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Report

Subject : Further Paper Reduction in Committee Process
Report to : The Cabinet
Date : Wednesday 18 June 2008
Author : Principal Democratic Services Manager
Cabinet Member for Resources : Councillor Thorpe

1. Report Summary:

At the request of Councillor Thorpe, to consider measures aimed at reducing further the amount of papers circulated to and printed by members

2. Paperless or less-paper meetings:

Over the last three years, strenuous efforts have been made to minimise the amount of paper posted to members. Councillors now only receive paper copies of agendas for meetings they are required to attend. All other agendas and minutes are sent electronically via the members' weekly eBulletin.

- 2.1. Despite these efforts, the council currently sends out a large quantity of paper documents to councillors. The council's Customer Services Unit carried out an analysis of the volumes in 2007 and found that on average 4 items are sent out per councillor per week, which equates to approximately £8,580 per annum for postage, £4000 for paper and a further £18,400 in printing costs (largely these printing costs are fixed eg equipment rental) and associated staff time. Obviously not all of this volume of paper and postage relates to supporting Committee meetings.
- 2.2. This report examines the possibility of reducing the volume, by making greater use of electronic documents in meetings.

3. The legal situation:

- 3.1 Section 100A (6) of the Local Government Act 1972 added by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 sets out the council's statutory requirement to provide notice of meetings (the summons) specifying the matters to be transacted. This must be '*signed*' by the proper officer and '*left or sent by post to the usual place of residence of the member*'. On the face of it this would appear to preclude the electronic service of the summons (agenda).
- 3.2 The legislation does state that lack of service of the summons on any Member will not affect the validity of the meeting but it is likely that the courts would construe this saving provision strictly to allow slips rather than for it to be deliberately disregarded.

4. Practical considerations:

- 4.1. At present all committee documents are available for download from the council's website 5 working days before the meeting to which they relate. Each document is uploaded separately.

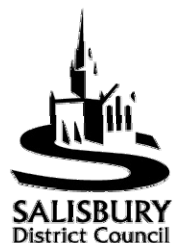


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Thus to download a copy of the full agenda, members have to download a number of separate documents which can be time consuming - particularly for larger agendas such as the Area Committees, Cabinet and Council. This would need to be addressed to make things more convenient for members.

- 4.2. To remove the necessity for paper documents in meetings, members would need a simple way of viewing the electronic documents in meetings. At present, this would necessitate bringing a laptop to each meeting. Laptop battery life should be adequate for most meetings if fully charged, but this would require members to fully charge the laptop before each meeting. Mains power is available at all meeting venues, so emergency back up power could be provided by extension lead (although this could be very difficult for larger meetings such as full council).
- 4.3. Members would also have to make sure the full document pack for the meeting is downloaded before the meeting. This would necessitate manually downloading each agenda pack to the laptop before the meeting. Again back-up copies could be provided at meetings via CDROM or memory sticks by the Clerk.
- 4.4. The use of electronic documents would facilitate the projection of documents on screen making it possible to highlight key sections of text such as recommendations.
- 4.5. Are members ready for such a major transformation? Councillor Thorpe has taken soundings from the groups and there has been little opposition to the principle of reducing the amount of paper circulated. However, some members may be slightly uneasy about relying totally on laptops in meetings. The recommendations set out below address this concern.

5. Recommended to the Council:

It is recommended that the council moves towards less-paper meetings by, surveying all members to ascertain:

- (a) those who are willing to move to 100% paper free meetings and to use a laptop for all council meetings
 - (b) those happy to access all documents online before a meeting provided a hard copy is available to pick up at the meeting
 - (c) those who would prefer to continue to receive a paper copy of the agendas pack
- (1) that the transmission method of preference be adopted for all councillors as soon as this is completed on the understanding that a hard copy of the agenda summons (the front sheet detailing the order of business) will still need to be posted to voting members to meet legal requirements.

6. Background Papers:

The use of electronic methods for circulation of committee documents to Members: A research report (Customer Services Unit) 2007

7. Implications:

You must complete the following:

- **Financial:** There are no additional costs in implementing this report. There is the possibility of modest savings to be made before vesting day from reductions in postage and paper, but these would be difficult to identify.
- **Legal:** The legal implications are addressed at Section 3.
- **Human Rights:** The Human Rights implications have been assessed, and none are infringed by the proposals set out here, as no member will be compelled to move away from their preferred transmission mode.
- **Personnel:** There are none directly associated with this report, although a lower printing volume will be generated which may impact in the longer term, although this is unlikely to be significant before Vesting Day.
- **Climate Change:** The reduction in printing and postage will have secured a reduction in the use of non-sustainable materials.
- **Council's Core Values:** The objective of this proposal is compatible with the council's aims and objectives as set out in the recent Climate Change review.
- **Wards Affected:** All