

FIPPENNY NEWS- A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR OKEFORD FITZPAINE PARISH COUNCIL

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper summarises the current situation with Fippenny News and presents options for the future direction of the community magazine for Okeford Fitzpaine.

2. Background

- 2.1 Fippenny News has been the community magazine for Okeford Fitzpaine parish for many years, including before World War Two. It is a record of the social history of the community. The magazine was originally produced under the leadership of St Andrew's Church, Okeford Fitzpaine until 2016 when it transferred to the parish council and the current editor.
- 2.2 The current editor established an online version of the magazine and website, and has also implemented archiving processes which are the minimum legal requirement of the British Library. The magazine is also translated into media for blind people. Since lockdown, the magazine has taken a more community magazine approach as opposed to a religious publication.
- 2.3 Scribus (a free, cross-platform and professional standard document layout application) has been used to allow editorship to be transferred in a cost-effective manner. Access to Python scripting has allowed automation of part of the editing workflow and integration of the event lists in the magazine with those on the Fippenny News website. This automation was not possible with the previous software (Microsoft Publisher). The editor also produces the magazine in a format that can be printed immediately. Sending documents that are unformatted will incur additional expense from the printers as they would need to typeset and format.
- 2.4 Fippenny News is produced, edited and distributed entirely by volunteers. It is currently produced on a monthly basis in printed and online versions. A free print magazine is distributed to the entire parish two or three times a year.
- 2.5 Various requests for volunteers have been made including the opportunity to gain media skills as unpaid work experience for journalism qualifications.
- 2.6 Prior to lockdown, distribution and fee collection was handled by two local residents with a network of local distributors. The pandemic presented an opportunity for them to stand down and the current distribution is now handled by Cllr Steve Corben.
- 2.7 Editing the magazine takes in excess of 30 hours of unpaid work each month.

3. Current Issues

3.1 The situation about the future of Fippenny News has become critical for several reasons:

- Rising costs of printing as the current printer has increased charges by 10%.
- A lack of volunteers or people willing to be trained in editing techniques has meant the burden on the editor in particular has become onerous.
- The distribution lead also wishes to stand down due to other commitments.
- the editing and distribution workload with Fippenny News has become unsustainable.
- some content is repetitive, mostly from people wanting their content to appear more than once.
- some people are unable to send material in an acceptable format which increases editing time.
- increased cost to the parish council of printing and from unpaid subscriptions.

4. Finance Position

4.1 Fippenny News costs 50p a printed copy to the reader and is a £5 annual subscription. Usually, 175 print copies are requested each month, with a free online version. The cost of production based on a 28-page magazine is £0.44p a copy. Twice a year, each household in the parish receives a free print copy.

4.2 The costs vary as we are charged per page. To mitigate costs per page, some repeat information is listed or condensed. We also print in black and white to save on costs.

4.3 Costs for 175 copies ranges from £77 to £86 monthly.

Costs for 400+ copies for the parish wide distribution are £272 per month.

| FIPPENNY NEWS ANNUAL COSTS | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| INCOME SOURCE | Expected income | Received | TOTAL | COSTS | TOTAL | BALANCE |
| Subscriptions | 875 (based on 175 subs at £5) | 365.5 | 365.5 | Magazine printing charges | 1275 | |
| Advertising | 418 | 297.5 | 297.5 | Domain cost | 59 | |
| Parish council subsidy | 400 | 400 | 400 | | | |
| | 1693 | 1062.5 | 1062.5 | | 1334 | -£271.50 |

5. The Importance of a Community Magazine

- 5.1 Community magazines are a social record of a community. If the volunteers were to cease, this asset would be lost.
- 5.2 Social media reaches a fraction of the community. When information is placed on social media it is dependent on an external company, whereas the community magazine is operated independently.
- 5.3 Fippenny News has been instrumental in getting help to some of the most vulnerable people in the parish. For example, a person who had just been made homeless turned up at the editor's door, having read a print copy of the magazine and with nowhere else to turn.
- 5.4 Fippenny News has also sensitively helped people who have literacy or IT difficulties to communicate to the public. Examples include support to design advertising to attract work.
- 5.5 During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Blackmore Vale Magazine, Unity (Sturminster Newton's magazine), and several other hyper local media closed. Fippenny News continued online, providing communication to people who were isolating.

6. Options

- 6.1 In the absence of any volunteers coming forward, and rising costs, there are several options for the future of Fippenny News. Ideally, change should come in from January as most advertiser and reader subscriptions are due, making it an easier break.
- 6.2 The various options are below.

| OPTION | DESCRIPTION | ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| ONE | Stop production of Fippenny News | No cost to parish council No need for volunteers | Loss of community magazine Loss of social history record Loss of communication method in the parish Loss of a communication route for people seeking help |
| TWO | Continue with 12 print issues a year and the online version | Increased printing charge Good communication method with parish reach | Risk of volunteer burnout Risk of non-payment from subscriptions |
| THREE | Produce Fippenny News quarterly on a subscriber basis | Printing costs would be reduced | Risk of non-payment from subscriptions Need to reduce advertising charges due to fewer print editions. Risk of not including all events in the parish Some parishioners not included |
| FOUR | Produce Fippenny News quarterly distributed free to the parish | Current printing costs would be reduced | Need to reduce advertising charges due to fewer print editions. Cost would be from parish council and advertisers Risk of not including all |

| | | | |
|-------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| | | | events in the parish |
| FIVE | Produce Fippenny News on a digital only basis. | Reduced or no printing costs | Magazine would not reach those who are not digitally competent. |
| SIX | Reduce the editions of Fippenny News to 10 a year | Printing costs would be reduced | Risk of non-payment from subscriptions Need to reduce advertising charges due to fewer print editions. |

7. Next Steps and recommendations

- 7.1 Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council are asked to discuss the issues relating to Fippenny News and consider the options available for future production of the magazine, covering costs, and managing subscriptions and distribution.
- 7.2 All documentation for Fippenny News including distribution lists, invoicing, and correspondence should be held in a central repository.

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