

Subject: Members Secretarial & IT Support
Date of Meeting: 22 September 2009
Report of: Acting Director of Strategy & Governance
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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The report provides Members with an update on the secretarial and IT support provided by and through Democratic Services and outlines the proposals to improve the resources available to Members.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the information in the report;
- 2.2 That the Committee approves the establishment of a working group of Members to take forward the development of a casework software programme to enable Members to manage their own casework more effectively; and
- 2.3 That a report is brought back to the next meeting on the outcome of the development of the casework programme, whether it should be purchased and the funding provision.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

Secretarial Support

- 3.1 The Democratic Services team provide secretarial support to Members and copy type or take dictation through tapes, from the dedicated dictation line on1216 or through Winscribe. Further training for Members could enable them to dictate directly from their blackberry on the Winscribe system.
- 3.2 Additional support in respect of the following is also provided:
- Ward newsletters
 - Ward cards
 - Mail merges
 - General research
 - Register of Interests

- Allowances and expenses and guidance on related issues
- Equipment supplies and stationery (business cards, headed paper and compliments slips)
- Provision and maintenance of the Council diary

IT Support

- 3.3 Working in conjunction with the ICT Support Analyst, Members are provided with home pc's & printers, as well as having access to pc's in their respective offices/group rooms.
- 3.4 As part of an ongoing replacement and improvement programme and recognising the imposition of having pc's in the home environment, Members are now being provided with laptops & screens. The benefit of the laptops being that Members can take them out of their homes and use them with wireless connections elsewhere.
- 3.5 It is hoped that Members will also be able to shortly use a program called Citrix which will provide them with the ability to access data held on the council's servers such as draft agendas and reports.
- 3.6 Members are fully supported by the ICT Support Analyst with any queries or difficulties with their IT equipment and/or blackberries and during working hours by staff within Democratic Services.

Casework Software

- 3.7 Following a request from Members, investigations have been made into the provision of casework software to enable councillors to manage their casework more effectively.
- 3.8 Officers have undertaken a review of what is provided by other authorities and investigated the main providers that are being used as well as an internal option. To date whilst there are 3 leading providers, discussions with other authorities using the packages have identified various pros and cons with each package:
- Different Aspect
 Tagish (also known as I-Caseworker)
 Porism (also known as E-Caseworker)
- 3.9 The cost of these packages varies from between £6,000 and £10,000 per annum dependant on the number of licences that are obtained.
- 3.10 As a result of the investigations, discussions with the providers of Votewise have led to the idea of developing a web-based solution for Members' casework, which would be known as Wardlink. Votewise is a locally based provider of a web-based system enabling prospective candidates to register and have on-line discussions with their respective electorate.

- 3.11 Having gone through the aims for a casework programme, it is intended to establish a Member working group to feed into the development of the package and test the process. The benefits being that the package can be written to meet Members' needs; work with the council's IT system, be both Microsoft and Mac compatible and provide a web-based model which will enable Members to manage their casework and detail those elements they wish to do so publically. This will enable direct interaction with residents so that a specific issue can be seen and the action being taken updated e.g. the loss of a street light might be raised by a resident and by listing the matter on their site, the councillor will enable other residents to see the matter has been raised and what action is being taken to resolve it.
- 3.12 It is proposed that a further report be brought back to the committee in November detailing the findings of the working group. The financial costs for the package are outlined in paragraph 5.1 and it is assumed that the Mayor would not be undertaking casework during their year, hence the costings are based on a maximum of 53 licences.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Members who had previously expressed an interest in the provision of casework software have been kept informed of progress and discussions have been held with officers in IT with regard to the programmes available and IT compatibility requirements.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Should the development of the Wardlink package prove successful, the cost would be dependant on the number of councillors wishing to make use of the system for example:

Part year November to March 2010	Full Year
10 licences would cost £500	10 licences = £1,200
25 licences would cost £1,250	25 licences = £3,000
53 licences would cost £2,650	53 licences = £6,360

- 5.2 It is anticipated that the cost of providing the casework solution for the remainder of the current financial year could be found from within existing resources. For context, the Executive Support budget for 2009/10 is £529k, of which £487k is staff related. In future years however, extra resources would need to be identified.

Finance officer consulted: Anne Silley

4 September 2009

Legal Implications:

- 5.4 There are no legal implications associated with the report and appropriate guidance to Members would be issued should a casework programme be approved for use.

Lawyer consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis 4 September 2009

Equalities Implications:

- 5.5 There are no equalities implications arising from the report; however the provision of a casework programme does enable greater control of their casework for all Members and could provide greater access and engagement for residents in respect of specific issues affecting their local areas.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.6 There are no sustainability implications arising from the report.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.7 There are no crime & disorder implications arising from this report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.8 The provision of casework software does enable Members to effectively manage their casework. However, any computer package is reliant on its ease of use and its security and will need to be evaluated to ensure it meets needs and can remain secure.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.11 The introduction of a casework programme for Members could result in a greater level of engagement with citizens and information of issues being accessible to a wider audience. This could lead to increased demand on staff time in responding to councillors and initiating action to resolve issues that have been raised.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

Background Documents

None