

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

6 DECEMBER 2012

Present: County Councillor Cowan (Chairperson);
County Councillors Chaundy, Holland, Hyde, Keith Jones,
Marshall and Benjamin Thomas

Apologies: County Councillors Furlong, Goddard, Margaret Jones

15 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Article 16 of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest, & to complete Personal Interest forms, at the commencement of the item of business.

16 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2012 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

17 : ICT OPTIONS

The Committee had previously established a Task and Finish Group to consider Member Support Services. The Task and Finish Group were requested to consider current provision of ICT facilities to Members in order to ensure that those facilities were suitable to enable Elected Members to meet the requirements of their roles.

Members were advised that a business case on the introduction of these proposals is to be prepared and presented to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Business and Local Economy. To test the proposals it was suggested that a cross-party trial be established, on a cost-neutral basis, in order to demonstrate a sound business case with clearly established cost savings and efficiencies.

The Task and Finish Group received a presentation from Steve Durbin, Head of Internal Services on proposals for improving ICT facilities to Members. The presentation summarised the current position with regard to service delivery. Members were advised that various ICT solutions were provided to Councillors and there were different levels of support in place. Councillors were currently provided facilities via laptops, mobile devices, thin client (terminal server) or via their own devices. The current position resulted in high service costs and less than adequate service due to the complexity and differentiation of the support being provided. Steve Durbin also highlighted the security compromises that exist.

The Committee was provided with costs of the current position as follows:

- ICT Costs
 - mobile phones and Good Technology - £1,260

- Broadband/Phone lines £21,900
- Blackberry Enterprise Server - £15,732
- Faxination - £5,429
- Non – ICT Costs
 - Paper printing - £40,000
 - Postage - £18,889
 - Cycle couriers - £631

The Committee was further advised that there were additional 'hard to measure' costs to consider including Member time, officer time and the costs associated with risks, such as fines from the Information Commissioners Office and reputational damage to the authority.

Steve Durbin put forward a proposal for the future provision to Members. He had previously discussed the requirements with Member Services and the it was agreed the new ICT must:

- be accessible to Members in different locations
 - be clear to read, and have the facilities to edit and annotate documents
 - be able to access the intranet, including the Members Enquiry System
 - be able to work offline when needed
- Provide a low volume printing option
 - faxination still needed
 - Full MS Office required
- Phone Access
 - voice, texts
 - camera, emailing for reporting
- Secure solution to reduce risk to Members and the authority
- Cheapest acceptable solution overall

The Committee was advised that Members would need a solution which was not only capable of being used in meetings, in the home/office and at surgeries, but was also capable of being used when Councillor were mobile. Members would therefore require two devices – a mobile phone and a portable 'tablet' device.

If Members wished to retain their own devices then support costs would be increased and the business case may not be viable. In order for the savings to be achieved there would need to be a change working practices with a reduction in the amount of printing and documents not being available as hard copies. The business case included an assumed cost of £15k for training Councillors. Members felt that this cost could be reduced if the training was provided in house.

It was further assumed that any capital spends on new equipment would be with a 5-year lifespan.

The current ICT provision does not enable Councillors to view, edit and annotate Council and Committee papers electronically. Steve Durbin stated that the proposed solution would provide an opportunity to improve services delivery whilst realising a saving in paper handling costs.

The Committee received for information an analysis of the various options available with three solutions to deliver the Members needs. The proposals and the advantages and disadvantages associated with each were discussed. The options were:

- Option 1 – Do Nothing – no cost of change but high delivery cost, poor utility
- Option 2 – iOS/iPad/iOS iPhone Solution – good acceptance and removal of paper and broadband lines but requires Good Technology on both devices and does not offer full MS Office compatibility; also perceived as high cost
- Option 3 – Windows Tablet/Phone – lowest overall cost, full MS Office compatibility, does not require additional software (Good Technology), however Windows 8 would be new to all members

Officers presented the following conclusions:

- Option 3 gives the best savings
- Option 2 may be more acceptable to Members but does not provide full MS Office capability
- For the business case to be viable and savings to be made there would need to be a significant reduction in printed copies of Council and Committee papers.

