

Officer responsible Community Relations Manager	Author Sam Fisher
Corporate Plan Output: Residents Newsletter	

The purpose of this report is to recommend that the number of issues of the Council householder newsletter, Christchurch City Scene, printed each year remain the same.

The previous Council adopted a recommendation that Christchurch City Scene be increased to weekly in 1999. Discussion by Councillors at the time stressed that such a change would need further examination.

This report draws on research on residents' opinions and an internal communication report.

BACKGROUND

- Christchurch City Scene has been published since 1995. The publication is the primary vehicle for communicating all of Council activities to all residents and citizens of the City, and is the primary vehicle for communicating the Annual Plan.
- Christchurch City Scene is published monthly and delivered to all letterboxes.
- While other Council communication deals with specific issues Christchurch City Scene provides the only significant overview, often for issues which news media will not cover.
- Changing Christchurch City Scene to weekly would cost the Council significantly more than is currently being spent.
- A recently completed review of Council communication and advertising effectiveness has recommended that Christchurch City Scene not be produced weekly but that timing of the issues be reviewed in light of the Council's communication needs.

RESIDENT RESEARCH 1998

Independent research conducted in 1998 by A C Neilson, on behalf of the Christchurch City Council, looked at a cross section of the community and tested their reaction to the timing of Christchurch City Scene. Councillors received copies of this research early in 1999.

- 63 percent of the City prefer to receive Christchurch City Scene on a monthly basis.
- 17 percent thought Christchurch City Scene should be less frequent.
- 15 percent thought Christchurch City Scene should be more frequent.

These findings were consistent with research conducted in 1997, where residents rejected a weekly Christchurch City Scene but saw merit in monthly publication.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION REVIEW

An internal communication review earlier this year conducted by John Law reported on Christchurch City Scene. This report recommended that frequency not necessarily increase, but that timing should be adjusted in direct relationship with the need to inform citizens.

INCREASED FREQUENCY OPTIONS FOR CHRISTCHURCH CITY SCENE

Weekly Publication

- There would be significantly more space available for explaining Council issues to citizens.
- All public notices could be placed in Christchurch City Scene, rather than being placed in the Press. Currently this is not possible due to various pieces of legislation specifying where public notices can be placed. Auckland City Council has transferred most of their public notices advertising to their weekly City Scene. Providing it was cleared by our Legal Services Manager, this would allow access to the public notices budget, approximately \$250,000 per year.
- Extra staff would need to be hired to write and edit the stories. Staff that could cover key staff on leave or away for whatever reason would also be needed.
- There would need to be significant increases to budget to produce Christchurch City Scene weekly. It is difficult to say how much would need to be added to the budget, as the format of the newsletter would change. Different paper and a changed size would be needed. There would also be production efficiencies gained from bulk purchasing of paper and volume discounts in printing costs. The new newspaper would need to be tendered to get the best price. Without having developed a design and tendered the production, staff estimate needing a minimum additional \$500,000 (this would be offset by public notice costs). If the Council wish to pursue the issue in more detail a design and fuller costings, including staffing will be sought and brought back to a later Council meeting.
- Although there is a significant amount of news being generated by Christchurch City Council, staff are not convinced that we could find appropriate material every week that would justify a weekly newspaper. However, a notices based approach with one or two anchor stories could be developed, similar to the Auckland format.

Fortnightly Publication

Fortnightly is seen by staff as the worst of both worlds, as we would be publishing a newspaper, but would not have the ability to offset production costs with public notices.

This would mean:

- Increased availability of space for Council material.
- Public notice funding would not be available.
- Cost efficiencies would not be as great as for weekly publication.
- Staffing would need to be increased.
- There would still need to be significant increases to budget to produce Christchurch City Scene. At an estimate without tendering, is that an additional \$300,000 would be needed.

STAFF COMMENT

Given customer preference for monthly distribution and the cost implications it is recommended that Christchurch City Scene not be published weekly but that distribution dates are adjusted to when significant areas of business require communication.

The Committee endorsed a suggestion by Councillor Stewart that all issues of Christchurch City Scene be delivered to all households in the Council's district.

Recommendation: That Christchurch City Scene continue to be published generally on a monthly basis, but there be timing adjustments based on Council communication needs.