

Report to the Constitution and Members Services Standing Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting: 20 Februar 2012

Portfolio Holder: Support Services

Subject: Circulation of Agenda – Follow Up Report

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Recommendations:

- (1) To review the circulation of agenda in respect of Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings;
- (2) To consider whether members of the Council should be consulted via the Members' Bulletin on any changes proposed with a view to initiating preferred changes to circulation lists or await the further review of electronic delivery and associated legal advice.

Report

1. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 November 2011, a follow up item was added to the Panel's work programme. This relates to member despatch arrangements and in particular to agenda which are sent to all Councillors.
2. This issue was discussed at the last meeting of the Panel and some concern was expressed about whether distribution lists should be reviewed so as to reduce the amount of paper copies in circulation. This has to be seen in the context of legal requirements which are now to be clarified by obtaining Counsel's opinion on:
 - (a) a move to an electronically-based despatch system for all agenda and all Councillors:
 - (b) a health check on the current arrangements for electronic notification to non-members with paper copies sent only to members of the Council body concerned.
3. A survey of despatch lists shows that the arrangement summarised in 2(b) above does not apply to the following agendas:
 - (a) Cabinet;
 - (b) Council;
 - (c) Standards Committee; and
 - (d) Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
4. The total distribution for each of these agenda is approximately 85-90, 58 copies are sent to Councillors and the balance for Directors and a limited number of other staff, plus the public at meetings and information centres. Some of the public copies held in Democratic Services prior to meetings are requested by Councillors and officers who do not receive a paper copy as of right. The general assumption is that Councillors who do not receive paper agenda are able to access the information on line. The IT allowance paid as part of the remuneration scheme (£500 p.a. for new members in their first year and £250 p.a. in subsequent years) is intended, along with Basic Allowance, to assist with running costs.
5. Under the present policy, a complete distribution to Councillors for Council meetings

will take place. In terms of the Cabinet (but not Cabinet Committees) and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (excluding Panels), a decision was made operationally to continue complete paper circulation so as to facilitate the call in process and heighten awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny function. However, this is not a constitutional requirement.

6. The Standards Committee is circulated to all Councillors as a paper copy. This was an operational decision designed to highlight the ethical framework and the role of the Standards Committee. However, the future of the Standards Committee is now under review following the passing of the Localism Act 2011.

7. If the Panel wish to see changes in the distribution of agenda, the Assistant to the Chief Executive could consult all Councillors on the following basis:

- (a) do they wish to continue the present arrangements for these four Committees?
- (b) do they wish to replace this with an "opting in" or "opting out" policy at the beginning of each Council year?
- (c) do they wish to replace the current system with "members only" paper agenda only for members of the bodies concerned?

8. The reduction in print runs for these three bodies will reduce the re-charge to Democratic Services for printing. Currently this sum equates to expenditure of £49,000 for the current year. However, any saving achieved should be balanced against:

- (a) possible adverse member reaction if paper copies are discontinued before an electronic alternative has been identified;
- (b) the need for legal advice on whether notices of meeting must be in paper form; and
- (c) the potential for non members to become "detached" from Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee activities if paper agenda are discontinued.

9. On balance, it may be preferable to await the results of legal advice currently being sought and the review of electronic delivery which is due next year.