

SUBJECT:	Introduction of Paperless Working for Members
REPORT OF:	Leader of the Council

1. Purpose of Report

To consider proposals to introduce paperless working for members and to seek approval to provide members with Apple iPad devices following the District Elections in May 2015.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

Provide great value services by finding more efficient ways of working, including reduced democratic costs.

3. Background

The size of the Council after the District Elections in May 2015 will be reduced to 28 members in accordance with the recommendations submitted to, and subsequently supported by, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Bearing in mind this reduction, it is important to continue to consider ways in which support to members can be improved and to identify more efficient ways of working and reduce democratic costs. Following concerns frequently expressed by members about the volume of papers they receive, an exercise has been carried out to see how paperless working for members could be introduced by, for example, exploiting developments in information technology and in particular mobile technology. This report sets out recommendations arising from this exercise.

4. Discussion

- 4.1 Over the years the Government has encouraged the development of information technology to deliver the communication of information about council decision-making processes to the public. From 2009 the Information Commissioner required all councils to make available their publication schemes on their websites and to include within these schemes information about their decision-making processes.
- 4.2 The initiatives the Council has followed in accordance with this agenda include the purchase of the modern.gov software package which, amongst other things, enables the publication of Council agendas and Part 1 reports via the internet. Although this information is available electronically printed copies continue to be produced and distributed to members and the public at an annual cost of approximately £13k.
- 4.3 Based on the figures for one cycle of meetings it is estimated that during the course of a year the number of pages printed for agenda papers and reports totals 300,000. One way to reduce the volume of printed paper distributed to members is to follow the example being set by several authorities and to provide them with a device such as a tablet, to enable them to access and download the Part 1 papers and any Part 2 papers via a secure link to the members' extranet site. The intention would be to develop the extranet site to become a "resource library" containing, amongst other things, policy documents. Apart from reducing printing and postage costs further advantages of providing such a device include savings in officer time in printing/distributing agenda and reduced use of paper. Whilst the main purpose of the tablet will be to contribute towards paperless working and assist Members in their decision-making role it will also enable members to

have access to email and social media thus increasing support to them in their representational role.

- 4.4 There are several devices/tablets available on the market which could meet our business needs but based on the market research previously carried out by Chiltern and their experience of use over the past 3 years the Apple iPad, together with their applications, offers the most technologically robust and cost effective solution. Furthermore, economies of scale would be achieved by IT supporting the same technical solution over both Councils. It is therefore proposed that following the District Elections all 28 members be offered an opportunity to be provided with a wi-fi only Apple iPad (64GB) with the necessary application installed. The expectation is that members will have wi-fi in their homes. Should they require 3 or 4 G connectivity they will at their own expense either tether the Apple iPad to a phone or a device such as mi-fi. Mobile communication will therefore be at members' expenses. Based on Chiltern's experience and mindful that no advantage would be gained by seeking quotations/tenders the Management Team has therefore agreed that the purchase of the Apple iPads be exempt from the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules in accordance with Rule A6, Paragraph 17.

4.5 Roll Out, Support and Other Issues

The intention is for staff in Democratic Services and IT to roll out the project immediately following the District Elections so that the apple iPads can be operational in time for the meeting of Annual Council on 25 May. Each member will be offered an Apple iPad with appropriate initial training followed by on-going support from IT and Democratic Services. Accessing plans and associated documents works well on the Apple iPads as users can zoom in to the plans to see all the details which will be of benefit to members particularly those attending site visits. Part of the training will include a demonstration on how to use the zooming facility.

- 4.6 Members accepting the offer will be requested to sign a document indicating (i) their participation in the scheme (thereby agreeing that they no longer wish to receive printed copies of committee papers and for a printed summons to meetings (front page of agenda showing order of business) to be sent to their home address; (ii) their agreement to comply with the Council's IT Policy; and (iii) their agreement to return the device once they cease being a District councillor.
- 4.7 If the objective of paperless working is to be achieved it is vital that all members embrace the new way working to avoid creating duplicate procedures and systems which would be difficult to administer given the limited resources available to support members. Any member declining the offer will be advised that, although printed summonses to meetings will be sent to their home address, they will need to visit the Council's website to download copies of reports. Any member declining the offer on the basis that they intend to use their own device will be advised that support to them cannot be guaranteed especially if their device is not an Apple iPad.
- 4.8 Notwithstanding the objective to achieve paperless working there will still be a need to print a limited number of agenda papers and reports for distribution to the public at meetings.

5. Resources, Risk and Other Implications

Financial

With each Apple iPad costing £500 (which includes a cover, stylus and the appropriate applications) the cost of providing to all 28 members is £14,000. Although no budgetary provision exists the expenditure can be met from reserves. Purchase of the Apple iPads will enable the budget for printing and stationery budgets to be reduced to £1,000 to cover the cost of printing a limited number of agenda papers. Annual savings of £12,000 will therefore be achieved resulting in the payback period being just over 1 year.

Legal

Legislation relating to access to papers for meetings has recently been amended to allow the summons to attend Council meetings to be sent electronically to a member's specified email address. The requirements as to the time for service and content of the summons remain unchanged.

Risks issues

There is a risk that not all members will embrace the new way of working thereby compromising the aim for paperless working and creating dual processes which will be costly and time consuming to support thus eroding savings.

Whilst producing printed papers is not without risks, there are also risks in making data available electronically especially if the Apple iPad were stolen or hacked into. This risk will be mitigated by encrypting information where appropriate and providing access via a password. Part 2 papers will only be available via the extranet, access to which will also be password protected. Quite clearly there is a need to strike a balance between the need for security and the comfortable use of the devices and the intention is to address this issue as part of the training with members.

Equalities

The project will be rolled out in the knowledge that not all members of the public have access to IT - a limited number of printed copies of agenda papers will therefore be made available for circulation on request and at meetings. It is also recognised that some members may have a disability (for example an arthritic hand or visual impairment) which limits their use of the device and although training will be provided other means of support may need to be identified to ensure that any such member can continue to perform their roles.

Sustainability

Pursuit of the project will reduce the volume of paper printed.

6. Recommendation(s) to Council

1. That the project to provide Apple iPads to members following the District Elections in May 2015 as outlined above be agreed as part of a wider strategy to introduce paperless working within the Council.
2. That a sum of £14,000 be allocated from reserves to meet the cost of purchasing the Apple iPads.
3. That approval by Management Team to an exemption from obtaining competitive tenders for the purchase of tablet devices in accordance with A6, Paragraph 17 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules be noted.

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Background Papers:	