

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Monday, 4 September 2023
<b>Report Subject</b>	Results of the Survey on the Production of Councillor Newsletters
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Governance)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its rolling review of the Constitution, the committee needs to review the protocol on production of councillors' newsletters. Currently the protocol says that councillors are not permitted to use council resources for this task. This reflects the longstanding practice of councillors producing their own, sometimes quite extensive, newsletters often defraying the costs through advertising from local businesses.

Prior to reviewing the protocol, the committee has previously surveyed councillors to see who does produce their own newsletter already and to gauge their opinion on the use of council resources. A survey of councillors was undertaken during July 2023.

There was a low response rate to the survey with only 13 responses. Of the responses received, there appears to be little/no appetite to change the current arrangements.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the current protocol prohibiting the use of council IT to produce councillor's newsletters remains in place.
2	That councillors are made aware of the provision that they can produce an annual report that will be published on the council's website.

## REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ON THE PRODUCTION OF COUNCILLOR NEWSLETTERS
1.01	<p>The Councillors' Code of Conduct governs the use of council resources at paragraph 7:</p> <p>“7. You must not —</p> <p>(b) use, or authorise others to use, the resources of your authority —</p> <p>(i) imprudently;</p> <p>(ii) in breach of your authority's requirements;</p> <p>(iii) unlawfully;</p> <p>(iv) other than in a manner which is calculated to facilitate, or to be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the authority or of the office to which you have been elected or appointed;</p> <p>(v) improperly for political purposes; or</p> <p>(vi) improperly for private purposes.</p> ”
1.02	<p>Providing purely factual information to the public can legitimately be undertaken by councillors using resources provided by the council unless the council chooses to prohibit this under paragraph 7(ii) above. The current protocol does impose such a prohibition which reflects the preferences of councillors during the last council term. Many councillors produce their own newsletters. Some of these are quite extensive, featuring other community services (e.g. local churches, WI groups etc) and the costs are defrayed by advertising from local businesses.</p>
1.03	<p>Newsletters often also include the political position of the councillor. This could not be permitted if such newsletters were to be produced using council resources under paragraph 7(5) and section 2 Local Government Act 1986. As a result, councillors have hitherto preferred to produce their newsletters at their own expense.</p>
1.04	<p>The Committee has previously surveyed the views of councillors when reviewing this protocol. A survey of councillors was therefore undertaken during July 2023. 13 Members (19%) returned a completed questionnaire. 3 of these were newly elected in May 2022 with the remaining 10 being returning councillors.</p>
1.05	<p>Of those who responded, 9 (69%) produce a Newsletter, where</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 (56%) produce it alone</li><li>• 3 (33%) collaborate with another councillor(s)</li><li>• 1 (11%) did not answer the question</li></ul> <p>In terms of frequency, 2 councillors said they produce their newsletter quarterly and 1 said they produce an annual one. 5 indicated 'Other' though only 2 provided more detail saying they produced them '<i>as required</i>' and '<i>to highlight a matter of concern to/from my residents</i>'.</p>

1.06	<p>When responding to the question about when they last produced a newsletter, only 4 indicated they had done so in 2023, the most recent being in July.</p> <p>3/9 councillors indicated that they intended to produce a newsletter in the future with 4 being unsure.</p>
1.07	The majority (7) of councillors who produce a newsletter do so in paper form and have it delivered to residents. One uses social media and another deposits theirs in a central community location.
1.08	In terms of councillors who make use of businesses advertising in their newsletter, only 1 responded to indicate they did so.
1.09	7 councillors were aware that they could produce and publish an annual report on the council's website. 5 were unaware. This demonstrates that more work is required to raise awareness amongst councillors of this facility.
1.10	Of notable interest is that no respondents said they wanted to use council IT equipment to produce their newsletters. 11 respondents stated that they did <b>not</b> want to use council IT equipment to produce their newsletters. The remaining 2 respondents skipped the question.

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	The council provides councillors with iPads and laptops that could be used to design or create content for an electronic newsletter. It does not currently have a budget for the production of printed newsletters and does not supply councillors with paper/printers. Printers are available at council premises that, in addition to the hire charge (which is paid anyway), cost 1 pence per side of monochrome and 10 pence per side of colour printing. The additional cost of printing a single page, double sided newsletter in monochrome for every household in the county (approximately 60,000 properties) would be in the region of £1,200.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT</b>
3.01	Councillors were consulted during July 2023 on whether to permit newsletters to be produced using council resources.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
4.01	None arising directly from this report.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 - Current Protocol Appendix 2 – Summary of Responses

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	None  <b>Contact Officer:</b> Gareth Owens, Chief Officer (Governance) <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 702344 <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk">gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk</a>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
7.01	None