

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL****RESOURCES, PROPERTY AND THE ECONOMY CABINET PANEL  
THURSDAY, 15 MARCH 2018 AT 10:00AM****HORIZONS MAGAZINE AND EXTERNAL CHANNEL STRATEGY***Report of the Director of Resources*

Author: Andrew Hadfield, Head of Communications (Tel: 01992 556446)

Executive Member/s: David Williams, Leader of the Council (as responsible for the Resources, Property and the Economy portfolio)

**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 To inform Members of the Resources, Property and Economy Cabinet Panel on the approach taken to a phased reduction of Horizons magazine and the improvements to the wider external channel strategy.

**2. Summary**

2.1 Over the last few years the County Council's external communication strategy has increasingly embraced digital channels, in line with the growing trend in news consumption being online and instant.

2.2 This trend questions both the need and resource necessary for three publications of Horizons magazine a year.

2.3 As a result, it is recommended that the number of editions of the Horizon magazine, delivered to every household in the county, will be reduced from the current three editions to two in 2018/19 and just one in 2019/20.

2.4 A number of actions will be taken to ensure that the County Council still inform and engage key groups who may not currently access news online.

**3. Recommendations**

3.1 The Panel is recommended to:

- a) Note the phased reduction of Horizons magazine and gradually decrease the number of editions (from the current three) to two in 2018/19 and single annual printed publication by 2019/20;
- b) note the wider external channel improvements and extra short-term measures;
- c) note the implementation of the next steps and timescales.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 As part of the contribution to the 2018/19 Integrated Plan, Officers have committed to make annual savings of £100,000 from the Corporate Communications salaries budget - largely as a result of a restructure completed in October 2017.
- 4.2 Further financial savings of £50,000 in 2018/9 and £100,000 in 2019/20 from the printed publications budget have been agreed within the integrated planning process. To meet these contributions a reduction in the number of printed editions of Horizons is required.
- 4.3 Measures have been developed that would mitigate any potential adverse impact on reducing to fewer editions of Horizons and to ensure that “no-one is left behind” as the County Council moves more of its communications towards digital channels.
- 4.4 The plans to reduce the numbers of editions of Horizons and develop further digital channels have been informed by an independent market research survey (see headline results in Appendix 1) and three in-depth focus groups, carried out in autumn 2017. An initial Equalities Impact screening document has been completed, the results of which have been incorporated into section 11 within this report.

## **5. Horizons magazine**

- 5.1 In terms of providing a positive impact on the Council’s reputation, recent market research in the autumn shows that Horizons is still a useful tool for reaching a significant proportion of Hertfordshire residents (58%) with news and events. While the magazine does have a positive impact on value for money (+12%) and informed ratings (+18%) compared to non-readers, it is only having a marginal effect on overall satisfaction (+3%).
- 5.2 In terms of delivering key service messages, the research indicates that the recall of specific stories was negligible and it is likely that there is some confusion amongst residents with other district, town and parish council publications. While Officers and Members scrutinise the specific wording and detail in each edition, many residents said that they would ‘flick through’ or ‘scan for articles of interest’.
- 5.3 It is also incredibly difficult to demonstrate that printed publications have an impact in encouraging residents to take specific action (e.g. the take up of online school admissions). For example, it is not as easy to demonstrate whether an increase in traffic to a specific web page is the result of an individual reading Horizons magazine. This is important as digital channels provide simple and highly effective analytics to track behaviours as well as to make real-time improvements to campaigns.
- 5.4 At focus groups, of those individuals who said they preferred receiving a physical publication, the majority were often content to receive an e-mail direct to their device. A number of those same individuals mentioned that they thought printed publications were expensive

whereas email bulletins were not. They did not feel that they would be any less informed if fewer editions of Horizons were published. However, there was shared concern across all the focus groups for those people who are not online, if the County Council solely relies on digital communications in the future.

## 6. Phased reduction of the printed edition of Horizons

6.1 Officers do not consider that the impact of Horizons, as identified in the focus groups, justifies the overall cost of design, print and distribution. This is £180,000 net per year (or the equivalent to 20% of Corporate Communications overall budget).

6.2 Officers approach to making the necessary savings is to gradually reduce the number of editions (from the current three) to two in 2018/19; and then to one annual publication in 2019/20.

