

KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

28th November 2006

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS

REPORT BY NICOLA RATCLIFFE, INFORMATION SERVICES MANAGER

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to bring Member communication into the electronic age in line with the e-Government initiative that the Council is working towards.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of this report are two-fold, there are additional costs that will need to be borne by the Council but these should be offset against the savings that are achievable if the recommendations are implemented in full. Should the recommendations be partially implemented the costs will exceed any savings that are possible.

3 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

There is no requirement for additional staff to implement the recommendations of this report.

4 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The only legal implications that apply in this area are in relation to the provision of agendas. Paragraph 4(2) (b) of Part 1 of Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 states as follows: "a summons to attend a meeting, specifying the business proposed to be transacted thereat, and signed by the proper officer of the council, shall, subject to sub-paragraph (3) below, be left at or sent by post to the usual place of residence of every member of the council" Sub-paragraph (3) allows a councillor to nominate a different address for delivery. Contact has been made with several other local authorities on the interpretation of this requirement, a number have suggested that if Members so request then it is within the requirements of the Act for them to receive agendas and reports electronically. The Constitution of one London Borough states that "Councillors may elect to receive notice by electronic mail rather than by post."¹

¹ London Borough of Lambeth

5 BACKGROUND & CURRENT SITUATION

The Council has had a policy of offering Members access to IT and on-line services for a number of years. Members have a choice of access methods from a simple Kennet e-mail address that forwards all e-mails to their home e-mail account to the provision of a laptop, printer and broadband. In addition, Members are able to create their own website. See Appendix A for full details of the services available. The Government has been pushing electronic Government since 2001, this has culminated in the priority service outcomes (PSO) which needed to be achieved by the end of March 2006. PSOs R5 and R6 require that Members have the option to have a Council provided web site and that reports, agendas and minutes are made available online. This Council achieved both of these before the target date.

5.1 STATISTICS

The following list shows the number of Members who access each of the possible options available to them:

- 24 have Kennet laptops
- 17 have printers
- 11 receive contributions towards the cost of their own broadband connection
- 22 are provided with BT Openworld access
- 39 have a Kennet e-mail address
- 25 have a Kennet web site

Some communications from the Council are provided electronically although these are mainly individual communications rather than to all Members. Copies of all reports, agendas and minutes are currently printed and posted to each Member, regardless of whether they sit on a committee or not, in the weekly post bag.

The Council's web site provides access to all public reports, agendas, and minutes. This is freely available not only to staff and Members but also to the public.

6 ISSUES

There are a significant number of issues that are currently being experienced; these vary from wasting resources to sustainability to irritation with piles of paper. The production of such quantities of agendas, minutes and reports involves significant resources. These include paper and consumables, staff time for running the printers and staplers, packaging into postage bags and the costs of postage. A number of Members have complained about receiving so much paper from the Council when they have access to electronic systems. This is in terms of the amount of paper that is wasted to the high costs of postage.

The Council has invested heavily over the years in information and communications technology and needs to look at all options for reaping the benefits.

7 PROPOSAL

In order to resolve these issues and to make best use of the resources that the Council has it is proposed that all Members are provided with:

- The necessary access to online services, either through the provision of equipment and communications or via their own equipment.
- A Kennet e-mail address that will be used for all communication from the Council.
- Print agendas and reports only for those Members and officers that actually sit on a committee. From research undertaken with a number of other local authorities, central production of paper copies of agendas for those Members who sit on a specific committee is the most cost-effective solution. The alternative is that Members print their own copies at a far greater financial cost and with the associated sustainability implications. This approach will ensure the security of the papers that are under the restricted Part 2 of any agendas. Members can request not to receive paper copies and to bring a laptop to the committee meeting to access the agenda and report. They will be able to access the internet from the Council offices through a wireless connection that is available. The laptop will need to be wireless enabled.

7.1 BENEFITS TO MEMBERS

It is anticipated that Members will see the following benefits:

- Reduce the size of the weekly post bag to just that which is necessary.
- Receive notifications of all other agendas, reports and minutes and can access them as necessary through the web site.
- An easy way of contributing to the efficiencies agenda that will engender public support rather than cutting services or raising prices
- Ability to communicate with each other electronically and to receive timely communications from officers.
- A more sustainable approach through reducing the amount of energy, paper and consumables used.

