

PART 1 - PUBLIC

---

Decision Maker: **General Purposes and Licensing Committee**

Date: **20<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

**TITLE: MEMBERS' WEB PAGES**

Contact Officer: John Mankelow, Democratic Services  
Tel: 020 83134602 E-mail: john.mankelow@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Ward: N/A

---

1. Reason for report

Members have expressed concern at the lack of facility to enable them to include personal and other details on the Council's web site with the ability to edit the content themselves.

---

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

Members to note the progress made to date and recommend to the Resources Portfolio Holder that he approve the next steps as outlined below to enable a suitable facility to be provided.

## Corporate Policy

N/A

---

## Financial

1. Estimated cost                      Cost of software package - £25,000 plus implementation, support, annual maintenance and server costs)
  2. Recurring cost
  3. Budget head                      there is no specific budget head
  4. Total budget for this head    £N/A
- 

## Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional) – cannot be estimated
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours – cannot be estimated at the present time
- 

## Legal

1. Non-statutory - Government guidance: the Electronic government standards require member webpages and the present provision complies with that standard
  2. Call-in is not applicable: .Regulatory committees are not subject to call in However any decision made by the Resources portfolio holder or Executive will be.
- 

## Customer Impact

Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected) -                      all Members and individuals or organisations who access Member web-pages.

### **3. COMMENTARY**

- 3.1 The development of enhanced community engagement is an important element in the delivery of Building a Better Bromley. Effective engagement with all communities enables a greater understanding and responsiveness to local need and ability to deliver high quality and relevant services. This development would boost public awareness of councillor roles as leaders and representatives within both their local, and the wider Borough, community, and would also provide additional channels for local people to make their views known to councillors and thereby increase their opportunities to influence decision-making
- 3.2 The web site which contains Councillors details is on old site that is separate to the main Council site. Although a user is passed seamlessly to it from the corporate website there are limitations in operability between the sites. For example, it is not possible to search on the main site for councillors by postcode, however, it does link to another website where postcode searches can be performed. Due to the volume of requests and because it uses old technology, the website can occasionally go out of service and therefore needs to be replaced.
- 3.3 Bromley Knowledge have been looking at various options for presenting councillor information to ensure it expands on Members' needs and keeps up with future developments while balancing this with financial pressures. The intention was to also ensure councillors would be able to edit their own pages held on the website while also being able to link to party political information.
- 3.4 On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the Chairman and Councillor Nicholas Bennett attended a demonstration of a system by a specialist in providing web services for local government. This system offered considerable future potential while also providing Members' their own pages, software to control the decision making process with agendas and minutes, register of interests and election results. This would potentially mean Members could (a) have their own personal website and (b) edit their own pages in a user friendly way. The website would be simple to create and update via a web 'browser' and generally improve Members' visibility to the general public. There would also be a facility that could be enabled to 'approve' pages before they appeared on the internet. In addition, there would be some training support from the supplier as part of the package. The system demonstrated is used by a large number of local authorities including Kent County Council and is one of a number of potential options to meet Members' requirements. Any system chosen would involve costs in implementation, training, support to Members, software maintenance and the provision of a server or a hosted service for the operational environment.
- 3.5 The system demonstrated was considered extremely comprehensive, however, the possibility has been raised of purchasing only a part of a total system to meet priority needs and minimise costs. For this to be investigated further a clearer statement of Member's priority requirements will be necessary.
- 3.6 Further investigation of delivery options is already progressing, for example, potential to use the Sharepoint product already being used within the Council is being explored at a demonstration on 12th March. Hosted sites such as <http://www.councillorsuk.co.uk/> are also options. It is possible that some of these options could be implemented fairly quickly without significant development requirements, to meet the highest priority requirements of Members.

#### **Support of website use**

- 3.7 To help Councillors set up their own websites it will be necessary to provide training on the technical procedures to update the content, add images and links etc. The maintenance of a website would be the responsibility of individual councillors, they would be the people to decide

what information was loaded and what language to use. As well as technical training, it would be worthwhile teaching councillors to use their sites effectively and to appreciate its potential.

## **Next Steps**

3.8 It is proposed that further work should be undertaken as follows:

- a) Confirmation of Member's priorities – these need to be agreed and stated clearly to provide a basis for potential delivery options to be evaluated;
- b) Delivery options analysis against the statement of Member's priorities – necessary to identify the most cost-effective options considering all implementation and ongoing requirements and costs;
- c) Definition of the business case – to enable budgetary decisions to be taken.

At this stage a further report can be made to approve the budget allocation. Following this a tender process would probably be instigated, assuming a new system or service is required, based on Member's priorities and including exploration of implementation, support and operational requirements.

## **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The ability of councillors to communicate by a new means would enhance their availability to Bromley residents. Good communication is an important factor in producing public satisfaction with the work of a Council. The additional means of communication provided by councillor websites will help make the Council excellent in the eyes of residents.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 As stated above, although the complete package demonstrated would cost £25,000 there is the possibility that only part of the package could be purchased. In addition, are a number of other costs and resource implications that will need to be identified and considered as part of a business case. There is no specific budget provision for this or any ancillary costs in enabling the software to be used through the Council's existing servers. The Executive is recommending that Council includes provision in the budget to support on a one off basis, initiatives which benefit the community and a bid could be made to cover the one off costs of purchasing this system from that fund if introduced.

## **6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There is no statutory right or right set in regulations for members of local authorities to be given web-pages or web sites. The right arises from e-government targets set by the then Office of the Deputy Prime minister. The relevant part of that directive provides that each English local authority must "...provide every councillor with the option to have an easy to manage set of public web pages that are either maintained for them or that they can maintain themselves." Bromley's website includes a page which gives basis details for each member including a photograph, contact details including surgery times, positions of responsibility and the like. Many other authorities have followed a similar approach to comply with the requirements of government in a similar way – however as is outlined above there are potentially other enhanced means of compliance available.

6.2 In promoting the right for the provision of member web-pages, there was recognition from government that the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code on Local Authority Publicity would need to be amended to bring out the greatest benefits from councillor web sites – however these changes are awaited.

- 6.3 By virtue of Section 2 to the Local Government Act 1986, a council must not publish any material which "in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party". Factors to be taken into account include whether material refers to a political party or persons identified with a political party or which promotes or opposes a point of view on a question of political controversy identified with one party and not another. Placing material on a publicly visible website constitutes "publication". This means that the Council would be acting unlawfully if it published such material on its own website.
- 6.4 Section 2(3) also prevents giving financial or other assistance to anyone to permit the publication of material an authority are prevented from publishing themselves.
- 6.5 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity sets out detailed guidance on publicity material produced by Councils. The Code makes specific reference to the situation in the pre-election period as well as in relation to councils providing "assistance to others to issue publicity" which might be taken to apply to links from council websites. Where Councillors' web pages are funded by the Council, Councillors may not use their web pages to promote political campaigns or particular political stances on issues. For example:
- They must not use their web pages to promote a political party or persons identified with a political party.
  - They must not use their web pages to promote or oppose a view on a question of political controversy that is identifiable as the view of one political party and not of another.
- 6.6 The Code of Recommended Practice on Publicity states:-
- "Publicity about individual Councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example a member of the Cabinet or Chair of a Scrutiny Committee) and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual Councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual Councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image-making should be avoided.
- "Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. While it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual Councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward his/her justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party, or directly attacking policies and opinion of other parties, groups or individuals".
- 6.7 Following adoption of the New Member Code of Conduct it will be a breach of that Code if a member contravenes the Publicity code referred to above.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Policy, and Personnel
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	None

