



meeting	ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE	
date	6 April 2005	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF MEMBERS' SERVICES

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR COUNCILLORS

Purpose

1. To confirm the arrangements for the provision of information technology for councillors.

Background

2. It is the County Council's practice to offer to its elected members a range of technology and telephony equipment to support them in the performance of their roles. Under the e-government targets set by Central Government, all councillors should have access to the internet and have an e-mail address through which they can be contacted on local authority business. Additionally, there is a target for councillors to be able to have a hosted web-site, which would be interactive and within which they would be able to communicate with the electorate.
3. This report describes the facilities currently available and planned for the future and seeks approval for the 'package' to be available for all councillors following the May 2005 Elections.
4. Members are aware that, since the last Elections, there have been significant advances in the types of technology available within the market place. Indeed, the Committee has agreed recently that six councillors should take part in a pilot project/trial of the latest infra-red technologies. Use of infra-red IT kit should lead to more portability of equipment and a reduced requirement for desk space. Clearly, it is not appropriate to seek to provide that equipment until the outcome of the trial is known and the benefits and any dis-benefits for a councillor's role have been identified and evaluated. In these circumstances, the matter has been discussed with the Council's IT Services, who have indicated that the package to be offered to councillors should be as follows:-

Computers

5. Each Councillor to be offered either a desk top PC or Laptop PC. Desktop PCs would be permanently installed within a councillor's

workspace at County Hall, whereas Laptops are capable of use both at County Hall and within a councillor's home.

6. The kit to be provided will have a minimum specification of 512 Mb of RAM and will have access to the County Council's standard packages for E-mail, Internet and Intranet access, electronic diary and calendar, word processing, spreadsheets, Powerpoint, and creation of databases.
7. It is anticipated that, in the case of those councillors who also occupy positions of responsibility within the Council (eg Leaders, Cabinet Members), the package will be a desktop PC or laptop and docking station with a higher memory and processor specification. This is because of the volume of data likely to be processed or stored on their machines.
8. Councillors who choose the laptop option are able to reclaim under the Members' Allowances Scheme the cost of the installation and call/rental charges of an additional telephone line or a broadband connection provided only for the purpose of using County Council IT facilities.
9. Councillors will be required to sign the acceptance of the IT Protocol which has been the subject of a report to the Standards Committee

Hand held technologies

10. There will be some councillors whose role requires them to be in almost constant contact with the Council or who wish only to use personally any IT facility for accessing a diary and reading e-mails. For these, the Council is able to offer a hand-held device and blue-tooth mobile telephone. Although the device is able to access the full range of software and programmes provided and supported by the County Council, it is strongly recommended that it is not used for word processing or similar functions due to the physical size of the screen and the health and safety implications of doing so.

Councillors' e-mail addresses

11. The County Council currently offers individual e-mail addresses for all councillors, using our usual naming conventions. This is the e-mail address which appears on an individual councillor's contact page on the web site and in all other Council publications. It is accepted that it is an individual's responsibility to ensure that e-mails accounts are regularly reviewed and their contents dealt with in accordance with the Council's usual policies and with the requirements of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation. These rules do not usually cause any problems for employees, but are more difficult for councillors. This is because of the breadth of responsibilities and roles which councillors perform and which often necessitate absence;

the fact that many councillors also have paid employment; the volume of mail which can be sent to councillors.

12. The e-mail facility which the council provides enables delegated access to be given to a third party by the account holder. However, councillors who do not use their account regularly might find it more helpful for their electronic mail to be automatically redirected to a generic e-mail address for their group and which can be accessed by the Democratic Support Officers supporting their Group. This facility, which is already in use by some councillors and identified appropriately on the web site, will be offered to all councillors immediately following the election.

Telephony

13. As members know, the Basic Allowance which all councillors receive includes an amount calculated to reflect the increased use of their home telephones arising from County Council business. With the exception of the additional telephone line or broadband connection referred to above, the Members Allowances Scheme does not enable councillors to reclaim the cost of telephone calls.
14. The nature of some of the roles which councillors perform, which lead to the need to maintain contact, together with the need to ensure the safety of councillors when, for example, they are representing the Council at meetings or conferences away from Nottinghamshire, has led to the Council having a number of mobile telephones available for councillors' use.
15. It had been the practice previously to offer a County Council-owned mobile telephone to every Cabinet Member and the Leaders of the Groups and for each Group also to have a small number of handsets available for individual councillors to borrow if they are travelling away from County Hall, especially if they are travelling alone. Over time, the practice within the Groups has been for the 'pool' handsets to be on permanent loan to councillors who have long lone journeys to County Hall or who are regularly away from Nottinghamshire on County Council business.
16. The County Council has an account for the provision of mobile telephones and 15 handsets are currently provided for use by councillors within these arrangements. In all of the circumstances described above, the councillor who has possession of the handset for the period covered by the account which is received is required to certify which calls were business and which, if any, were personal. The cost of all personal calls (plus vat) is met by the councillor.
17. The Committee is asked to determine whether it wishes the practice of providing mobile telephony to be continued as described above. In this regard, members may wish to extend the arrangements by

agreeing that, where requested, a mobile telephone may also be provided on permanent loan to the chairs of committees.

Financial Implications

18. The budget for Members' IT equipment is £91,724 in 2005-6. This includes an additional allocation of £20,000 and a carry forward from 2004-5 of £23,000.
19. The IT kit currently installed or provided for councillors is, in most cases, coming to the end of its useful life. There is a potential requirement for 67 sets of kit at a total maximum cost of £103,850, plus installation.. Installation costs are £20 per installation (£1,340) and there are also annual costs of £96 per e-mail account. These annual charges are met from elsewhere within the Members Services and are already included in next year's budget.
20. The costs of mobile phone provision are included in the overall Members' Allowances budgets.
21. The costs of additional phone lines or Broadband connections which Members are able to claim are already built in to the Members' Allowances budgets.

RECOMMENDED

22. That the Committee consider and agree the arrangements for the provision of technology and telephony for councillors

Patricia Holt-Murphy
Head of Members' Services

Legal Services' Comments (EB 24.03.05)

Consideration of the matters in this report and recommending the implementation of the arrangements set out in this report is within the constitutional delegation to Administration Committee.

Director of Resources Financial Comments (NS 23/3/05)

23. The financial implications are included in the report.

Background Papers Available for Inspection

Nil.