



## Report of the Chief Democratic Services Officer

### Member Management Committee

Date: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007

### Subject: Personal Digital Assistants

**Electoral Wards Affected:**

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

#### 1.0 Purpose of this Report

1.1 This report seeks Members' views with regard to the provision of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for use by Members.

#### 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members will recall that, in February 07, it was reported that a pilot exercise had been undertaken with regard to Members using PDAs. A cross section of four Members had been asked to trial the use of PDAs and the feedback from this exercise had been very favourable.

2.2 The Member Management Committee recognised the fact that, whilst PDAs could be of great assistance to some Members, this was highly dependent on the role undertaken by the Member, their personal circumstances and their preferred method of working.

2.3 The Member Management Committee was advised that no funding had been identified for providing PDAs to Members and that the actual cost of provision could vary significantly; partly because of the unknown level of likely take up by Members and partly because further work was required with regard to their likely usage.

2.4 Officers were asked to report back to a future meeting.

#### 3.0 Main Issues

3.1 Following discussions at the February 07 meeting of the Committee, all Members were circulated with a questionnaire asking whether they would wish to be provided with a PDA, should they be made available.

- 3.2 This request was accompanied by a brief description of PDAs, an outline of how the associated administrative arrangements may work and an invitation to speak to Members who had been involved in the pilot exercise (an extract of the information provided to Members is contained in the appendix to this report).
- 3.3 A total of 23 Members responded with a clear preference (11 indicating they would like a PDA and 12 indicating they would not) and a further four indicated that they would want further information before forming a view.
- 3.4 As anticipated by the Committee there does not seem to be any clear pattern as to which Members would be likely to benefit from a Council provided PDA and it would be very difficult to draw up clear eligibility criteria, particularly as Members' roles on the Council may vary from year to year.
- 3.5 It is therefore suggested that, if PDAs are to be made available, then they should, in principle, be offered universally to Members. At the same time, however, the cost associated with PDAs could be quite high and it will therefore be necessary to ensure they are only issued where there would be a clear benefit to the Council. It is proposed, therefore, to roll them out as follows:
- Briefing session(s) to be provided to all interested Members, to cover the advantages and disadvantages of PDAs and the potential of VASCO tokens as a more cost effective option (it is anticipated that the sessions would be attended by Democratic Services and ICT Services Officers together with input from those Members who have been involved in the pilot exercise).
  - Following the briefing session(s), Members would be able to submit a request for a PDA. The Chief Democratic Services Officer would then consult with Group Whips before allocating PDAs
  - The individual allocation of PDAs would be reviewed on a six monthly basis and, if appropriate, any underutilised devices may be reallocated (although it is worth noting that there would be some cost involved in the attendant reconfiguration)..
- 3.6 It is clear that not all Members would require a PDA, although the level of take up is likely to increase over time. It is therefore suggested that funding be made available for 50 Members to be provided with PDAs in 2007/08 with a further 25 being made available during 2008/09. In order to assist with managing demand for PDAs, funding would be retained centrally within Democratic Services, rather than devolved at a Group level, although allocation would be in consultation with Group Whips.
- 3.7 It is anticipated that the full cost of providing and maintaining PDAs would be met by the Council, as would the cost of refreshing/exchanging data. However, Members should be aware that the cost of refreshing/exchanging data can be very expensive, particularly if the devices are used whilst abroad. It is proposed that the devices are not generally enabled to work overseas and, instead, Members travelling abroad are issued with VASCO tokens as a more cost effective (albeit less convenient) means of communication. However, it may be appropriate to make the facility for overseas use available in some instances (e.g. for a small number of designated Members or by enabling for short periods on a case by case basis) and the Committee is asked for guidance on this point.

3.8 It is further anticipated that, in accordance with the Members' Allowances Scheme, the cost of all telephone calls (i.e. both business and personal calls) would be met by the Member concerned. It is anticipated that this would be administered by means of a quarterly invoice.

#### **4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance**

4.1 The recommendations in this report do not have any implications for Council Policy or Governance.

#### **5.0 Legal and Resource Implications**

5.1 The recommendations in this report do not have any legal implications.

5.2 The maximum cost of providing PDAs as detailed in this report (assuming limited overseas usage) would be as follows:

2007/08	£47,700
2008/09	£52,150
2009/10	£56,350

5.3 Annual expenditure in subsequent years would vary between approximately £50k and £60k depending on the numbers of PDAs issued or upgraded during the year.

5.4 This expenditure will be met from budget within the Head Office – Corporate Governance function.

#### **6.0 Recommendation**

6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to offer such guidance and advice as they consider necessary with regard to the provision of PDAs to Members.

## **Personal Digital Assistants for Members**

A Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) is a hand held device which can provide remote access to the Council's IT systems. They can be used as a mobile phone, can access/update the electronic diary (for those Members who use the Council provided calendar facility) and emails. They also have a built-in camera and can be used to record type-written notes and voice recordings.

PDA's can provide other applications (e.g. word processor and spreadsheet) but the functionality is limited and they are not as easy to use as a PC or laptop.

### **Why is it that I can buy a PDA at a lower cost than the Council can?**

It costs more to set up a PDA to work with the Council's systems, to develop and update the applications and to provide ongoing technical support and training.

### **Can I buy my own PDA and use it to access the Council's systems?**

No – it would be prohibitively expensive to adapt a non standard PDA to work on the Council's systems and the Council would not be geared up to provide technical support if anything went wrong.

### **Could I have a PDA and not a PC?**

Preferably not – a PDA cannot provide the same facilities as a PC and you would still need a PC e.g. to view large documents on screen. In addition, if you do not have a PC, then the operation of the PDA will become more costly as the device will always have to be updated "over the air" as opposed to by connection to a PC which is the lower cost method.

### **Would the PDA be insured?**

Yes – the cost of the device includes a monthly charge to Orange for their "Care Package"

### **Could I use the PDA as a mobile phone?**

Yes - but, in accordance with the Members' Allowances Scheme, you would have to pay for all business and private telephone calls (Indicative current call charges are at the following rates – 4p per minute to landlines and Orange mobiles peak and off peak – 15p per minute to all other mobile networks peak – 10p per minute to all other mobile networks off peak).

### **How would I pay for any call charges?**

The most efficient option would probably be for you to receive a quarterly invoice.

### **Could I use it abroad as a PDA?**

Probably, but the cost to the Council would be fairly high so using a VASCO token may be a better option.

### **Could I use it abroad as a mobile phone?**

Yes, although the call charges (which you would have to pay for) may be fairly high.