

Report 08.61
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Committee Council
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Elements redesign and refocus

1. Purpose

To advise Council about plans to redesign, rename and refocus the quarterly magazine *Elements*.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

Elements is Greater Wellington's quarterly newspaper, highlighting our work through stories about our involvement with the community. It is delivered to approximately 180,000 households in the region, as well as to display stands in GW's offices, the region's libraries and information centres.

4. Comment

Because it is distributed to all mail boxes in the Greater Wellington region, rather than being posted as addressed mail, *Elements* competes for attention amongst a whole plethora of junk mail, community newspapers, newsletters and missing pets flyers. Its "moment of truth" as an effective communications tool is the period between somebody emptying their mailbox and placing unwanted material into their recycle bin.

In this brief time, it is Greater Wellington's objective for its magazine to leave at least one key impression or to deliver one lasting message about GW's role and functions.

Ideally the magazine should generate sufficient interest and appeal for readers to decide to spare its life for a longer period, read its contents in more detail, seek more in-depth information from GW's web site, and to make submissions/contributions to Council as appropriate. While the magazine should support relevant GW consultation processes in a timely manner, it is not intended that this be the definitive primary communications channel for this purpose.

4.1 Reasons for redesign and refocus

There are four key reasons for redesigning and refocusing *Elements*:

1. The current **design** of *Elements* has been used for more than six years and is limiting, with an inflexible design template that doesn't allow for variation in article length, structure (e.g. tables, lists, special sections) or presentation.

Current design features also reduce readability, such as the small font for captions, the confusing contents panel on page 2, and the size of the publication (the current broadsheet size is cumbersome to read – a smaller magazine-size would be much easier to handle).

These problems would be resolved by developing a new template for a magazine-size publication that allows for a range of article styles and better readability (e.g. larger fonts, clear contents lists).

2. Senior management have said they would like the **content** of *Elements* to be more strategic, focusing on articles that can help Greater Wellington to achieve its objectives, rather than its current focus on environmental stories.

Also, the *Elements* story list is currently compiled by inviting key contacts within GW (i.e. communications advisors, some officers and some managers) to suggest story ideas – this makes story selection something of a bun fight rather than a planned process. However, there is currently no editorial policy around *Elements*' content, making it difficult to provide a rationale for which stories should be included and those which should not.

These problems would be resolved by developing an editorial policy that prioritises and emphasises strategic planning for upcoming issues (i.e. planning a good spread of stories from across the organisation that will increase understanding of our role, show the community what we can do for them, and encourages the community to participate in activities that will help them and help us to deliver our strategic outcomes).

3. A redesign and refocus will provide the opportunity to make *Elements* a key tool for helping GW meet its communication objectives of:
 - a. Improving awareness of GW's plans, roles and functions amongst our communities and stakeholders
 - b. Increased levels of community engagement and constructive participation in GW's decision-making processes
 - c. Greater levels of compliance with GW regulations
 - d. Residents taking greater responsibility for their sustainability actions.
4. A redesigned and refocused *Elements* will also help GW meet its 'Making Greater Wellington Greater' goal of engaging effectively with the community.

4.2 New name for Elements

The name *Elements* can be seen to reflect the elements in our logo (water, air, earth and energy) but it doesn't convey what the publication is about and who we are – and the meaning behind the title isn't clearly made to readers. It is proposed that the name be changed to *Greater Wellington* magazine – this will make readers more likely to link the flagship newspaper with our organisation and reflect that our work covers the entire Wellington region.

4.3 Editorial policy

Following a redesign (if it is signed off) we plan to begin taking a more strategic approach to *Elements*' content:

- Each issue will cover two/three of our key functions to familiarise the public with what we do – these will be taken from the 'back to basics' list of functions
- We'll include articles on issues that are a high priority for Greater Wellington, e.g. issues that are topical, timely and involve the community. They will be placed to reflect their importance.
- We'll include other articles on issues of interest but they'll be smaller, and some information will be grouped together in tables (e.g. a list of upcoming community events, etc)

We are proposing that *Elements* becomes an EMT agenda item every six months, where an indicative schedule of major stories based on supporting GW's themes, strategic outcomes and seasonal events is proposed and tabled.

The final choice of the **cover story** for an issue will be made by the Editor within two months of publication (no earlier) based on an assessment of newsworthiness or topicality at the proposed publication date as well as timeliness, available content, illustrative material available and priority compared to other stories. Other priority stories will still appear but may not warrant cover prominence.

All stories will be chosen at the discretion of the Editor based on the same criteria as that for the cover story.

The occasional issue of *Elements* may include an **insert** as a way of communicating a key aspect of a division's work or adding value to readers (e.g. a poster of the parks network or an illustration of planned improvements to our transport network). The inclusion of an insert will be at the discretion of the Editor and will be budgeted for in consultation with the relevant GW Division. The division will work with the Editor and Corporate Publisher on the content and production of the insert.

5. **Communication**

Readers of *Elements* were advised in the December 2007 edition that a revised format publication was likely from March 2008.

6. **Recommendations**

That the Council:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***
3. ***Approves the redesign and refocus of Elements.***

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