

17 LAMB update May 2020

Since its beginning, we have received a lot of positive feedback about how the Lyskerrys magazine has highlighted the many great things going on in Liskeard, and it has also been a really useful way to publicise events and get across Town Council messages. Because it is delivered door to door it reaches everyone, including people who may be socially isolated.

However, we have always struggled to get it onto a sustainable financial footing. As well as the consistent £1,000 per edition funding from the Town Council, the early editions of the magazine were mainly funded via the initial Awards for All grant, and content partnerships with RIO and Pluss.

In January 2019, the Town Council agreed to provide £4,000 funding from the newsletter reserve to enable LAMB to explore ways to make the Lyskerrys magazine more financially sustainable.

This report sets out what has happened since. It has been a difficult and frustrating process, involving a lot of hard work and many set backs. However, it did prove possible to publish three editions in 2019, one in Spring 2020 and we believed we had a potentially sustainable model for future editions when the coronavirus struck. We are still hopeful that this will be possible when activities can resume.

Work on advertising and paid content

As previously reported, in February 2019 an open application processes was held for a person or organisation to set up an advertising model which would enable LAMB to pay for a significant amount of the magazine's costs via carefully chosen advertising, especially sponsored content; develop further 'content partnership' relationships with like-minded organisations who pay towards the cost of an edition and are involved in decisions on the overall theme and content; and secure grants for projects related to the magazine.

This resulted in David Crawford from Drakewalls Marketing being retained in March 2019. He produced a marketing plan and programme of work and went on to identify and contact a long list of potential advertisers via email, telephone and in person. Because the necessary work was front-loaded, with new systems being required before advertising income could be expected, Drakewalls Marketing was initially paid a monthly fee for delivering the work agreed. From July 2019 this moved to a payment of 30% commission. However, despite considerable efforts from Drakewalls Marketing, the amounts of advertising sold were limited. £280 for summer 2019 and £440 for the joint autumn/winter edition. In December Drakewalls Marketing told LAMB that it could no longer continue with the arrangement.

There was still around £1,000 left in the financial sustainability fund and in September 2019 LAMB asked Jenny Lightley, the former editor of the Love Saltash magazine, to carry out a piece of work contacting businesses and organisations to explore paid content in the magazine, which had worked well for Love Saltash. She contacted a wide range of businesses and organisations, some from her own contacts and some supplied by LAMB. She was not able to get any definite commitments, but she did give us five organisations who had expressed real interest and one of these agreed to paid content in the spring edition, although this was later moved to the summer. Others were also prospects for the summer edition.

Jenny also made some recommendations for the future, including carrying small ads in the magazine. LAMB had previously decided not to do this, mainly because of the cost and time of selling and processing the ads in relation to the small amount of income gained.

However it was agreed to try selling ads 8 to a page and ask for a minimum commitment of 4 issues. The first three of these were featured in the spring 2020 edition.

Learning

Considerable time and effort was spent on trying to establish an advertising model that would bring in significant income to the magazine. The barriers to this seem to be:

- Most local businesses are used to paying small amounts for advertising, often in charitable publications. Most were not open to the idea of paying more for more effective communication in a well-read publication.
- Larger organisations and businesses, which were more open to this approach, found Liskeard to be too small a market for their purposes.
- Because the magazine was well presented and seemed to be successful, it didn't feel like a publication that people would help out by contributing money.

The conclusion is that it is possible to raise some advertising, from organisations which see the point of larger advertisements, plus growing the number of small ads, but that while it should be an income stream, advertising is very unlikely to be a major source of income for the magazine.

Wider ideas on functioning and funding

Power for Change Trading Up Programme

LAMB was one of ten social enterprises in Cornwall and beyond to be chosen for the 2019/20 Trading Up Programme, nationally funded by Power to Change and run in Cornwall by the School for Social Enterprise. This involved twelve sessions over 10 months to look at issues like business planning, finance, marketing, measuring impact and so on. It proved a useful opportunity to think through issues, especially sustainable funding, and discuss them with others. We revisited LAMB's vision, mission and values:

Vision

To celebrate and promote Liskeard, helping to create a sense of belonging and pride and giving a voice to a wide range of people.

Mission

- To publish a free, high-quality community magazine which is positive, inclusive, informative and which people want to read.
- To develop a complementary online presence.
- To provide opportunities for local people to improve their skills.
- To enable a range of local voices to be heard, including people who may be socially isolated or marginalised.

Values

- Our products are free and accessible to all.

- Accentuate the positive
- Support Liskeard
- Be welcoming and inclusive

As a result of this, we started looking for other partners, especially ones which could help us in carrying out parts of our mission which we felt we weren't completely fulfilling.

In September 2019 we held a meeting for contributors and friends of the magazine to explore how we could achieve our aims and, specifically, if a crowdfunding campaign would be useful. The meeting was positive overall but there was doubt that crowdfunding would work well in our situation. One outcome from the meeting was that, with the help of RIO, we made contact again with PLUS, who had previously been content partners on two issues.

PLUS

PLUS works with people who have been out of employment or training for some time to help them make steps back towards employment. They were interested in how the magazine could help with that, and we wanted to enable a wider range of local voices to contribute to the magazine and help build people's skills.

After discussion with PLUS we agreed a package of work. LAMB would run 'Connect and Create' sessions twice a month which would be open to anyone, and have a presence from Positive People and a chance to sign up to the programme. They would give people the opportunity to learn how to tell their own stories and those of their community, and find out about how the magazine is created and how they could get involved. The Lyskerry editor would also provide training and mentoring to PLUS staff. For this, PLUS would pay £900 a month for six months, with the potential for renewal for a further six months. This started in February 2020, and three sessions took place before the start of the coronavirus crisis. Since then the mentoring sessions have continued in a reduced form.

Current financial situation

In gaining a place on the Trading Up Programme LAMB was given £2,000, with further match funding available for any increase in traded income beyond £2,000 compared to the previous year. Due to the coronavirus crisis, Power to Change have indicated that they will match levels of traded income that would have been achieved if coronavirus hadn't curtailed activities, if this can be evidenced. We expect this will amount to more than a further £3,000.

Before coronavirus it looked as if there was a potential model of sustainable funding made up of continuing TC support at £1,000 per edition, the PLUS contract and some advertising. If the grant application is successful, the Cattle Market Makers project may also provide income for advertising and mentoring.

LAMB has been in contact with PLUS who understandably can't make any firm commitments about future funding at the moment but are optimistic that the face to face work can be shifted to a future date and still funded.

There are no guarantees but it should be possible to start Lyskerry's back up again after lockdown, and all involved are committed to try to do that, using the small amount of funds in hand and ongoing income.

Rachel Brooks

18 May 2020