7.2 SAVINGS

At a time when the Council has to make savings not only to address the efficiencies agenda but all so to balance the budgets any savings that can be made should be introduced. The anticipated savings are:

- Postage – in excess of £2,500 per annum.
- Staff time in printing and preparation for posting - £5,000 per annum

7.3 INDICATIVE COSTS

It will remain possible for Members to select the package that best suits their needs. Some Members will be more comfortable using their own PC whilst others would rather use a Council-provided laptop, the options are fully explained in Appendix A. This is not a new cost as Members are able to take up the offer of various packages for connectivity at the present time.

The anticipated costs per Member over 4 years per item are:

- Laptop - £1,000
- Printer - £200
- Broadband access (using own connection) - £720
- Desktop software - £200
- BT Business broadband - £768

The actual financial impact over the four year term of providing Members with IT access will vary greatly depending on individual preference:

- the full package will cost £2168
- a contribution towards the use of a personal broadband connection will cost £720

8 RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that, after the District Council elections in May 2007:

- All Members have a Kennet District Council e-mail address that they monitor,
- All Members select their preferred method of accessing electronic information (as outlined in Appendix A),
- All Members have a Council provided web site that they provide as much or as little information to their constituents as they feel necessary,
- Only Members who sit on a Committee receive paper copies of agendas and reports, and
- The preferred means of communication between the Council and Members is electronic, so that wherever possible communication is carried out through e-mail both from and to Members.

Nicola Ratcliffe
INFORMATION SERVICES MANAGER
October 2006

Appendix A – IT Services Available to Members

Hardware & Software

The Council can provide both a laptop and/or a printer to enable Members to carry out Council business. These will be a standard specification and will have a modem. Members will have to sign the acceptance document before the equipment will be allocated. The laptop will have the Microsoft Office suite loaded on to it ready for use.

E-mail

E-mail addresses will be set up for all Members who use the system. This will be in the format firstname.surname@kennet.gov.uk. The Council will provide a secure area within the Kennet District Council website that Members can log into. Members will then be able to send and receive e-mails through their Kennet e-mail address.

Web Access

The Council can provide access to the Internet, using BT Openworld business account. This enables unlimited access to the web and free phone calls. Members will need to provide a phone line to access this.

Training

Training will only be provided for setting up Kennet provided equipment and access to the secure area of the website. This is provided by Stella Millar, IT Training and Support Officer on extn 851 or stella.millar@kennet.gov.uk

The Council will facilitate training courses through a third party for Members who have little or no experience in the use of a PC.

The Council runs courses for the use of the Microsoft Office suite, this covers Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. These courses are available to Members, for further information please contact Michelle Wells, Training & Development Officer in HR on extn 652 or by e-mail michelle.wells@kennet.gov.uk

Member Web Sites

Kennet offer Members the opportunity to have their own web site to promote the work that they are doing for the community that they represent. Full training and guidance is offered. To create a web site please contact Stella Millar, IT Training and Support Officer on extn 851 or stella.millar@kennet.gov.uk

Support

Member support is provided by Stella Millar, IT Training and Support Officer on extn 851 or stella.millar@kennet.gov.uk. Stella provides a first point of contact, if she cannot help she will redirect Members to the Council's Support Desk.

The Support Desk is available to Members during office hours. The staff can be contacted on extension 867 or by e-mail to IS.Support@kennet.gov.uk. All calls received, both from Members and officers, are logged and dealt with strictly on a priority to the Council basis. Support is only provided from the offices, there is no facility available for call out of support staff. Members will need to bring the equipment to the offices if any work needs to be carried out on either the laptop or the printer.

Options

Members can participate at a number of different levels, depending on their own individual preference. The possibilities are:

- Full package: laptop, printer and web access
- Web access (broadband): enabling access to the web through BT Openworld unlimited access, using a member's own equipment
- Secure access: a log on to the KDC website to enable access to the secure applications using a Member's own equipment and existing access to the internet. The Council makes a contribution of £15 per month towards the cost of the connection.
- Web site: ability to maintain an on-line presence – this can be activated with any of the above options.

Members must read and sign the Council's ICT Security Policy before access will be given.