6.3 As part of this phased approach, Officers propose to review and test the impact of this decision through further market research after the first annual edition in spring 2019.

6.4 The next two issues (March 2018 / autumn 2018) will remain largely the same. From March 2019, the new annual publication will require far more significant changes see details in the table below:

	March and autumn 2018	March 2019 (and thereafter)
<b>Summary (Format and frequency)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to produce Horizons and maintain current A4 format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>produce the first 'annual' publication in new A5 format and similar to the traditional Council Tax and A-Z booklet of council services</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporate minor style and substance changes</li> <li>news content to reflect the new Leadership and also the reduction in frequency</li> <li>overall maintain current look and feel</li> <li>effectively communicate the reduction in number of print editions</li> <li>heavily promote the new digital channels (e.g. News Hub, Update Me)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a Leader's column</li> <li>key achievements from the previous year</li> <li>priorities for the next year</li> <li>key spending and council tax</li> <li>key services and contact information –in A-Z format</li> <li>a useful 'what's on' calendar for the whole year</li> <li>more call to actions to encourage residents to visit the website for more information</li> <li>promotion of Update Me as the way to stay informed via the News Hub</li> </ul>
<b>Distribution and collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>procure a new distributor to save costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it is hoped that further savings can be found by distributing via district councils along with the council tax bills</li> <li>work more closely with partners (e.g. with advertorials from the police and health) but also encourage support from district and parish councils</li> </ul>

## 7. External channel improvements

7.1 As part of the review of Horizons, several ways that the County Council can improve the performance of its other external communications channels have been developed. Overall, it is proposed that the County Council take a "digitally led" approach, with improvements being made on more traditional channels (e.g. media relations and other print channels). This strategy is set out in Appendix 2 and is based upon

increasing the reach of, as well as engagement with, County Council digital channels.

- 7.2 Central to these improvements would be an improved content management strategy. Currently, content management is through a “blog” that is displayed as a basic list of news stories. It is proposed to transform this into a much more user friendly ‘multi-media news hub’ (see Appendix 3) enabling Officers to continually publish a variety of content (including video) that is promoted on a daily basis via social media and weekly via the “Update Me” news bulletin.
- 7.3 A new monthly round-up of key stories will be called “e-Horizons”. This summary will also be promoted via “Update Me” and social media.
- 7.4 Evidence shows that a significant number of residents would still prefer to hear from the Council using traditional channels: with 56% saying leaflets or other printed materials; 54% saying posters in public buildings (e.g. libraries); and 42% saying they would prefer to hear from the County Council via street advertising. Accordingly printed summaries of “e-Horizons”, for use as summary posters on noticeboards in libraries and other key public buildings, will be provided and to encourage further take up of the online news hub. This will seek to bridge the “digital divide”, with the full detailed stories that are available online. The summary poster will further encourage residents to sign up to “Update Me” and social media channels.

## **8. Extra short-term measures**

- 8.1 As part of the County Council’s risk and equalities assessments, Officers have considered the potential impact of reducing the number of Horizons print editions.
- 8.2 Overall, the vast majority of residents (90%) are online and at focus groups, most residents were willing to access alternative channels (such as e-mail or social media). It is therefore appropriate to recommend the approach outlined above and to continue to invest in the development of digital channels.
- 8.3 Officers are also confident that this approach is appropriate, even for those residents (around 13% from market research (135 out of 1000 residents surveyed) who said that Horizons is their only source of information about the County Council. This is because this group does in the most part have online access, although they are not actively engaged with the County Council. However, it may be necessary to focus upon some specific geographical areas, with targeted information through traditional channels.
- 8.4 Officers have also identified those older residents (over 65 years old) have a higher print readership and a lower online access. For these groups of residents, Officers have considered a range of extra communications activities that could be implemented in the short-term, whilst continuing to increase the reach of and engagement with digital channels for this identified group.

8.5 Officers plan to run a full-page advertisement in either all the local district publications or in local newspapers across the county. This would focus on a mixture of key corporate news, relevant service campaigns and promotion of its digital channels (i.e. "Update Me"). This would be trialled in Summer 2018 and then reviewed to ascertain whether this is an effective measure for further use in Autumn/Winter 2019.

## 9. Future direction: more targeted, audience based approach

9.1 Market research, both by survey and additional focus groups, demonstrates that residents' preferences for information (e.g. channel, content, frequency) do vary significantly.

