

Full Council

PR & Communications – Feedback Communications Working Party

1	PROJECT PROPOSAL
1.1	To consider feedback from the Communications Working Party.
2	INTRODUCTION
2.1	<p>During October to November, the Parish Council commissioned 20 hours media and communications work from AbbyP PR.</p> <p>The Parish Council requested the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - website to be updated and simplified - Councillor profiles to be updated and improved - Social media accounts to be reignited with new posts - Branding to be reviewed including email signatures/noticeboards and a review of options for a newsletter/Link Magazine
3	COMMUNICATIONS WORKING PARTY FEEDBACK
3.1	<p>The Communications Working Party met on Tuesday 16 November 21 to review this approach. The Working Party agreed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the website is more accessible with friendlier language and fewer pages to navigate - formatting of information has been unified for consistency e.g. emails, phone numbers - social media accounts are now active with simple and engaging posts - AbbyP PR has negotiated a new price with the Link Magazine for a 12 issue commitment
4.	LINK MAGAZINE
4.1	At the request of the Parish Council AbbyP PR has liaised with the Link Magazine to review the relationship and secure a better price. A Proposal is attached.
4.2	<p>In the past the Parish Council has paid £773 plus VAT the new price is £540 per calendar month or bi monthly.</p> <p>Under the new arrangement, there would be more features including call outs and indexing on the front page.</p>
4.3	<p>It is estimated that it would need 4-5 hours creative input to create the content for each issue/page.</p> <p>For a single 12 month period on a bi monthly basis this would require funding estimated at</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £3240 six editions of the Link Magazine - £1500 editorial input (estimated) <p>Total: £4,740</p>
5	TO RECOMMISSION
5.1	In the last 12 to 24 months, the Parish Council has received mixed feedback

	<p>on its communications. Of these, it has been noted that there has been some negative feedback on the cost and quality of the Parish pages in the Link Magazine as well as the perception of a low public profile of Councillors and the Parish Council.</p>
5.2	<p>The trial of 20 hours of professional media and marketing inputs has shown that it is possible to champion a new approach that is more open to engagement. This has a positive impact on the perceptions and expectations of local residents and provides a link between the staff, Councillors and the public.</p>
5.3	<p>The Working Party is proposing that the Parish Council commits to a longer term investment in order to fully establish a style, pattern and reliable frequency of communication. It is estimated that 4-5 hours per week would allow for preparation of the Link Magazine inputs alongside regular updates on the website, social media as well as making use of existing channels such as noticeboards, school newsletters/bookbags, communal spaces/waiting rooms and other free sources.</p>
5.4	<p>At the current rate, a commitment of 5 hours per week would be a cost in the region of £13,000 per annum.</p>
6	BUDGET, FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS
6.1	<p>Consideration must be given as to the benefit residents in West Swindon and the impact on the delivery of services that are effective and appropriate. The initial investment has demonstrated that within an allocation of 20 hours it has been possible to make visible changes and create momentum and dialogue. The 20 hours has also demonstrated that the momentum needs ongoing resourcing in order to be sustained well.</p>
6.2	<p>Commissioning professional services allows for a reduced number of hours than employing a member of staff. Commissioning allows for lower risk than direct employment; whilst the rate of pay per hour is higher there is no cover for pension contributions, sickness absence or annual leave. Commissioning also enables the Parish Council to seek very specific skills and inputs.</p>
6.3	<p>The Parish Council has an existing budget for professional fees at £3,000 per annum. This has covered property services, HR services and legal advice. This budget would need to be increased in the future to incorporate communications/pr professional fees.</p>
7.	RECOMMENDATIONS
7.1	<p>That Council notes the information in this report and details any further steps to be taken.</p>
7.2	<p>That consideration is given to advertising an opportunity to provide the Parish Council with professional marketing, communications and media support at 4-5 hours per week renewable on a 12 monthly basis for up to 36 months.</p>

Paula Harrison,
Parish Manager