IMPROVING ICT ACCESS FOR MEMBERS

Submitted by: Head of Customer and ICT Services – Jeanette Hilton

Portfolio: Resources and Efficiency

Ward(s) affected: Non - specific

Purpose of the Report

To formally respond to the recommendations of the Transformation and Overview Scrutiny Committee, at your meeting of 9 February 2011, detailing actions to be taken with regard to the provision of Members ICT

To update Cabinet on ICT provisions put in place since the report of 9 February 2011 and to put forward recommendations for further development.

Recommendations

(a)   That the use of allocated Newcastle email addresses for members Newcastle caseload becomes adopted practice.

(b)   That Members be encouraged to use their dedicated website as their main source of information.

(c)   That the current practice of printing emails for members should stop as soon as possible.

(d)   That the ICT Access for Members Protocol be approved in its entirety.

(e)   That the Members Allowance Scheme be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel with regard to ICT provision.

(f)   That the means of access to relevant council systems be reviewed and developed in line with advances in technology.

(g)   That printed agendas continue to be distributed to members for the Committees on which they sit.

Reasons

Effective ICT access to a number of council systems is fundamental in supporting councillors in performing their role more efficiently.

A number of recent technology developments in ICT will enable greater access to council systems by members through a secure, structured approach in line with member and constituents expectations.

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1.   **Background**

1.1   A report was received at your meeting of 9 February 2011, detailing the comments and recommendations of the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of Members' use of and access to ICT (Information and Communication

Technology). A number of changes and updates have been made since that date and this report serves to update Cabinet on those changes.

2. **Issues**

2.1 In response to the proposals put to Cabinet at that meeting:

Proposal (i)   ICT is an essential tool for any Member of the Borough Council.

Response: Cabinet recognise the importance of access to technology in supporting all members in their roles, and the benefits this brings in effectively communicating with constituents and the wider political arena. Recent advances in home and mobile computing mean that councillors rightly expect to be able to have access to Council information from any location they choose.

Proposal (ii):   To avoid confusion for members of the public, officers and other Members, the provision of e-mail addresses for members who are not able or willing to accept e-mails will be withdrawn.

Response: All councillors are issued with a newcastle-staffs.gov.uk email address on election. The use of this address provides secure access to email; residents can be assured that their data is safe and protected.

Proposal (iii)   In light of (ii) above, the facility for printing e-mails for Members should stop.

Response: Printing of emails has gradually decreased following a drive which included putting agendas and minutes on line. Some members still have their emails printed. The cost of printing these items, many of which are multiple pages, can be up to £70.00 monthly, not including staff time. The councillors' courier service will continue to be used.

Proposal (iv)   The facility of a members' intranet, accessed via the council's website, should be provided, with content to include access to e-mail, easily accessible information on committee agenda items and minutes, on-line training, a message board and other useful information as identified.

Response: A dedicated members' website has been developed and is available for use which includes access to secure mail, and links to other essential information for councillors. Recent enhancements include the link to modern.gov, a computer system that assists councils in automating the key aspects of the government decision making process (know as a committee management system). This includes the management of forward plans, agendas, minutes and decisions, and these are published to the intranet and internet. The site will continue to be developed in line with councillors requirements.

Proposal (v):   Members will use their basic allowance to purchase the IT equipment that they require.

Response: Modern councils and constituents expect members to be able to utilise technology to support their role as a Councillor. The Independent Remuneration Panel will be asked to look at the current Members Allowances Scheme and make recommendations regarding the future composition of the scheme. Recommendations will be made by your officers that the provision of ICT equipment be included in discussions.

Proposal (vi):   Members who are not able to acquire their own IT equipment can request the loan of used council IT equipment for their period of office. In making this provision, if members are able to acquire their own equipment then they should do so without recourse

to this offer.

Response: With regard to the availability of and access to IT equipment, the proposal is to introduce an ICT Access for Members Protocol (Appendix A). In summary, the Protocol makes provision for the future supply of ICT hardware and software in order that Councillors can use technology in a safe, secure and effective way to support their duties. Access will be provided through two methods initially:

(a) Reusable IT equipment from existing stock
(b) Councillors existing IT equipment

The Protocol also details provisions for member printing and increasing member training.

Proposal (vii) Use of secure government e-mail by Members will have to be arranged by alternative means.

Response: The members dedicated website provides secure access to email and member specific areas of knowledge. ICT Services also provide an enhanced level of secure access to specific government departments such as Department for Works and Pensions, in compliance with government standards. These addresses are allocated following submission of a business case.

Proposal (viii) Training in basic ICT skills can be obtained from a variety of external sources, such as local libraries, that may suit Members better (and be better value for money) than training provided by the council.

Response: The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is an internationally recognised computer qualification that teaches personal computing skills using a range of popular Microsoft Office software packages. Courses are available at a number of local sites and training can additionally be undertaken on line. Training in basic ICT skills will form part of the Member Development Programme.

Proposal (ix) The council will provide 'signposts' to suitable equipment, suppliers and trainers.

Response: The ICT Support desk is available to members in providing help and guidance on these matters in conjunction with Member Services. Signposting to equipment, suppliers and trainers will also be accessible through the members dedicated website and forms part of the Member Development Programme.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 Members are issued with an individual Newcastle email address on election. These provide a secure communication platform between members and their constituents. Due to the high level of security, it is proposed that the use of these addresses by members for their Newcastle caseload becomes adopted practice. Councillors may, at their own risk, forward emails to other addresses, on receipt and acceptance of a disclaimer, as detailed in the ICT Access for Members Protocol.

3.2 That members be encouraged to use their dedicated website as their main source of information to support their role as councillor. Training and support will be provided by ICT and Member Services.

3.3 The current practice of printing emails for those members who choose not to have email, should stop as soon as possible. This will have the added benefit of reducing the cost of printing.

3.4 That the ICT Access for Members Protocol be approved in its entirety.

3.5 That the Members Allowance Scheme be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel and discussion takes place, and recommendations made, with regard to ICT provision within the allowance.

3.5 That the means of access to relevant council systems be reviewed and developed in line with advances in technology, to ensure a positive direction of travel.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

6.1 The proposals are fundamental in delivering on the corporate priority of Transforming our Council to achieve excellence. Councillors are at the forefront of delivering increasingly more efficient, transformed services to their constituents.

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 The information Commissioners Office (ICO) has recently published guidance for members of local authorities, with regards to their obligations under the Data Protection Act. The ICO recommends that members register as a data controller with them, as members handle personal information. Guidance on how to do this is available on the ICO website.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

8.1 Members considered equalities implications in formulating the proposals detailed in report submitted by the Transformation and Overview Scrutiny Committee, at your meeting of 9 February 2011

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.1 There are financial implications associated with the implementation of secure supplementary hardware (identification tokens) that will not be met from existing resources. It is anticipated this will be partly financed through the review of members' allowances. The current cost is £95.00 capital cost per device, with £15.00 yearly maintenance.

10. **Major Risks**

There are no major risks directly associated with this report.

11. **Key Decision Information**

This item is included in the forward plan.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

3 November 2010 – Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (401/11)
7 June 2010 – Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (83/11)
9 February 2011 - Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (602/11)

13. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - ICT Access for Members Protocol 2011