9.2 Through the delivery of the 2018/19 campaign priorities, Officers will develop a more targeted approach to the way the Council communicates with residents. This is aligned with the personalisation work that Officers are looking at and similar to the 'other people like you...' model developed by Amazon and other online companies.

9.3 Officers will use the most recent market research and the existing Experian MOSAIC profiling groups to create communication specific "pen profiles" for the audiences across Hertfordshire. The Corporate Communications team, as well as individual services, will then be able to use these when considering the best channels for their specific objective or project.

9.4 This may mean that Officers could seek to use similar, direct communication techniques for specific campaigns in Adult Care Services and Children's Services. Alternatively, the County Council may choose more broadcast channels for universal services such as Environment and Libraries; whereas social marketing techniques are increasingly being used within Public Health.

9.5 In addition, and linked to the above, specific responsibilities within the Corporate Communications team will be assigned by area, to provide localised content (e.g. to the local press and via district, town and parish councils) on priority campaigns. This will also help the County Council to engage and build deeper relationships in the local area.

## 10. Next steps:

Date	Event/Activity
19 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	Distribution of Horizons (as usual)
March/ April 2018	Launch sign up campaign for Update Me
May/June 2018	News Hub launch and promotion of new monthly e-Horizons
Early Summer 2018	Full page advertorial in either all the local district publications or local newspapers
Sept/Oct 2018	Horizons (revised content and distribution – same overall look and feel)
March 2019	New annual, council tax publication
Spring 2019	Further market research testing, feedback and review by the Senior Leadership

## **11. Equality Impact Assessments**

- 11.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.
- 11.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public-Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum, this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 11.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 11.4 The following potential impacts on those with protected characteristics under the Act have been identified as part of an initial screening assessment was carried out as part of the development of this strategy to ensure that no stakeholder – or specific protected group – was left behind. The screening document has shown small groups who may potentially face adverse impacts:
- 11.4.1 Firstly, there was a small amount (13%) of people who said they only receive information through Horizons. This has been more fully addressed in the mitigating additional activities – as well as the fact that these groups are mainly online and would therefore be able to receive this information in other ways.
- 11.4.2 Secondly, there is a decline in internet access by age (a protected characteristic) with 65% of over 65s online, compared to 90% of the total population. It is also important to acknowledge that those people who said they had a disability have a lower online access at 65%. There is not a significant difference in online access between men and women.
- 11.4.3 Finally, there is a higher level of readership of Horizons amongst those people who said they had a disability (65%) compared to those with no disability (57%). There is also a higher readership rate of Horizons amongst women (64%) compared to men (53%). Readership of Horizons is above 68% for residents above 65 years old (compared to 30% for those aged under 30).
- 11.5 There will still remain a single, annual publication which Officers believe will be an effective form of communication to all residents. This,

like Horizons, would be made available on request in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille and audio.

- 11.6 In addition, Officers have also sought to provide adequate mitigation within the strategy – particularly through the additional print publication within the local district publications or local press. The County Council will also be printing the new, monthly summary of news, called e-Horizons, printed and placed in Libraries, Day Service, Children’s Centres and Care Homes, where possible and are also planning to explore the use and benefits of local bus stop advertising and local print advertising.
- 11.7 Officers will complete a full Equalities Impact Assessment with the support of other services to use with the implementation of the wider external channel strategy.

## **12. Financial Implications.**

- 12.1 As part of the Integrated Planning process savings have been agreed from the printed publications budget of:
- 2018/19 £50,000
  - 2019/20 £100,000
- 12.2 The plans set out above will deliver in full these savings, whilst leaving some scope for funding additional measure to mitigate any adverse impact of reducing the number of Horizons editions.

### Background Information

None

## **Appendix 1:**

### **Summary Market Results October 2017**

The Council commissioned an independent market research company who contacted 1,005 residents on landline numbers, across all districts, both male and female and across all age ranges. The 18-29-year-old respondents had to be weighted as they were underrepresented.

Officers have also carried out several focus groups across different locations, including Farnham House and County Hall to get some qualitative analysis.

