

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder 20 January 2010
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director Corporate Services / Democratic Services
Officer

FUTURE PROVISION OF MEMBERS' DIARIES

Purpose

1. To review the future provision of Members' diaries.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought to the Portfolio Holder because it is a decision affecting all Members, could require expenditure from the Democratic Representation budget, which falls within his portfolio, and relates to workloads of the Democratic Services, Graphics and Printing teams, all of which are services within his portfolio.

Background

3. On 20 June 2005, Councillor John Batchelor, then the Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, received a list of potential cost savings within the Democratic Representation budget, which recommended cessation of production of Members' diaries and annual provision of custom inserts. His opinion was that the diaries were non-essential and could be dispensed with; however, no formal decision was taken.
4. On 19 December 2006, Councillor Simon Edwards, then the Resources, Staffing, Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, considered the matter and agreed that civic information need no longer be produced, as this information was available electronically, but that provision of diary inserts for the forthcoming municipal year showing key meeting dates continue.

Considerations

5. Following concerns raised by some Members that the 2008-09 municipal year diaries were delayed due to meeting information not having been agreed, 2009-10 meeting dates were confirmed earlier in the year, enabling the following municipal year's diary inserts to be circulated in March 2009.
6. These current inserts cover the period up to the end of June 2010, but meetings are now being scheduled into the 2010-11 municipal year. An annual challenge arises as officers are requested to meet different requirements for diary insert pages, with some Members preferring inserts for the calendar year and others for the municipal year. Receiving calendar year inserts in late autumn accommodates meetings being booked into the latter half of the following year, but additional municipal year inserts are requested each spring when meeting dates to the end of the municipal year are scheduled.
7. Although generic January-December 2010 diary pages are no longer available from the Council's suppliers, the Printing Officer has confirmed that May 2010-April 2011 municipal year inserts can be ordered, and that these can be supplemented mid-year

with January-December 2011 calendar year inserts, available from around September 2010. Filofax also provides academic year inserts, running from 1 August to 31 July.

8. Custom-printed paper inserts including meeting information cost approximately £250 per order (60 copies), and these previously have been supplied by an external company as the most cost-effective option in terms of efficient use of officer time, and results in a higher quality product because of the superior printers used by a professional firm. Staffing reductions in both the Democratic Services and Graphics sections will have an impact on the speed with which municipal diaries could be produced in-house, depending upon priorities within current workloads. As the Council does not have an A6 printer, in-house production would require all pages to be printed on A4, then cropped to A6, hole-punched and sorted.
9. The Council is also nearing the end of its current supply of leather diary covers and, if Members are in favour of retaining the paper diaries, a decision will need to be taken on whether to continue to provide the custom-made covers. In 2004 the Council ordered fifty covers in "Blue Coram PU" with gilt corners and the Council's logo embossed in gold foil. Including a bulk discount, this cost £523.50 plus VAT (£10.47 plus VAT each). On 11 January 2010 the supplier quoted £520 plus VAT for a new shipment of fifty covers (£10.40 plus VAT each), also including gilt corners and embossing of the cover with the Council logo in gold foil, as on the existing diaries. This marginally lower figure reflects a minor reduction in cover size, although these covers accommodate the same size of inserts, and discontinuation by the suppliers of the blue covers, which in future years would have to be replaced with a black cover.

Options

10. To cease future production of Members' diaries. Members' basic allowance includes £646 towards expenses, which would cover purchase of a paper or electronic diary.
11. To continue to produce custom-made diaries for those Members who request them. This number is decreasing annually as more Members prefer to purchase a diary meeting their individual needs. Producing fewer diaries upon request could see a greater cost per unit, as bulk discounts are available for larger orders.

Implications

12.	Financial	None significant.
	Legal	None.
	Staffing	Although only a small monetary savings is made, a more substantial on-going efficiency savings would be realised in terms of officer time currently required to compile, layout, proofread and finalise the inserts. Such a move would also comply with the Council's desire to minimise the amount of paper produced.
	Risk Management	None.
	Equal Opportunities	None.

