

CIPR PRide awards 2010 – Thames & Chiltern region

Category 17: Best magazine **TC10 17/01**

Title: Hertsmere News

Entry from: Hertsmere Borough Council

The aim of Hertsmere News

Hertsmere News is Hertsmere Borough Council's quarterly magazine produced for its residents and delivered to every home in the borough.

Its aim is to inform residents about council-led services and how they can access them, to offer advice and support on a range of issues and provide updates on key council-led projects in the community.

It plays a key part in delivering the wider Corporate Communications strategy in terms of raising the profile of the council, with the ultimate outcome that residents will:

- know what services we provide, where and how to access them, and the quality of service they can expect from us
- feel confident and satisfied with our services, their cost and that we are providing leadership within the borough
- understand how they can get involved or influence our work.

Participation in the magazine and contribution to it is encouraged. We promote consultations, run competitions and welcome letters for a two-way inclusive approach. Contact details for councillors are included to make it easy for residents to get in touch with their elected representative.

How Hertsmere News meets the requirements of our target audiences

Hertsmere covers 39 square miles and has 100,000 residents concentrated in four main towns –all with their own identity.

Our primary audience is our residents but Hertsmere News is also distributed to the local press, community groups and to partners with whom we work closely.

Hertsmere has areas of social deprivation, as well as affluent areas, and we also have groups for whom English is not their first language. Our older population is above the national average.

Therefore our audience is diverse, of all ages and social backgrounds and has varying interests in the services and work of the authority. We have a number of measures in place to address this:

- Each issue covers stories from all four main towns, while the front cover image varies in the location it depicts.
- Every issue contains information on how people can get the magazine in a different language or format (we send large print copies to a list of residents who have asked to receive it in this way and we recently fulfilled a request for an Italian translation).
- The magazine is available on our website and can be viewed in a user-friendly way as well as with an audio package.
- We aim to follow RNIB guidelines as far as possible such as avoiding capital letters to help those with visual impairments to read it more easily and have a contrast between the text and background. We also avoid using certain colours together that colour-blind people would not be able to tell apart.

We are often asked by residents and by community groups to include items which they feel are of interest and these requests are all considered on a merit/needs basis.

To meet these needs we include:

- a What's on guide to promote local events
- contributions from partner agencies – in particular those who are part of our Community Safety Partnership
- letters page – prompted by requests from residents.

While comments from councillors are included, they are kept to a minimum with preference given to comments from the wider community and photographs that include residents.

The magazine is also sent to key stakeholders and those who have influence in our community, such as focus groups, friends' groups, Neighbourhood Watch coordinators, police/fire services and parish and community newsletters.

Because editorial control rests with the communications team, which has a wider communications role, the magazine is used to address issues raised by residents or highlighted locally and nationally. Recent content has been around: registering to vote; providing help in the recession; the introduction of fines for littering and dog fouling; making the most of recycling facilities; police priorities; and service provision during the snow earlier this year. We also include supplements to support other communication campaigns, such as our annual A to Z guide and regular waste and recycling collection calendar.

Hertsmere News is a vital part of the council's communications strategy with its residents. Where appropriate, council campaigns are structured to ensure Hertsmere News can work alongside other communication tools to reach a broad target audience.

It is printed on recycled paper.

Design and creativity

Hertsmere News is designed entirely in-house. The magazine aims to be bold and bright, to encourage residents to pick up the magazine. Where possible we source images from the borough – using residents and real service-users – rather than relying on stock images. To reflect the borough's diverse population, we include a mix of ethnicities and abilities and include events about different faiths.

Stories are concise with the aim of signposting residents to further information. It is designed so that the pages are uncluttered, to avoid residents feeling overwhelmed by too much information.

Evaluation and measurement

Every three years an independent research company carries out a consultation with more than 1,000 residents. The results help to shape the magazine's content, style and delivery.

During our most recent survey (results published in January 2009), nearly 60% of respondents felt that the council kept them well informed and the primary way they got information about the council was via Hertsmere News.

The majority of residents (58%) report they have seen a copy in the past 12 months and nearly three quarters (72%) of residents that have seen Hertsmere News in the last year read at least some of it.

Our residents generally agreed that the articles were clearly written (78%), they found Hertsmere News interesting (69%), they like the way it is written (66%), there is a good variety of articles (63%) and that it is informative and relevant to them (61%).