#### **a) General news and channel consumption**

- 90 per cent of residents use the internet (65 per cent of over 60s)
- 77 per cent reported frequently reading national newspapers when compared with 32 per cent reading local newspapers.
- The Daily Mail, The Times, The Telegraph and The Sun (Print) were the top read national newspapers; The Comet, Mercury, Herts Advertiser and Watford Observer were the top read local newspapers.
- 55 per cent of residents read printed news. This is down significantly (14 per cent) since the survey was completed last year by The Campaign Company. It is even lower at 38 per cent for the under 30s.
- 74 per cent of residents now read their news online. BBC News is read by 58 per cent of residents compared to 52 per cent in 2016.
- WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram are the top used social media channels (71 per cent, 67 per cent and 28 per cent respectively for those using the web). This has significantly grown since 2016.
- TV news is still an important tool, with BBC National News the most viewed broadcaster (76 per cent), followed by BBC London at 27 per cent.

#### **b) Hertfordshire County Council News and channel consumption**

- 86 per cent of residents have seen some form of information from the County Council in the last six months.
- 63 per cent have seen or can recall one of the County Council stories they were asked about (+5 per cent on the 2016 survey).
- 59 per cent felt that the County Council were neither perceived positively or negatively in the press.
- Horizons (58 per cent), printed leaflets (49 per cent) and the County Council Website (34 per cent) were the top three channels seen by residents in the last six months.
- 78 per cent of those who read Horizons, stated that they found it useful although almost half (48 per cent) who do read it, also said that they did not feel informed by the County Council.



- A significant number of residents have seen other traditional channels like posters in public buildings (31 per cent) or street advertising (25 per cent).
- 42 per cent of residents in the last six months have seen at least one of the digital channels and there is still significant potential to grow further with the fact that 84 per cent are on social channels and 90 per cent use the internet.

**c) Preferred channels and mitigating actions**

- The biggest gaps between the current consumption of the County Council information compared to their preferred channels are on the digital channels, with the website (at 56 per cent) the highest of these.
- Preferences for receiving information in the future about the County Council through more traditional channels, remains high. This was replicated in the focus groups with a number of people saying that they still like to hold something physical like a newspaper or leaflet and read at their leisure.

A significant number of these people also said that they would be quite happy receiving this via email or to go online for more information, when prompted.

- There is an appetite for county wide news stories with Robert Gordon's death being one of the most read on the County Council blog and engaged with on social media. Equally, residents want to know about hyper-local, service issues that are personal to them. They also feel the County Council could have a role in promoting local events (e.g. firework displays) even if the County Council are not directly funding them. Another top performing blog post was the top five budget things to do in Hertfordshire over half term. A benefit of this is that it would make the County Councils own channels more interesting for the corporate messages to be included within, therefore increasing the chance of these stories being seen.

## Appendix 2:

# External Channel Improvement plan

## Summary

In line with the wider County Council strategy, the County Council will focus on a 'digitally led' approach to communicating with residents. This means hosting most of the multi-media content first on the website and then promoting via digital, as well as traditional channels.

This is born out of evidence as 90 per cent of Hertfordshire residents use the internet and 74 per cent of residents now get their news online. This is an increase of 9 per cent since May 2016 and compared to 55 per cent who read printed news. Local newspapers are read by around a third of all residents (32 per cent), fewer than those who use the County Council website (34 per cent).

As consumers, the general public have become accustomed to wanting everything now, at convenience and at the touch of a button. The County Council have also found that Hertfordshire residents are far more selective in what they read, skimming over headlines and only fully digesting content that they feel is worth their precious time or shareable amongst their community.

To ensure the County Council are reaching the target audience in the most effective way this plan includes three main elements. Firstly, there needs to be an improvement in the County Council's digital channels to ensure effective engagement and reach. The County Council will also look at how it makes the most of a reduced but more targeted approach to printed publications. Finally, the County Council will also increase its partnership working to help engage a wider Hertfordshire audience not currently following channels.

## Improvement of digital channels

The County Council will do this primarily in three ways:

### 1) Develop and launch the 'News Hub'

Specifically, this means the County Council will:

- Develop the current list of news blog articles into a News Hub that can host a range of multi-media stories (e.g. video, animation and thumbnail pics) that are more accessible and easy for residents to navigate to find information relevant to them.
- Promote the daily top stories on the front-page carousel at the bottom of the website and share relevant stories across key service pages (e.g. 'you may be interested in..' type of content). This will be alongside the use of social media channels to push out these stories.
- Continue to promote the weekly key stories through Update Me and produce a monthly e-Horizons as an online magazine style summary for key campaigns and corporate news. This will also be circulated to key stakeholders, partner organisations (for their use in their publications) and printed in a poster format for use in libraries and other public buildings (see appendix 3 for visuals).

