to the fostering phone number	5	7 April – 21 May 2015	Four enquiries from Stapleford, Newark, Worksop and Newark have been sent the information pack and service is awaiting response. One enquiry from Nottingham was cancelled out as inappropriate.
The typical saving a Nottinghamshire County Council foster carer can save the Council is in the region of £124,935* per child, per year they are fostered. *this figure is based on savings made from the child not being placed in residential care.			

### I-work

Method of enquiry	Date range	Result
Calls to the Customer Service Centre	7 April – 21 May 2015	Four young people have enquired about the programme as a direct consequence of reading the article. Two of these have now

		successfully started the programme whilst the other two are going through the process.
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## Broadband

Call to action	Date range	Result
Check eligibility through postcode-checker on the Internet	7 April - 20 May 2015	Residents checking their eligibility on the NCC website rose by 201% from the same period the previous year (1,145 to 3,453). This period also saw an increase in enquiries (40) from residents regarding coverage of the programme. Actual take-up of the service rose from 12.52% to 13.47% (of the current 45,000 premises that currently are eligible for connection) this contributed to the March 2016 target for 21% of eligible premises connected.

## Digital engagement

18. The response to the question about whether they would prefer to read the product online was strongly in favour of the printed product at the moment. Just 12% of respondents to the survey said that they would prefer to read County Life online with 88% saying that this would not be something that they would like to see.
19. It is expected that this position will change in the coming years as people become more accustomed to reading newspapers and magazines online.
20. The County Life homepage on the website received 274 unique page views between 7 April and 15 May 2015.
21. Under the Equalities Act, the Council has a duty to consider the access needs of the public, both in terms of services and Information, so a completely digital solution will be difficult while we do not have universal access and acceptance of online publications.

## Summary

22. The feedback from the survey is encouraging with the majority of respondents enjoying the look, feel and content that indicates increased satisfaction while delivering significant savings in the publications budget.
23. The magazine aims to help keep Nottinghamshire residents informed and raise awareness of the variety of services that the Council offers by telling the stories of the people who use them.
24. Recall of the magazine and association with the Council remains high with 84% of those asked recognising that the publication was produced by Nottinghamshire County Council (an increase from the 78% figure the previous year).

## **Recommendations**

25. That feedback continues to be gathered about the reaction of residents to the publications and regular reviews take place to ensure that the Council continues to deliver value for money.

### **Other Options Considered**

26. To stop producing or printing the magazine and put all the articles or information online. Whilst this may be the longer term goal, the survey results suggest that this would not be welcomed and is likely to lead to a proportion of residents, many of them considered some of the most vulnerable people, not being able to access the information.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

27. To continue to keep residents informed about the range of services that the Council delivers and therefore how the Council provides value for money. How informed people feel is one of the key drivers of overall satisfaction with the Council.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

28. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Financial Implications**

All expenditure attached with these work streams will be contained within existing budgets.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that Policy Committee

- 1) Approves that the County Life publication continues to be evaluated with annual reports brought to Policy Committee

**Alan Rhodes**  
**The Leader of the Council**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Done/Clare Yau**

### **Constitutional Comments (SLB 01/07/2015)**

29. Policy Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

### **Financial Comments (SES 01.07.15)**

30. The financial implications are set out in the report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All