



Rochford District Council

To the Meeting of: FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

On: 1 FEBRUARY 2000

Report of: HEAD OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND MEMBER SERVICES

Title: ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DESPATCH OF COMMITTEE PAPERS

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Report approved by

Purpose of Report

This report recommends that in future there be two despatches to Members each week and that the arrangements for publishing the agenda and reports be changed accordingly.

Background

At the meeting of Council on 23 November 1999, it was agreed to make a number of changes to the format and content of committee agenda, reports and minutes. The Council deferred a decision on the introduction of a change in the distribution arrangements for committee agenda and other post for Members pending a further report on how the distribution would take place and the costs involved.

Despatch of Committee papers and other post for Members

Agenda are currently despatched on the Friday of the second week before the meeting (save where meetings are convened at short notice) and delivered to each member and to town and parish councils by hand on a Friday evening. All items of non-urgent post for members are held back until the Friday despatch.

The Head of Administrative and Member Services is concerned that the current arrangements result in administrative bottlenecks in the committee and document production units on the day of despatch and in post for members being held up.

To overcome these difficulties, it is suggested that a second despatch be introduced each week and the despatches take place on a Monday and Thursday. Agenda for meetings on a Monday or Tuesday could be included in the Thursday despatch of the second week before the meeting. Agenda for meetings on a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday could be issued on the Monday of the week prior

to the meeting. Any general post for members would be sent on the first available despatch.

Method of despatch

The current despatch arrangements rely on the willingness of a single member of staff to undertake the task each Friday. The member of staff receives a fixed fee of £28.77 per delivery together with a mileage allowance of £35.84 per delivery for making use of her own vehicle (a total of £64.61). Although on occasion the member of staff undertakes an additional mid week delivery of mail, she has indicated that she would not wish to undertake two deliveries each week on a regular basis nor would she wish to undertake a delivery on a Monday or Thursday. She has also indicated a preference to reduce the length of her existing round by sharing it with another member of staff. Attempts to provide cover/additional support for the existing delivery arrangements have in the past proved difficult to achieve and only one member of staff has indicated a possible interest in undertaking the task in the future. Some other staff may be prepared to undertake the task if the rate of pay was increased substantially.

The Head of Administrative and Member Services has considered the following alternative despatch arrangements:

Royal Mail – Used by the majority of local authorities, delivery is reasonably reliable although trials have indicated that next day delivery can be erratic in some parts of the District. Members have also previously expressed concern as to the security of items trusted to Royal Mail to deliver. The cost of each posting is likely to be around £75 on average.

Courier company – A number of local courier services have been approached and have indicated a willingness to undertake the delivery of mail for Members on both a Monday and Thursday each week. The lowest quotation received is £73 per delivery.

Use of an existing employee – If the despatch took place in the afternoon instead of the evening, it may be possible to find staff prepared to undertake delivery of mail. However, at present there are no staff identified as having spare capacity to undertake the job. The cost of this option will depend on the grade of the member of staff used.

Employment of a new member of staff – It may prove possible to employ one or more individuals at Scale 1 to undertake deliveries on two afternoons each week. Payment to the individual(s) could be on the same basis as at present (£64.61).

Member collection – Members' mail could be made available for collection from either the Rochford or Rayleigh offices from mid day on a Monday and Thursday. However, it is acknowledged that this arrangement may only be convenient for a small number of Members and may be an option combined with one of the others listed above. This could reduce costs of delivery.

Electronic distribution of committee agenda – It is technically possible to deliver committee agenda electronically either by remote access to the Council's main server or through the proposed Council website. However, it is acknowledged that this arrangement would only prove acceptable for some Members. Remote

access to the server would result in additional costs particularly if the Council bears the cost of the telephone call charges. The use of the proposed website would generate no additional costs. Again this might be a solution to be used in conjunction with one of the above.

Conclusion

The introduction of two despatches each week would help ensure Members, Town and Parish Councils and the media receive committee agenda and other mail much earlier. The Head of Administrative and Member Services has also identified the move to two despatches each week as essential to improving the efficiency of the committee, word processing and reprographics sections. Whilst appreciating that the current employee is unable to carry out the delivery of mail on alternative days, the Head of Administrative and Member Services considers that it is important to introduce greater efficiency in the way that Members' mail is handled. The use of a courier company would be the preferred solution as this avoids the need for, and cost of, recruitment and staff management. The responsibility for ensuring that delivery takes place at the required time is that of the courier company. Overall, the cost for each delivery is unlikely to be much greater than the current cost although the move to two despatches each week would increase costs. However, it should be remembered that there are already additional mid-week deliveries undertaken when the need arises.

Crime and Disorder Implications

There is a potential safety risk for a single member of staff delivering mail, particularly during the winter months. The Council as employer has a legal responsibility to minimise the safety risks for all employees.

Environmental Implications

A second despatch each week involving hand delivery would mean an additional vehicle journey taking place around the District.

Financial Implications

The additional cost of introducing two hand deliveries of mail each week on a regular basis and as recommended below is £2,500 per annum. Provision for this has been made in existing budgets. There are also efficiency gains to be taken into account.

Legal Implications

The proposed arrangements for issuing agenda papers would meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972.

Parish Implications

Town and Parish Councils would receive more timely information with the use of two despatches each week.

Proposed that the Committee RESOLVES with effect from the next cycle of meetings

1. to change the current arrangements for despatch of committee agenda and mail to Members and Town and Parish Councils by instead introducing a hand delivery of mail on a Monday and Thursday afternoon each week as outlined above.
2. to employ Anglia Courier Express at £73 per despatch to undertake the deliveries the cost to be met from within existing budgetary provision.
(HAMS)

Background Papers - None