- Ensure all County Council content on the web is mobile friendly and in line with the digital style guide (e.g. using plain English and friendly tone of voice).

## **2) Accelerate the reach of County Council digital channels:**

The County Council currently have one of the largest presences on social media compared to other County Councils. The recent research found that those who had seen County Council activity were much more likely to be satisfied with Hertfordshire County Council. However, getting specific messages seen and heard on social media is getting harder through increased traffic and particularly paid content.

A number of residents at focus groups have said that it simply had not occurred to them to follow the County Council on social media or sign up to an e-newsletter. The County Council also know that younger residents are unlikely to follow the Council directly. However, they would read content if recommended by a friend or third-party influencer or advocate, including the local or national media.

The below sets out specific areas for improvement:

### **A. Social media targets and actions**

- Maintain followers to over 100,000 across all social media channels (with a particular focus on Facebook) to gain 600,000+ impressions per month.
- The County Council knows that it cannot rely on increasing the reach of channels alone to get out messages, for example four per cent of residents have seen Hertfordshire County Council's Facebook account but 67 per cent have a Facebook account. The County Council will therefore work in partnership with other stakeholders (for example local authorities as well as community groups) to push out content to an even greater audience (for example via Twitter direct messages and Facebook pages or private forums) to amplify and share messages across their channels.
- Invest wherever possible in paid for advertising to target specific posts, in particular for the take-up of services and key campaigns.

### **B. E-newsletter targets and actions**

- The County Council will aim to double the number of new subscribers from 1,500 per month to 3,000 per month in order to deliver the target of 100,000 over the next year by April 2019 (currently 77,000). The County Council have a separate, more detailed action plan to achieve this, including: direct e-mail, social media adverts and a dedicated 'sign-up' campaign.
- The County Council will also promote events and weekly content via social media.
- The County Council will work in partnership with providers of other e-newsletters in Hertfordshire to cross promote news, such as through districts and town councils; as well as the police and health services.

## **3) Continue to retain strong digital engagement rates**

Simply increasing the number of followers or subscribers will not be enough to gain meaningful awareness on digital channels.

To maintain strong engagement, the County Council will promote the below mixed content via a number of channels:

- **Key decisions/ corporate priorities:** these are often the most important to the organisation and help to build reputation for the authority (e.g. Cuffley Camp, Nascot Lawn, Ringway contract, Growth and Infrastructure). The County Council will continue to manage these as effectively as possible with advanced planning with the key services and the monthly Leader/Deputy/CLG process.
- **Services news:** this type of content also helps to build reputation but will be often more important to directorates for specific reasons, such as online school admissions or social care recruitment. Through experience, Officers have found that stories with a people focus which use case studies wherever possible (e.g. front-line workers such as gritters, care workers), allow Officers to get content across in a more user-friendly manner and with better engagement.
- **Timely and useful information:** this should seek to share user-generated content (especially retweets or partners and community groups) to provide relevant information about Hertfordshire news and events but does not always have to be wholly delivered by the County Council (e.g. festive events). This is primarily so that County Council channels are more likely to be engaging and enable the Council to be able to get across more corporate and service messages on other occasions without the risk of being unfollowed if the content becomes too 'dry'. The County Council would look to do this on a daily basis through social media; a weekly events story in Update Me; and a competition in the e-Horizons monthly round-up.

#### **A. Social media activity**

- Invest small financial amounts (e.g. £100) wherever necessary in paid-for-advertising to deliver specific targeting of posts, in particular for the take-up of services.
- Increasing the mix of content as above and engagement through a content calendar managed within the team.
- Use Instagram as a tool to celebrate Hertfordshire as a place to live with a few corporate messages weaved into the narrative. Also include guest takeovers to promote certain initiatives (e.g. physical activity) or key figures (e.g. David Williams 'My week in pictures' or a 'Day in the life' profile of frontline workers); and share posts from partner organisations such as the district and town councils.

#### **B. E-newsletter activity**

- The County Council have an above average open rate (40 per cent) which is almost double the industry average for its sector (21 per cent). The County Council will aim to retain this open rate alongside an increase in subscribers;
- The County Council will explore the use of local versions of e-bulletins in the future.

