



## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 6TH FEBRUARY 2019

**SUBJECT: REVIEW MAIL SERVICE SUPPORT FOR AGENDA DESPATCH**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide Members with background information on an MTFP savings proposal to cease Mail Service support for circulation of committee documents to Member's homes ('Agenda Despatch'). The report includes an explanation of alternative electronic and paper options should the savings proposal be approved.
- 1.2 The report is seeking the views of Members prior to this savings proposal being presented to Council on 21 February 2019 as part of the overall Council savings proposals.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Mail Service has traditionally supported distribution of hard copy committee documents to Elected Members via courier, but this costs £5000 per year, is increasingly difficult to resource and has a negative environmental impact.
- 2.2 More cost-effective secure delivery options are now available that will complement the Council's drive towards environmentally friendly digital working, whilst making available alternatives for a minority of members to continue to work using paper on an exception basis.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that support for agenda despatch by the Mail Service courier should cease on 31 March 2019 to achieve an MTFP saving in 2019/20 and in line with the direction of modern local government. The alternative options outlined in this report can be utilised instead to encourage electronic working, but the alternative options will also support continued working from paper where absolutely necessary.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the Council's constitution is reviewed to determine whether a modification is required, similar to neighbouring local authorities, to enable electronic agenda despatch.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To achieve a £5000 saving towards the Council's overall savings targets.
- 4.2 To reduce impact on the environment of vehicle journeys and printing.
- 4.3 To work in alignment with the Council's digital objectives, increase security of exempt committee documents by viewing them on encrypted and password protected devices, and reduce costs of confidential disposal of exempt hard copy committee documents.

## 5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Hard copy committee documents have traditionally been provided to elected members at their home address via a courier service provided by the Council's Mail Service. Over time a number of elected members have either opted to collect printed papers when they come to Penallta House or access papers electronically, but the majority continue to use the courier service.
- 5.2 Welsh legislation stipulates that the summons for a member to attend a meeting must be "left at or sent by post to the usual place of residence of every member of the council", but there is a facility for members to opt to receive the summons a different way. Other local authorities have adapted the Rules of Procedure in their Constitution to allow for electronic methods of delivering committee documents. For example Torfaen CBC's Constitution says "the Proper Officer will send an invitation and agenda to every Member of the Council" and goes on to say "Council have agreed that it will require Council and Committee meetings to move towards conducting business digitally with effect from June 2012".
- 5.3 The courier service costs the Council's Mail Service £5000 per year in staff overtime and vehicle fuel. There are clear environment impacts due to travelling the length and breadth of the county borough, and MTFP savings achieved due to staff retirement has made the courier service more difficult to sustain whilst also delivering a Mail Service for the whole Council. Printing costs and staff preparation time are also incurred by Democratic Services, and income is generated by the Print Unit.
- 5.4 A presentation was given to Democratic Services Committee on 26 November 2018 on outcomes of a member consultation on going paperless. Members welcomed the option to work electronically as long as options continue to be available for members that need to continue using paper formats.
- 5.5 This report proposes changes to the agenda despatch process but includes alternative options to satisfy Democratic Services Committee concerns, and to address other challenges that we have identified, whilst still achieving advantages for the majority of members.
- 5.6 The proposal is for all committee documents (open and exempt) to be sent to members within statutory timescales via Modern Gov, similar to arrangements in neighbouring local authorities. Members can utilise IT equipment supplied by the Council at their home address to securely access electronic versions of the committee documents. Modern Gov can be used on portable devices (e.g. laptops, tablets) to access papers during Council meetings, and also enables members to annotate papers as required. IT and Democratic Services will provide support on queries and training on utilising Modern Gov/IT equipment as necessary.
- 5.7 If the majority of members work this way we can achieve the following benefits:
- a. increased security for constituents, the Council and the individual elected member, as there is no need to securely store and transport printed papers, reducing risk of data breaches that could cause damage and distress to individuals and lead to substantial monetary penalties;
  - b. removes the cost of disposing of confidential waste (i.e. exempt hard copy committee documents); and
  - c. better for the environment, as reduces printing and fuel costs for a van to travel the length and breadth of the county borough.
- 5.8 However it is recognised that there may be some uncertainty about how to utilize the technology, some members may not yet have a portable device to use at a meeting, broadband speeds in certain parts of the county borough will vary due to service provider restrictions, and some members may have specific reasons why continuing with paper is necessary.