Consultations

13. All Members. Twelve of fifty-seven members responded:
- (a) Councillor David Bard: "I, personally have used an electronic diary for some years and have no need of paper inserts."
 - (b) Councillor Steve Harangozo (in person): "I have no strong feelings about the diaries, but would prefer that Members receive more electronic alerts of upcoming events in case they haven't been looking at their diaries recently."
 - (c) Councillor Sally Hatton (by telephone): "I would very much like to keep the diaries. I feel they have so much information, I'd like to see them continue."
 - (d) Councillor Liz Heazell (by telephone): "I'm a little concerned about diaries being stopped because I now have to go and waste half a year's diary, either at the Council's expense or mine, and I think it would have been helpful if we had been told earlier in the diary-buying season that we would have to be buying our own. Is there any way that the Council could continue – I find it quite useful to have the meetings already printed in there. I also found quite useful all the information we used to have in our diaries about out-of-hours provision, that sort of thing, if we suddenly need an Enforcement Officer on a Saturday. I do think having our own diary meant that we used to get that sort of information. Is there no way in which staff and Members could continue to have that sort of thing, even if it means offering to contribute to the cost?"
 - (e) Councillor Peter Johnson: "In view of money shortages I fully agree that members should supply their own diaries."
 - (f) Councillor Janet Lockwood: "The diary itself I don't use and think it is a waste of resources."
 - (g) Councillor Mike Mason: "Whilst I agree that generic inserts can be purchased, the diary cover binder and some of the general information pages are of use and this is particularly so for newly elected members. I would therefore object to any discontinuation of the principle of issuing a members diary with the new members information packs. Furthermore replacement cover binders duly embossed with the Council's crest should be available to longer serving members as their existing ones wear out. If some savings on printing can be made by issuing generic pages each year instead of ones with meeting dates already printed on, then so be it. However your comment about reliance on electronic calenders may only apply to a very few members and the current performance of the secure email system does not enhance that function. I have on a number of occasions raised this with Steve Rayment and Cllr Wotherspoon. Indeed very recently I attended an external meeting where two Portfolio holders failed to attend due to a failure of whatever diary system they were using, Would you please also point out in your report to Cllr Edwards that member's facilities and remuneration are already essentially frozen with the decision last year on salaries and that in comparison with other authorities member's facilities in general are fairly sparse. Those of us who have had to register under the data protection act have also had the added annual expenses of £35. In my view this should be allowable as an expenses claim. I make these points merely to assist with the evaluation of savings and not as a criticism of democratic services. Is there a compromise here?"
 - (h) Councillor Alex Riley: "I use my SCDC diary all the time. I don't know any member who uses an electronic one instead. Portfolio Holders might, but the rest of us don't. Please do not do away with our diaries. The cost of providing them must be very small."
 - (i) Councillor Bridget Smith: "I use a diary with lots of columns as I have 3 different jobs so I would not miss it. I use my South Cambs one as a back up really."

- (j) Councillor Susan van de Ven: "I see no need to have diaries supplied free of charge to Members! Happy to have this cut."
- (k) Councillor John Williams: "I am not bothered, as I don't use it (though I know many who do)."
- (l) Councillor Peter Topping: "I agree - these are not widely used. But some may regret their passing..."

Effect on Strategic Aims

14.	Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
	None specific.
	Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.
	None specific.
	Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
	None specific.
	Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.
	None specific.
	Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
	None specific.

Conclusions / Summary

- 15. In response to concerns raised by Members, it should be noted that:
 - (a) Meeting dates are added to the Council's website immediately upon agreement, circulated with the minutes of the meeting at which they were agreed, and published in the Weekly Bulletin, all of which are accessible by Members and can be copied into personal diaries;
 - (b) Meeting information for the current and next week is posted on the wall of the Members' Lounge every Monday morning;
 - (c) Meeting dates can be downloaded to most e-mail programmes (including Microsoft Outlook, Lotus Notes and Novell Groupwise), Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile telephones directly from the Council's modern.gov system;
 - (d) All Members already have access to the Council's Microsoft Outlook electronic diary through the Council's Outlook Web Access secure e-mail system;
 - (e) Civic information, such as contact information for Parish Councils, is available on the Council's website and intranet, to which all Members have access;
 - (f) Contact information for officers is available on the Council's intranet, to which all Members have access;
 - (g) When away from their computers, or if they haven't printed off contact information, Members can use, or advise residents to use, the Contact Centre switchboard, which can forward calls to the correct service or to an out-of-hours service. Outside of Contact Centre and Council opening hours, direct telephone lines to most Council services are connected to answer machines which also give details of out-of-hours emergency telephone numbers.

Recommendations

16. That the Portfolio Holder agree that Members' diaries and diary inserts no longer be produced, realising an annual cost savings of approximately £250 for printing and layouts and £520 plus VAT for diary covers.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Opportunities for Cost Savings – Report to Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, 20 June 2005 and minutes of this meeting

Members' Diaries 2007 – Report to Finance, Staffing, Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, 19 December 2006 and minutes of this meeting

Members' Allowances Scheme 2009-10

Contact Officer: Holly Adams – Democratic Services Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713030