## Printed publications

The County Council need to consider the following four areas:

### 1) Horizons magazine

- The County Council will keep the next two issues (March 18 / Autumn 18) the same but procure an alternative, cheaper distributor.
- From March 2019 and thereafter, the County Council will produce a smaller, A5, annual publication that goes out with council tax letters. It will be similar to a traditional council tax and A-Z booklet of council services (see below:)

	March and Autumn 2018	March 2019 (and thereafter)
<b>Summary (Format and frequency)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue to produce Horizons and maintain current A4 format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• produce the first 'annual' publication in new A5 format and similar to the traditional Council Tax and A-Z booklet of council services (see appendix 3 for visuals)</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• incorporate minor style and substance changes</li> <li>• news content to reflect the new Leadership and also the reduction in frequency;</li> <li>• overall maintain current look and feel</li> <li>• effectively communicate the reduction in number of print editions</li> <li>• heavily promote the new digital channels (e.g. News Hub, Update Me)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a Leader's column,</li> <li>• key achievements for the previous year</li> <li>• priorities for the next year</li> <li>• key spending and council tax</li> <li>• key services and contact information, in A-Z format</li> <li>• a useful 'what's on' calendar for the whole year</li> <li>• more call to actions to encourage residents to visit the website for more information</li> <li>• promotion of Update Me as the way to stay informed via the News Hub.</li> </ul>
<b>Distribution and collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• procure an alternative distributor (non –Royal Mail) to save costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is hoped that further savings can be found through distributing via district councils with the council tax bills</li> <li>• Work more closely with partners (e.g. with advertorials from the police and health) but also encourage support from district and parish councils</li> </ul>

### 2) Additional targeted publication(s)

- As part of market research, Officers have identified a group of around 13 per cent of residents who currently only get their information from Horizons.
- Most of this group live in North Herts, Hertsmere and Stevenage, which are areas covered by The Comet, The Mercury, Royston Crow, Borehamwood Times, Welwyn and Hatfield Times. The MOSAIC profiles these residents fall into mostly are Suburban Stability, Prestige Positions and Municipal Challenge. However, there is a broad geographical spread across the county.
- Generally, they range from 56-65 years in age, the majority of whom are online, surfing the internet and from national insights (Ofcom) are more likely to be using tablets rather than smart phones.
- The County Council are therefore planning to run a full-page advertorial in either all the local district publications or local newspapers across the county. This would focus on a mixture of key corporate news, relevant service campaigns and promotion of digital channels (i.e. Update Me).
- Officers will trial this activity in the summer of 2018 and review whether this is an effective measure for further use in Autumn/Winter 2019.

### **3) Poster sites and digital display boards (e.g. Libraries)**

A number of residents said that they would still prefer to hear from the County Council via traditional channels with 56 per cent saying leaflets or other printed materials; 54 per cent saying posters in public buildings (e.g. Libraries); and 42 per cent who said they would prefer to hear from the County Council via street advertising.

The County Council will make more use of existing noticeboards in libraries to build awareness of key campaigns and service information with more details available online.

Each month Officers will update a poster on the key news from across the county taken from the multi-media news hub (i.e. the new monthly e-Horizons) as well as promoting the sign up to County Council digital channels, such as social media and e-newsletters.

Every quarter, the County Council would make use of access to bus shelter advertisements for priority campaigns – including the promotion of digital channels (e.g. Update Me sign up).

For specific service-user communications and consultations, the County Council would continue to advise that direct mail correspondence (e.g. letters and leaflets) and direct e-mail, remains the most effective way of engagement.

### **4) Traditional media relations**

With the convergence of online and print news - often shared via social media and stories frequently broken by members of the public, it is now more important than ever to ensure that the content the County Council provides to journalists is also posted directly online.

Print news is declining significantly (14 per cent) since last year but still 55 per cent of residents read printed news – this reduces further for the under 30 age group (38 per cent).

Overall, it is difficult to compare local media readership as a slightly different question was asked in May 2016: a third of all residents now say they read a local paper in the past week; compared to over half of residents saying that they read at least one local paper every month in May 2016.

