

## **MEMBERS' POST (Min 336/00)**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report invites the Sub-Committee to review the present arrangements for the despatch of mail to Members.
- 1.2 The arrangements for the despatch of mail are not a statutory activity although there is a requirement to deliver the summons for meetings at least 3 clear days in advance of meetings.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 In April this year, a system of delivering mail to Members on a Monday and Thursday each week was introduced, supplemented by ad hoc deliveries as required. This replaced the previous arrangement of a single despatch on a Friday each week with additional deliveries as necessary. A summary of the principal reasons that Members agreed to introduce the changes at that time are set out at Appendix A to this report. In addition, difficulties had arisen in finding sufficient staff prepared to undertake regular deliveries of mail to Members. The Council therefore agreed to employ a courier company to deliver Members' mail.
- 2.2 A small number of Members have indicated that the mail arriving twice a week causes them some difficulties. Further, complaints have been made about the need for additional deliveries taking place beyond the regular Monday and Thursday despatches.

### **3 CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS**

- 3.1 Mail is currently delivered to Members twice a week on a Monday and Thursday. The delivery contract is with Anglia Courier Express who collect the mail from the Rochford offices at 10.30am on the day of despatch. The route taken by the courier has been agreed with the Council and includes Parish Councils, the Evening Echo and local libraries. The cost of each delivery is presently £76.

### **4 MEMBERS' VIEWS**

- 4.1 In June this year, an article was placed in the Members' Bulletin inviting the views of Members on the arrangements for dealing with Members Mail. One Member responded to that invitation and expressed a

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preference to return to one delivery each week.

- 4.1 Following further complaints at the July meeting of the Corporate Resources Sub-Committee about the problems some Members experience in dealing with two deliveries each week, a survey form was included in an edition of the Members' Bulletin in July.
- 4.2 The response to the Member survey indicates 16 members are satisfied with the current arrangements with 5 dissatisfied. Of those dissatisfied with the service there is a common desire to return to one delivery each week. One Member has suggested that it would be better to have the despatch on a Tuesday and Friday. Another Member has complained of the need for additional deliveries to the two scheduled ones.

## **5 OFFICER COMMENT**

- 5.1 Of those responding to the July survey, a majority of Members are satisfied with the current arrangements.
- 5.2 Whilst the days of the despatch could be changed, there would be a need to ensure that the Council complied with the law requiring the summons (the agenda) for meetings to be issued to Members at least 3 clear working days before each meeting. At present, even with two despatches each week, it has been necessary on occasion to arrange additional despatches to ensure compliance with this rule. Indeed, prior to the current arrangements being introduced, additional deliveries were frequently arranged specifically to deal with the delivery of agenda and reports for the growing number of additional meetings convened at short notice. Further, the "referencing" of items often with the request that Officers produce a second report, means that it is not always possible to arrange for papers to be included in one of the scheduled despatches.
- 5.3 If Members are minded to return to a single delivery of mail each week, it would still be necessary to arrange for supplementary deliveries of mail most weeks to address the issues at 4.2. The issues identified in Appendix A to this report would also return as potential difficulties.
- 5.4 With regards to the despatch days, a Tuesday and Friday despatch could be introduced. However, this would mean that some agendas could be received a day closer to the meeting (but still within the statutory timetable) or slightly less time for officers to prepare reports.

## **6 THE WAY FORWARD**

- 6.1 From the survey, a majority of Members are clearly happy with the present arrangements for sending Members' mail. However, there is a small number of Members who do not like the arrangements. In order

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to address the needs of those Members who would prefer a weekly delivery, and although adding to the administration of the despatch, it would be possible to hold the mail for those Members to either a Thursday or Monday each week. The exception to this would be where meetings have been convened at short notice and there is a statutory requirement to serve a summons 3 clear days before the meeting. Also, those Members may not receive some of the reports that are marked "to follow" on agenda until after the date of the meeting unless further exceptions are made to the once a week arrangements. Whilst it could be argued that reports should not be marked to follow, in practice there will be a continuing need for this given that meetings are often convened at short notice and/or officers endeavour to ensure that their reports contain the most up to date information. In considering this option, Members should also be aware that whilst anything is possible, the more complicated the arrangements that are introduced the greater the risk of errors being made from time to time.

## **7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Although some savings may arise from the cancellation of one of the two scheduled despatches each week, it is anticipated that a second despatch will be required most weeks to deal with meetings convened at short notice and reports marked to follow. Even if some Members elect to have only one despatch each week, this is unlikely to generate much saving as in most instances the courier company will probably be in or passing through that area of the District in any event.

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Council must comply with the legal requirements to issue agenda and reports at least three clear days before a meeting. Although the failure of individual members to receive an agenda within this timescale perhaps because of requesting a weekly delivery of papers may not invalidate a meeting, Members may find that they have not received all of their papers before a meeting takes place. Some Members may also find that the public and the press have received agenda papers before them.

## **8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 If a weekly despatch is re-introduced, Parish Councils would receive agenda and correspondence from the District Council later than at present.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RESOLVES** the future arrangements for delivery of mail to Members. (HAMS)

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**Background Papers:**

Survey forms from members

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**APPENDIX A**

1. More timely provision of information to Members. Previously when there was only one delivery each week, mail could sometimes be held in the office for up to 6 days before it was sent to Members.
2. The workload for Members is spread more evenly over the week.
3. By the end of the last municipal year, the regular weekly despatch was frequently supplemented by additional despatches on different days of the week causing confusion as to when mail would arrive. The increase in unscheduled meetings and the requests for additional information to be sent out between the issue of an agenda and the meeting of a Committee and Sub-Committee necessitate additional despatches. Despatches on the fixed days of Monday and Thursday provide some certainty for Members on when they will receive post as well as fixed deadlines for officers.
4. The use of two fixed despatches each week reduces the number of occasions when it is necessary for mail to be sent to Members by Royal Mail. This results in savings in postage.
5. Administratively, a single despatch means that the committee and administrative support services are invariably spending the entire day of despatch working on last minute agenda and reports. The new arrangements help to spread that workload more evenly.