

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES

12 FEBRUARY 2015

SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

DELIVERY OF AGENDAS AND OTHER PAPERS TO MEMBERS – WEEKLY COURIER SERVICE

Purpose of Report

To remind councillors of their right to receive committee papers and to seek support for alternative options that will secure financial savings.

Background

Councillors who are summoned to attend meetings of the Authority are to be provided with a summons. Schedule 12, Paragraph 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides as follows:

“...a summons to attend the meeting...shall, subject to sub-paragraph (3) below, **be left at or sent to the usual place of residence of every member of the Council.**”

Historically, the Authority has provided a weekly courier service to the home address of each Councillor. The Friday courier service was initially intended to deliver actual summons to Councillors; however over the years this has slipped to include almost everything placed in a Councillor’s pigeon hole.

The Courier Service is expensive and in light of the difficult financial challenges facing the Authority, all arrangements need to be reviewed in order to try and seek a cheaper yet effective alternative.

Overtime costs alone are in the region of £10,000 per annum. There are also additional costs associated with the service due to fuel and vehicle costs.

The purpose of this report is to request the Council to consider alternatives to the current arrangement to secure the £10K savings already approved as part of the Council's budget setting process.

Whilst the statutory provision refers to the Councillors having papers delivered to their home address, the Act does provide for an alternative:

“...If a member of a principal council gives notice in writing to the proper officer of the council that he desires summonses to attend meetings of the council to be sent to him at some address specified in the notice other than his place of residence, any summons addressed to him and left at or sent by post to that address shall be deemed sufficient service of the summons.”

Use of Technology to Distribute Agendas

The Democratic Services team has been publishing agendas on-line and distributing electronic agendas via e-mail for a number of years. This is an effective and efficient way of distribution.

Following the recent acquisition of the Modern.Gov software system, an App on Apple and Android devices will be available to Members in due course, which will allow agendas, minutes and reports to be automatically downloaded direct to an individual's tablet computer.

The user would simply need to choose preferences and everything else is done in the App. This system means that once downloaded they sit on the tablet without the need for any connection at the meeting.

Technology appears to be the answer to many issues; however Councillors, Officers and the Public often favour a hard copy over an electronic copy. In part, this is due to the fact that it is habit to make notes on a hard copy whereas it can be complicated to make notes on electronic versions. There are software solutions available for this. Other reasons include confidence and competency in using new and emerging technologies.

Options to Consider

Option 1 – All Councillors give notice in writing stating that they wish to cease receiving agendas at their home address. The Authority can then cease to continue operating a courier service; and all Councillors will collect their agendas directly from their preferred Civic Centre location (i.e. Neath or Port Talbot). Additionally, electronic versions of the agendas will be available on-line and e-mailed directly to them.

Option 2 – The Authority establishes a voluntary opt out system whereby Councillors are encouraged to opt out of the Courier Service; however it is clearly their choice. These Councillors will have their agendas distributed to them electronically; however, hard copies will remain in their pigeon hole until they choose to collect it, or unless they confirm they no longer wish to receive hard copies of meeting papers.

Option 3 – Alternative suggestions to be provided by Council.

Equality Impact Assessment

A Screening Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. After completing the Screening Assessment, it has been determined that this policy does not require a Full Equality Impact Assessment and is considered unlikely to have any significant equality impact.

Financial Implications

Budget savings will be achieved by changing the current arrangement to the sum of £10K per annum.

Recommendations

It is recommended as follows:-

- (a) The Democratic Services Committee considers the options in this report and identifies a proposal that can be commended to Council.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To review and assess alternative options for the weekly Courier Service.

List of Background Papers

Draft Letter to Members

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