What is clear is that the best read local publication, The Comet (11 per cent) have maintained their strong readership base while the next best others (such as Herts Advertiser, Mercury and Watford Observer have all struggled now at around 5 per cent). Instead they are focussing more content online, while reducing print editions and they have been criticised for producing less genuinely local content.

Therefore, Officers know that traditional media is still an important channel for the County Council to use when promoting different types of content. To maintain and improve the County Councils media offer, the County Council will:

- **Take a more proactive approach:** opportunities to have a greater regional and national voice on key issues. In addition to developing a public affairs strategy, Officers will look for more regular opportunities on key reputational issues such as growth and infrastructure.
- **Take a stand:** Officers have demonstrated that there is a positive impact to take on the bigger, more controversial stories, such as HVCCG cuts to social care funding in 2017 where the County Council were able to get the Councils side of the story across.
- **Focus on the publications that matter:** Officers will continue a proactive approach to the most important media. This does include providing exclusive content and localised case studies to the: Comet, Mercury, Watford Observer, Herts Advertiser and BBC Local news (online and radio). The County Council also need to work harder to engage with national newspapers, such as the Daily Mail, Times, Telegraph and The Sun, as well as BBC National and BBC London for TV news.
- **Focus on the issues that matter:** Officers will continue to manage the reputation of the county council through effectively handling the most important and often controversial decisions being made by the council.
- **More efficient response service:** to enable the team to be more proactive, while responding to the ever-increasing pace of reactive enquiries, Officers will implement a prioritised reactive media approach based on the publications and issues that matter. This will also include the creating a suite of pre-approved holding statements, to provide comment when given incredibly tight deadlines as well as for critical incidents.
- **Team resourcing:** within the Press Office, the County Council will have the capacity to focus on the key proactive, corporate priority each day as well as managing the main reactive stories. In addition, the County Council will refocus the wider services team to each pitch at least one positive story per week to the local media, trade and national media outlets. The County Council will also commit on a weekly basis to deliver one multi-media story per Comms Officer, searching out 'good news' opportunities within the services and looking for greater news hooks to share.
- **Look for extra opportunities for coverage:** The County Council will look at increasing its presence with key media by using media partnerships either on a regular basis (such as a regular column, letters pages and radio panel discussions).
- **Be social and shareable:** as with other channels, the County Council will look to repurpose content from the news hub but also to focus on stories that have a strong human-interest angle and are shareable. To maintain and improve relationships with journalists, and be a useful conduit for information, the County Council will share more local news where appropriate, including Hertfordshire County Council stories in the media.
- **Evaluation:** while the media landscape in Hertfordshire is shifting more towards online news rather than print, the current media scoring system is not reflecting this shift. Following the current market research, the County Council will amend its scoring system based on the outcome of the research. This will give Officers a more accurate view of how residents consume media and to focus more on the media strategy when selling-in stories.

- **Media training:** The County Council has already begun implementing a programme for senior officers and executive members across the organisation. This is to ensure continuing broadcast coverage on radio and TV for both positive stories and expertly handle interviews during crisis situations. The County Council will also look to provide standard in-house training for frontline officers when they are increasingly used as case studies.

## **Localised approach and greater partnership working**

In addition to a number of specific improvements already mentioned and in response to some of the research, the County Council knows that there is a need for more localised and targeted information.

The County Council already works closely with a range of organisations (e.g. district councils, NHS and police) and will look to develop a genuine partnership approach for the annual printed publication.

Where possible, the County Council hope to be able to provide useful, localised information. For example, Sawbridgeworth Town Council, as part of the research, that they would happily promote Hertfordshire County Council information about local road closures or nearby events if it was provided to them.

The County Council will continue to build on the existing stakeholder database that was developed by a group of graduate trainees in the autumn to ensure that the County Council have a comprehensive list of key digital and traditional 'influencers' split by district. The County Council will also build on relationships with communications colleagues in partner organisations and develop methods for cascading information to residents through their communications channels on a monthly basis, including the use of downloadable content for key campaigns each quarter.

The County Council will also consider assigning specific responsibilities within the Corporate Communications team by area, to provide localised content (e.g. to the local press and via district, town and parish councils) on priority campaigns but also to engage and build deeper relationships in the local area.



## Appendix 3:

### Visuals of proposed developments

1. Online news
2. Monthly e-magazine
3. Annual publication

#### 1. Online news:

Currently the media centre has been re-purposed as a blog page for news content.

