

# **Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Report reference:**

**Date of meeting:** 17 April 2012



**Report of:** Constitution and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel

**Chairman:** Councillor D Stallan

**Subject:** Circulation of Agenda – Follow Up Report

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## **Recommendations:**

- (1) That with effect from the Annual Council meeting 2012, non members of any Council body be invited to “opt in” to receive a paper agenda;**
- (2) That paper copies of Council agenda continue to be sent to all Councillors; and**
- (3) That the Management Board be asked to conduct a review of paper agenda distribution to Directorates with a view to reducing costs further.**

## **Report**

1. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 November 2011, we were asked to carry out a review of agenda which are sent to all Councillors.

2. This issue has been discussed at two meetings of the Panel and we were concerned 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. We have received details of a survey of despatch lists which 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.

These are sent to every member of the Council in paper copy.

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 present legal requirements, a complete distribution to Councillors for Council meetings must continue to 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 and legal requirements can be met by circulating paper agenda to members of those bodies only.

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. We are proposing that, from the start of the 2012/13 Council year, paper agenda will only be sent to members of Council bodies. We are proposing that non members should be able "opt in" if they wish to receive paper agenda. A pro forma would be provided for this purpose. However, full paper distribution for Council agenda will continue, in compliance with legal requirements.

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 which has already been reduced by approximately £10,000 for 2012/13.

9. We will be considering electronic options for Council agenda in the new Council year. This may include the use of new technology at meetings which will make the use of paper agenda redundant. Those proposals will, however, have to await legal advice as to whether full electronic delivery will meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. In the meantime, we are recommending that the Council should continue its drive to reduce paper usage and associated costs. We are also recommending that a similar review of paper agenda distribution to officers should be undertaken by Management Board.