5.9 The Digital Cabinet project is the first step in supporting all members to work electronically, and both Democratic Services and Digital Services are on hand to assist with any queries or familiarisation required. In the meantime alternative options are available that will assist in achieving an overall financial saving on the courier service and environmental benefits. The alternatives are summarised in a diagram in Appendix 2, and described below:

- a. arrange for committee documents to be printed for the minority of members that cannot yet work electronically, to supplement the electronic documents that would have reached them via Modern Gov within statutory timescales. The member can collect from Penallta House or an alternative Council building close to their home – this option is suitable for both exempt and open papers. Concerns have been raised about limited opening times for some Council buildings in an elected member's locality, and but it should be emphasised that electronic documents will be available at home via Modern Gov, so there will be no delay in members accessing documents within that statutory timescales;
- b. for open papers only, a less desirable but low cost option is for members affected to arrange for papers to be printed and posted to their home address (costs are given in Appendix 1). However take-up of this option needs to be closely monitored to avoid courier cost savings being replaced by postage costs, so buy-in from the majority of members to work electronically is crucial.

Special Delivery would be required for exempt committee documents, at a cost of £6.90 per item. Given the greater security risks in printing exempt papers the cheaper, more secure option of printed exempt reports being available from a Council building is recommended, as the exempt papers will be accessible via Modern Gov at home.

- c. in exceptional circumstances members could print relevant papers only at home, as they are already provided with printers, paper and ink. However this would need to be monitored, as if all committee documents are routinely printed at home it will be more expensive than printing centrally on equipment designed for bulk printing. Democratic Services Committee noted at their meeting on 26 November 2018 that 74% of respondents to the questionnaire agreed that Members should not increase their printing at home.

5.10 The Mail Service courier also delivers supplies of paper and ink for members to use at home, and it is proposed that these could either be collected by the elected member from Penallta House when they attend a meeting, or from a council building close to their home.

### **Conclusion**

5.11 Modernisation of the agenda despatch process is overdue, in light of security, cost and advances technology. Modern Gov and IT equipment provided to members should equip the majority with the ability to work from electronic committee documents, including annotating them for use at meetings. Buy-in from the majority of members is crucial to making this change a success, but we recognise some key challenges and have proposed some interim solutions.

5.12 Options are:

5.12.1 Continue with the status quo, and operate agenda despatch in the traditional way

5.12.2 Change to a digital way of working, to showcase members leading the way in the wider digital transformation project for the Council. If change is the proposed option, there are further options for timescales:

- a) Change now in order to meet proposed MTFP savings targets for 2019/20.
- b) Change gradually but continue to meet costs of traditional agenda despatch during 2019/20 financial year, and continue to accept security risks and environmental impact.

## 6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 All members have been or will be provided with portable IT devices for use at home and at meetings.

## 7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 Constitution  
Carbon Management Strategy  
Sustainable Development Strategy  
Data Protection Policy  
Information Security Policy.

### 7.2 Corporate Plan 2018-2023

This proposal contributes to the Corporate Well-being Objective 4, part of which is to minimise adverse impacts on the environment:

*Objective 4 - Promote a modern, integrated and sustainable transport system that increases opportunity, promoted prosperity and minimises the adverse impacts on the environment.*

## 8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 8.1 This proposal would contribute to Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 listed below.

- *A prosperous Wales*
- *A resilient Wales*
- *A globally responsible Wales*

It will reduce Council vehicle use, as a courier will no longer be required to drive the length and breadth of the County Borough. We also anticipate that over time increasing numbers of Members will opt for accessing papers electronically rather than receiving printed papers. Therefore the Council's environmental impact and costs will be reduced.

- 8.2 This proposal is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act.

- Long Term – reducing environmental impacts ensures that short-term needs are balanced against the need to safeguard the ability of future generations to meet their long-term needs.
- Prevention – reducing environmental impacts and increasing security of agenda despatch prevents problems occurring, or getting worse.
- Integration – the benefits of ceasing Mail Service support for the traditional agenda despatch process will positively impact the Council's objectives and goals, as well as the objectives of other public bodies to safeguard our environment.
- Collaboration – Democratic Services acting in collaboration with Customer and Digital Services will help to make this change, and achieve the benefits identified in this report.
- Involvement – involving all elected members, who have an interest in achieving the Council's well-being goals, and reflect concerns of constituents from the area which the body serves.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 An EqIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and supplementary guidance and no potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EqIA has not been carried out.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Ceasing mail service support for agenda despatch will save £5000 per annum in fuel and staff overtime from the Central Services budget.
- 10.2 Alternative options while members become accustomed to working electronically will involve collection from council buildings or utilising post where absolutely necessary. Appendix 1 describes £372.88 estimated cost savings over a one month period of using post compared to courier for open papers only.
- 10.3 If post is used for exempt papers, costs will increase due to requirement for Special Delivery, so collection from Council buildings to supplement viewing on Modern Gov is recommended for exempt documents, otherwise any difference in cost savings will need to be found elsewhere, which are likely to have a front line service delivery impact.
- 10.4 There will be additional cost savings for members of securely disposing of printed committee documents.
- 10.5 There will be a reduction in paper printing costs.
- 10.6 Security of storage and transportation of exempt committee documents will be improved at no additional cost.
- 10.7 If the £5000 saving is not made via this route then alternative savings will need to be found elsewhere in the service area, which are likely to have a front line service delivery impact.