The Chairperson thanked Steve Durbin for his informative presentation. The Committee discussed the issues set out in the presentation and the options contained therein. The discussion and points raised are summarised as follows:

- The Committee discussed the cost of providing training for Members. Steve Durbin suggested that the £15k sum was based on providing full training to all 75 Members. It was accepted, however, that Members will require varying degrees of training and therefore the £15k figure was based on the worse case scenario. Training would also be provided 'in house' wherever possible in order to keep costs to a minimum.
- The Committee requested a full breakdown of the potential savings and other benefits associated with Options 2 and 3 of the proposals.
- The Committee felt that there was merit in the Members conducting a pilot exercise by testing Options 2 and 3 at the next meeting of the Council. The Chairperson sought volunteers to take part in the pilot exercise. ICT agreed to provide ipads or tablets to those Members who wished to take part in the trial but who could not provide their own equipment.

AGREED – That:

- (1) Steve Durbin is requested to prepare a fully-costed business case for future ICT provision to Members, to include savings and other benefits;

- (2) volunteer Members from the Democratic Services Committee will trial Options 2 and 3 at the next meeting of the Council. ICT will loan iPads or tablets for those Members participating in the trial who are unable to provide their own equipment;
- (3) the Task and Finish Group will meet on 19 December 2012 to review the trailing of Options 2 and 3 at Council and to receive the fully-costed Business Case from Steve Durbin;
- (4) an additional meeting of the Committee will be arranged in January 2013 with a view to agreeing a way forward.

18 : ANNUAL REPORT BY MEMBERS OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY

The Committee received a report to consider draft guidance published for consultation by the Welsh Government on the arrangements to be made by local authorities for the production of annual reports by elected Members. Members were advised that the annual reports were intended to provide members of the public with information about their local Councillor's activities. Section 5(1)(a) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires local authorities to make arrangements for Members to produce annual reports on their activities during the previous municipal year. The Committee was asked to note, however, that whilst a local authority must put in place arrangements to enable Members to produce annual reports, it is not mandatory for Members to do so. The draft guidance published for consultation by the Welsh Government was appended to the report.

The draft guidance states that local authorities are able to set their own conditions or restrictions on what is included in an annual report. The guidance also proposes standard items for inclusion in the content of annual reports, including:

- Roles and Responsibilities – to include details of Membership of Committees and outside bodies, as well as attendance records
- Local Activity – details of surgeries held and representations made on behalf of electors and the results of those representations
- Major Projects – involvement in local, county or regional initiatives or projects
- Learning and Development – details of training and development events or conferences and seminars attended

The Committee was also asked to consider whether annual reports should be mandatory and whether additional information, such as attendance at PACT meetings and their presence at other meetings in their communities, should be included within the reports. Cabinet Members are also able to produce separate annual reports on their activities in their executive roles.

The Committee was advised that annual reports should only contain factual, non-political information that specifically relates to activities undertaken as an

elected member. Reports should not be critical of other members or seek to make direct comparisons.

The Welsh Government expects the first annual reports for 2012/13 to be published no later than June 2013. The Committee was asked to note the draft guidance and comment on the Council's future arrangements

The Committee discussed the contents of the report. Members were invited to comment on the issues set out in the draft guidance paper. The discussion is summarised as follows:

- Officers advised that the costs of producing annual reports would be reduced if the reports were published electronically. There was no requirement to produce a formal report.
- The Committee was keen to ensure that, where duties are shared amongst Councillors from the same political group within a single ward, this is reflected in the report.
- The Committee felt that all reports should be proof read by a third party to ensure that there is no political content included within those reports and to ensure that there are no Data Protection breaches.
- The Committee supported the publication of annual reports. Officers were requested to draft a template as a basis for future annual reports. Members requested the opportunity to add some narrative to their reports in addition to the mandatory information required in each report.
- The Committee requested officers to seek clarification from the Welsh Government as to whether Councillors within a single ward could publish 'collective' annual reports.
- Members were requested to comment on the draft guidance published by the Welsh Government by 21 December 2012.

RESOLVED – That:

- (1) the draft guidance issued for consultation by the Welsh Government be noted;
- (2) the comments from the Committee outlined above be used to inform the Council's future arrangements for the production and publication of annual reports by Members.

19 : JOINT MEETING WITH STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – That a Joint Democratic Services Committee and Standards and Ethics Committee meeting be convened in April 2013.