

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) held in CIVIC SUITE 0.1A, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 6 May 2014.

- PRESENT: Councillor T V Rogers – Chairman.
- Councillors G J Bull, S Cawley, K J Churchill, S Greenall, R Harrison, P G Mitchell, M F Shellens and A H Williams.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors P L E Bucknell and E R Butler.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, J P Morris and R J West (Item 111).

109. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3rd April 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

110. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

111. THE FUTURE OF MEMBERS' IT - CALL IN

(Councillor B S Chapman, Executive Councillor for Customer Services, was in attendance for this item).

(Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, J P Morris and R J West were also in attendance for the discussion on this item).

Following the publication of the Cabinet's Decision regarding the future of Members IT on 11th April 2014, the Panel gave this matter further consideration. The reasons for the Call-In together with the options which were available to the Panel and a summary of their previous discussions on the matter were set out in a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

By way of introduction, the Executive Councillor reminded the Panel of the background to the proposals. He referred to the need to gain Public Services Network compliance, to respond to the support expiry deadline for Windows XP and to improve on Members' existing IT experience. Councillor Chapman then updated Members on the latest developments and the reasons for them. Members were advised that

the estimated saving from not providing all Members with laptop/desktop PCs and associated equipment had been re-evaluated at £42k and that there would be additional savings relating to the withdrawal of printed agenda and reports, printers, broadband and consumables. Furthermore, the need to pay for future upgrades/development would be removed.

Having recognised the need to cease their connectivity to the Council's network for security reasons, Members were informed that the Authority had secured two domain names which could be used for their email addresses to create a consistent and professional approach. The Panel discussed the systems used by neighbouring authorities and the ways in which these operated. The Council would assist Members to set up the most useable system of accessing their emails, tailored to each Councillor's preferred way of working.

In response to a question by a Member, an update on those issues, which had been raised at the previous meeting, was provided. These included the arrangements for the transition to the new way of working, associated training and support, the encryption of confidential information and testing of file sizes. In terms of the decision to allow iPads to be purchased from Members allowances, it would be possible to offer interest free loans for this purpose. In response to a request that Members should be able to use the Council's electronic address book from their own equipment, it was reported that while the Council had a high degree of confidence that this would be possible, in the event that this was not the case, alternative ways of providing this information would be investigated.

Some Members reiterated the previously expressed point that the requirement to provide their own IT equipment would deter potential candidates from standing for election. However, other Members were of the view that, given that the basic allowance payable was currently in the region of £4k per annum, it was reasonable to expect Members to purchase their own equipment over their term of office.

In response to concerns that all newly elected Members would be required to purchase an iPad, it was confirmed that this would not be the case and that the minimum requirement for them to participate in the new arrangements would be access to a desk based PC. The Modern.gov application would operate on most devices. Alternatively, Members could use the Adobe reader to obtain and read agenda and reports via the internet. Members were of the view that Cabinet's decision notice did not clearly make these points and it was suggested that this part of the decision should be amended to clarify this position such that it made reference to the new ways of working as opposed to the 'iPad scheme'. Members were advised that the Council would only offer financial assistance to enable Members to acquire the Council's recommended device, which was an iPad.

The Panel discussed the decision to withdraw printed agenda and reports for Members meetings where possible. Having been assured that it would still be possible to request paper copies, it was agreed that this part of the decision also should be amended to reflect this position. It was noted that it would not be possible to cease issuing paper copies of agenda until the Local Government (Electronic

Communications) (England) Order 2014 came into effect and that it would not be possible to do so in all cases.

Councillor K J Churchill questioned whether the introduction of the scheme required an amendment to be made to the Council's Constitution given that it would affect all Members and that there was reference to the Council's telephony and IT support within the Council's Members Allowances scheme. He also asked whether it should be a matter for decision by the full Council in accordance with Article 15 of the Constitution and thus whether due process had been followed. Members were of the view that the Cabinet should verify whether the terms of the Constitution, particularly the Members Allowances Scheme (and the associated guidelines), met the requirements of the new arrangements. If changes were required, a review should be undertaken and implemented in the usual way through the Corporate Governance Panel.

Councillor J P Morris addressed the Panel on a proposal that Councillors should be provided either with iPads to enable them to undertake Council duties or with an iPad allowance for those who chose to use their own devices. He also suggested that Members should be offered the opportunity to purchase their existing hardware at an appropriate rate. The Panel decided not to pursue these suggestions because Members allowances more than covered the cost of an iPad. Furthermore, the Council sought to achieve the best rates for disposal of equipment.

At the conclusion of their deliberations, Members agreed that they had no objections to the decisions at (a), (b), (d) and (e) of the Cabinet Decision Notice set out in Section 2.3 of the report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and that these should be implemented as stated. It was further agreed that the remaining decisions should be referred back to the Cabinet for clarification of those issues that were raised during the discussion and for consideration of their Constitutional implications. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet be recommended to

(a) amend point (c) of their decision to read:–

‘that printed agendas and reports will be provided on request’;

(b) amend point (f) of their decision to read:–

‘that, from a date to be determined, it be compulsory for all elected councillors to use the new arrangements and that Members will be entitled to participate in the loan scheme if they wish to do so to purchase an iPad’;
and

(c) review the current terms of the Constitution and, if necessary, implement revisions in the normal way.

Chairman