## **11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Overtime has been paid regularly to couriers for agenda despatch over many years, and HR advised that a consultation is carried out with the five employees that undertake agenda despatch courier tasks, and that if members decide that agenda dispatch should cease, a notice period is given.
- 11.2 Staff undertaking courier duties were made aware that changes were being considered some time ago, and a formal consultation took place on 30 January 2019 with staff and trade unions. Concerns were raised about the impact on staff of losing this element of their income and the effect on pension, as this group of staff are low paid and unlikely to recoup these hours. Trade Unions therefore asked for compensation payments and rota payments to be considered, as they are of the opinion that these hours appear contractual within the JD. Trade Unions also raised concerns about security of the technology proposed and cost of IT support to ensure technology was both in place and effective; and whether staff would be asked to undertake overtime in the event of a technical failure. The Corporate Information Governance Manager is working with HR to resolve these queries.

## **12. CONSULTATIONS**

- 12.1 All responses from consultations have been incorporated in the report.

### 13. STATUTORY POWER

#### 13.1 Local Government Act 1998 and 2003, and responsibility of full Council.

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#### Appendices:

Appendix 1 Snapshot of estimated courier spend compared to postage  
Appendix 2 Summary of options for accessing committee documents

## Appendix 1 – Snapshot of estimated courier spend compared to postage

1.0 In April 2018, there were 14 committee meetings, including 1 full council, 3 scrutiny committees and 2 cabinet meetings. Courier costs for April 2018 are estimated below. It is difficult to identify exactly how many calls are required for the following reasons:

- there will be some overlap, e.g. one member of multiple committees will receive one call with papers for more than one meeting; and
- a small run of 3 calls could involve travelling miles across the county borough if the elected members are located some distance away from each other.

2.0 Estimated courier costs for both open and exempt papers:

Fuel:

Wk 1 = 3 calls approx. 20 mile courier run @0.45p per mile = £9

Wk 2 = 50 calls approx. 140 mile courier run @0.45p per mile = £63

Wk 3 = 60\* calls 140 mile courier run @0.45p per mile = £63

Wk 4 = 24 calls approx. 70 mile courier run @0.45p per mile = £31.50

*\*13 opted to collect/electronic*

Overtime = £370.78

**Total courier costs = £537.28**

3.0 Estimated postage costs (open papers only):

Wk 1 = 3 letters @£1.20 = 3.60

Wk 2 = 50 letters (approx.) @£1.20 = £60

Wk 3 = 60\* letters @£1.20 =£72

Wk 4 = 24 letters (approx.) @£1.20 = £28.80

*\*13 opted to collect/electronic*

**Total postage costs = £164.40**

4.0 Therefore there is an estimated saving of £372.88 in one month for the Council.

5.0 Exempt reports would require Special Delivery at a cost of £6.90 per bundle. Printing of exempt reports poses a greater security risk than viewing them on Modern Gov, so it is recommended that for both cost and security reasons exempt reports should be viewed on Modern Gov both at home and at meetings wherever possible. If printed copies are required, they could be pre-ordered and collected from Ty Penallta, and only posted in exceptional circumstances.

**Appendix 2 – summary of options for accessing committee documents**

<p><b>Default –</b> to avoid courier journeys</p>	<p><b>Options to <i>supplement</i> Mod Gov –</b></p> <p>Used temporarily wherever possible.</p> <p>Opening times of buildings, and speed of mail service will not delay members accessing documents - available via Mod Gov within statutory timescales.</p>	<p><b>Suitable for:</b></p>
<p>Mod Gov –</p> <p>Open and exempt committee documents available at home within statutory timescales.</p>	<p>1. Print committee documents for collection from Penallta House or an alternative Council building.</p>	<p>Members who do not yet have a portable device to access papers in a meeting.</p> <p>Members who do not feel confident using Mod Gov or technology, or have a specific reason why they still require paper formats.</p> <p>Both exempt and open documents.</p>
	<p>2. Open documents only - print and post to home address (cost savings are described in Appendix 1).</p>	<p>Members who do not yet have a portable device to access papers in a meeting.</p> <p>Members who do not feel confident using Mod Gov or technology, or have a specific reason why they still require paper formats.</p> <p>Open documents only.</p> <p>Exempts would need to be sent via Special Delivery which is costly, so member would need to collect from a Council building, or ideally seek support to use Mod Gov at home.</p>
	<p>3. In exceptional circumstances members could print <u>relevant papers only</u> at home, but this would need to be monitored and discouraged.</p>	<p>Emergency situations, if a member cannot collect documents from a Council building in time to attend a meeting.</p>