

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: THE FUTURE OF MEMBERS IT – CALL IN

Meeting/Date: CABINET – 21 MAY 2014

Executive Portfolio: Councillor B S Chapman

Report by: Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the deliberations and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) following its decision to call in the Cabinet's decision on The Future of Members IT.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is requested to consider the Panel's recommendations.

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Cabinet to consider the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) following its decision to call in the Cabinet's decision on The Future of Members IT.

2. CABINET DECISION

- 2.1 The Cabinet, at its meeting held on 10th April 2014, considered proposals to withdraw Council funded IT equipment for Members and to promote the use of their own IT equipment. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix 1.

- 2.2 In advance of the Cabinet meeting, the Panel had received a presentation by the IMD Service Manager on the proposals and the Panel's comments were conveyed to the Cabinet by way of the report attached at Appendix 2.

- 2.2 The Cabinet decided:-

“(a) that Council-funded IT equipment for Members be withdrawn, with continued support only being provided in exceptional circumstances;

(b) that the purchase of iPads from Members allowances be approved;

(c) that, (where possible) printed agendas and reports for Members meetings be withdrawn;

(d) that the principle that all Members should use non-HDC (but HDC approved) email addresses for Council business be supported;

(e) that HDC funded broadband connections be withdrawn; and

(f) that with effect from 1st May 2014, it be compulsory for newly elected Members to participate in the iPad scheme.

It was also RECOMMENDED to Council that the Members' IT and telephone support guidelines in the Council's Constitution be varied accordingly to reflect the above.”

3. CALL IN

- 3.1 Following publication of the Cabinet's decision, three Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well Being) called it in. This was discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 6th May 2014, which Councillor B S Chapman, Executive Councillor for Customer Services, attended.

- 3.2 The reasons given for calling in the decision were that –

“The decision will have a negative impact on the willingness of members of the public to stand for election to the detriment of local democracy and could also harm the eyesight of Councillors. It would also dramatically increase the costs of printing at home. This decision should be subject to scrutiny by the whole Council and not just made by a coterie of Councillors from a single party.” – [Councillor M F Shellens]

“A decision which has far reaching implications for Councillor communications has not been given sufficiently detailed consideration and has been taken

contrary to the normal decision making requirements.” – [Councillor K J Churchill]

“There has not been enough time to consider this item. On reflection, the size of print on the iPad will be smaller than on a paper version. I have concerns over the cost burden it will place on Councillors now and in the future. Having a hardcopy is more useful.” – [Councillor S Greenall]

4. DELIBERATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 Councillor Chapman has reminded the Panel of the background to the proposals, which includes the need to gain PSN compliance, to respond to the support expiry deadline for Windows XP and to improve the existing IT experience for Members. Most individuals have some form of equipment within their homes.
- 4.2 The Panel has also received an update on the latest developments and on those issues which had been raised at their previous meeting. These included arrangements for the transition, associated training and support, the encryption of confidential information and testing of file sizes.
- 4.2 The Panel has not challenged the decisions (a), (b), (d) and (e) of the Cabinet Decision Notice (Section 2.2 of the report) and has agreed that these should be implemented as stated.
- 4.3 Members have recognised the need to remove Members’ connectivity to the Council’s network for security purposes and have noted that the Authority has secured two domain names which can be used for Members’ email addresses to create a consistent and professional approach. The Panel has been informed that that the Council will assist Members to set up the most easily useable system of accessing their emails, tailored to each Councillor’s preferred way of working, for example outlook accounts can display emails from a number of email addresses. Members have also made a specific request to be able to use the Council’s address book from their own equipment. Whilst the Council has a high degree of confidence that this will be possible, in the event that this is not the case, alternative ways of providing this information will be considered.
- 4.3 The Panel has noted that the estimated saving from not providing all Members with laptop/desktop PCs and associated equipment had been re-evaluated at £42K. However there would be additional savings relating to the withdrawal of printed agenda and reports, printers, broadband and consumables. Furthermore, it will remove the need to pay for future upgrades / development.
- 4.4 In terms of the decision to enable iPads to be purchased from Members’ allowances, the Panel has been informed that it will be possible to offer interest free-loans for this purpose.
- 4.5 The Panel has given detailed consideration to points (c) and (f) of the Cabinet decision notice and has recommended that that they are amended.
- 4.6 Members have discussed the decision to withdraw printed agendas and reports for Members meetings, where possible. Concerns have been expressed with regard to the increased costs which Members might incur when printing documents at home. Having been assured that it will still be possible to request paper copies, Members have **RECOMMENDED** that point (c) be amended to clarify this position –

(c) that printed agendas and reports will be provided on request.

4.7 The Panel has noted that it will not be possible to cease issuing paper copies of Agenda until the Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2014 has been enacted.

4.8 Members were of the opinion that decision "f" suggests that all new Members should purchase an iPad. They disagree that all newly elected Members should be required to purchase an iPad, particularly when Modern.gov can be accessed on any web enabled device. During the discussion on this point, it has been confirmed that newly elected Members will not be required to purchase an iPad and that the minimum requirement for Members to participate in the arrangements is the ownership of a desk based PC. Members have also noted that the Modern.gov application will operate on most devices / or Members could use adobe reader to access and read reports and agendas on the internet. For clarity, it has been stressed that the Council will only offer financial assistance to enable Members to acquire the Council's recommended device, which is an iPad.

4.9 For the purposes of clarifying what is intended it is **RECOMMENDED** that the decision at 2.2 (f) be amended as follows –

(f) 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.

4.10 A number of concerns have again been expressed that the requirement for Members to provide their own IT equipment will deter potential candidates from standing for election. However, the view has been expressed that given that the basic allowance payable is currently in the region of £4k, it is not unreasonable to expect a Member to purchase their own equipment over their term of office at a cost of approximately £400.

4.11 Councillor K J Churchill has questioned whether the introduction of the scheme requires an amendment to be made to the Council's Constitution and whether this should be a matter for decision by the full Council in accordance with Article 15 of the Constitution. The Panel is of the view that the Cabinet should verify whether the terms of the Constitution, particularly the Members Allowances Scheme (and the associated guidelines) are sound and reflect the requirements of the new arrangements. If changes are required a review should be undertaken and implemented in the normal way. With this in mind, it is further

RECOMMENDED

that the Cabinet review the current terms of the Constitution and, if necessary, implement revisions in the normal way.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Cabinet is requested to consider the Panel's recommendations as set out in Sections 4.6, 4.9 and 4.11 of the report now submitted.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – The Future of Members' IT – Report by the IMD Service Manager

Appendix 2 - Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)
Comments to Cabinet on The Future of Members IT.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Constitution

The Future of Members IT – Report by the IMD Service Manager

Cabinet Decision Notice – 10th April 2014.

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