### Media centre

#### Latest news

[Untitled22Final chance to have your say on transport plan for Hertfordshire](#)



[Get hitched in Hertfordshire in 2018](#)



#### Guidance for journalists and media

- [Council meetings](#)
- [Planning applications](#)
- [Consultations](#)
- [Filming on highways](#)

#### Contact

[press.office@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:press.office@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

01992 555537 (Monday to Friday 8.30am - 5.30pm)

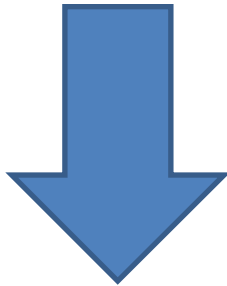
For out of hours urgent media enquiries please call 07850 007382.

#### Twitter



Herts County Council  
@hertscc

Our gritters have been busy over the winter period and will be out again tonight @herts\_highways #Grittwitter



The screenshot shows the Thomson Media Centre website with a navigation bar (HOME, NEWS, IMAGES, VIDEOS, FACTSHEETS, CONTACT) and a 'LATEST NEWS' section. The news items include:

- August 2017:** 'TWO WEEKS TO TANGO: TOP TEN THINGS YOU CAN LEARN I...' (with image of people swimming).
- August 2017:** 'Statement on Barcelona Attacks 18/08/2017' (with Thomson logo).
- August 2017:** 'THOMSON CELEBRATES EXAM RESULTS WITH A SELECTION O...' (with image of a person celebrating).
- August 2017:** 'LARRY LAMB MEETS 'CRUISE MATES'' (with image of Larry Lamb).
- August 2017:** 'UK CHILDREN ARE MISSING THE MARK ON SWIM TARGETS' (with image of children in a pool).
- July 2017:** 'THOMSON UNVEILS A BRAND NEW STYLE OF TRAVEL STORE' (with image of people in a store).

With development it can become improved News Hub

## 2. Monthly E-Horizons and printed as a poster in public buildings (e.g. libraries)



**Hertfordshire**

# News from the county council

**A message from the Leader of the Council**



As 2018 begins, I want to say a huge thank you to everyone, including many county council workers, who worked or volunteered across the festive season to make sure residents were kept safe and able to access the services they need. We are all very grateful to them and hope they also found time to spend with their families.

**David Williams,**  
Leader of the Council

**Get in touch**



Visit us online for 24/7 support at:  
[www.hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk)



Our key services are also available by phone:  
0300 123 4567  
0300 234 5678  
0300 456 7899

## Top Stories this month



Our Family Safeguarding team won a prestigious award.



We completed several large roadworks projects to keep the county moving.



Our libraries have continued to flourish

## What's on?



Join us at the Hertfordshire County Show



Have a go on our new Aerial Ladder Platform at the fire station open day.



The Tour of Hertfordshire takes place in July

### 3. Annual Printed Publication

- Sent every March
- Smaller, A5 booklet
- Distributed with the council tax letters

# Leader's column

from Councillor David Williams



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Praesent hendrerit bibendum purus, nec maesuada felis pulvinar quis. Cras ut massa eleifend, pretium lorem non, pharetra leo. In at suscipit nulla. Aenean at accumsan mauris, non tristique risus.

Proin maximus sem et erat fermentum lobortis. Donec ultrices laoreet augue a vehicula. Integer libero odio, dictum quis ipsum ut, mattis viverra risus. Sed iaculis laoreet elit, vel posuere.

Suspendisse porttitor, augue eu tempor imperdiet, augue ex pellentesque tunc, at tulum purus diam non felis. Nulla egestas erat id tristique fermentum.

## A year to remember

what we achieved in 2016/17

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



**Opportunity to be HEALTHY & SAFE**



Nulla vitae eu metus, lacinia vehicula et vitae augue. Nulla quis lorem non erat semper tristique eu non necque.

**Opportunity to PROSPER**



Nulla vitae eu metus, lacinia vehicula et vitae augue. Nulla quis lorem non erat semper tristique eu non necque.

**Opportunity to THRIVE**



Nulla vitae eu metus, lacinia vehicula et vitae augue. Nulla quis lorem non erat semper tristique eu non necque.

**Opportunity to TAKE PART**



Nulla vitae eu metus, lacinia vehicula et vitae augue. Nulla quis lorem non erat semper tristique eu non necque.