

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER

E-PETITIONS - OPTIONS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To request that software options for an E-Petitions facility be considered in the context of the following :-

At the Meeting of the Council held on 14 July 2010, Minute CO24/10 resolved that :-

'With regard to the request for a supplementary estimate of up to £7,000 to purchase an E-Petition facility to meet the 15 December 2010 deadline, this be investigated as to whether absolutely necessary and if so, refer to the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee for further consideration.'

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **An E-Petitions software option be selected and approved from those listed at Appendix A.**
- 2.2 **A supplementary estimate from the Working Balance for the amount of the option selected be approved.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 A report entitled 'Listening to Communities – Statutory Guidance on the Duty to Respond to Petitions' was presented to the Council on 14 July 2010. The report included reference to the introduction of a Petitions Scheme by 15 June 2010 and an E-Petitions facility by 15 December 2010. The Council approved the Petitions element of the report but did not wish to approve a supplementary estimate for the E-Petitions facility and requested that further investigations be made.
- 3.2 The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 introduced a duty on the part of local authorities to respond to petitions and the timeframes mentioned at 3.1 have been applied to each element of the scheme.
- 3.3 The 2009 Act applies the same requirements to electronic petitions as to paper petitions except for the following:-
- Principal local authorities are only required to respond to E-Petitions made through their E-Petition facility

- Principal local authorities must decide when a request to host an E-Petition is received whether the petition is appropriate for publishing on their facility
 - Principal authorities will decide what equates to a signature on a petition
 - Principal local authorities are required to provide a facility for people to submit petitions to the authority electronically. In addition to this, local authorities can choose to respond to E-Petitions submitted by other means and if they choose to do this, should indicate in their Petitions Scheme how they will deal with these types of petitions
- 3.4 The authority's E-Petition must allow citizens to create a petition which can be published on-line and made available to others for electronic signature. Acceptances of email petitions will not meet this requirement.
- 3.5 In dealing with E-Petitions, Councils will need to take into account issues such as Data Protection, libel and a requirement to comply with equalities and anti-discrimination legislation.
- 3.6 With regard to the suggestion of sharing an E-Petitions facility with Harborough or Rutland although neither authority were against the proposal, on speaking to E-Petition suppliers there were no cost savings available for a shared service due to the facility being externally hosted.
- 3.7 Details of a selection of suppliers and what they provide with costs are outlined at Appendix A.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The scheme is compatible with the Council's intention to be more proactive in promoting democracy and involving the community in Council decision-making as well as with the Council's commitment to electronic working.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The cost of the E-Petitions package is dependent on the option chosen by the Committee outlined at Appendix A. These can include an initial fee followed by an annual fee depending on the option selected. A supplementary estimate from the Working Balance will be required for the initial amount of the package selected plus the first years running costs. The ongoing fee will need to be built into later years budgets.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

- 6.1 To provide an E-Petitions facility by 15 December 2010 complies with the Council's statutory responsibility under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 7.1 There are no community safety implications in this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 The scheme provides greater accessibility to the public in terms of promoting democracy and encouraging 'people power'.

9.0 RISKS

9.1 If an E-Petitions Scheme is not provided, the Council could be accountable for public challenge.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no climate change implications in this report

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 There has been consultation with Harborough District Council and Rutland County Council on a proposal to share an E-Petition facility.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All.

Contact Officer: Senior Democracy Officer
Date: 26 August 2010
Appendices: A – E-Petitions Options
Background Papers: Council Minutes of 14 July 2010
Consultation on Draft Statutory Guidance on the Duty to Respond to Petitions
Overview, Scrutiny and Audit Committee – Minutes of 8 June 2010
Reference : X: Committees/PFA/2010-11/290910 SE – E-Petitions Options