

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 23 JANUARY 2012

REPORT ON: OPERATING MODEL REDESIGN PROJECT - MAIL HANDLING AND DISTRIBUTION/COURIER SERVICE

REPORT BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (SUPPORT SERVICES)

REPORT NO: 30-2012

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report outlines a proposed centralised mail handling and distribution/courier service to manage incoming mail more efficiently across the Council. It also sets out the requirements necessary to enable the scanning, routing, workflow and file management of incoming mail.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Two courier posts (one in the Social Work Department, the other in the Communities Division) are transferred into the Support Services Division to work together with the mail room operatives in a new team to provide a centralised mail handling and distribution service under the management of the Principal Administration Officer - effective from 1st February 2012.
2. Two courier posts are deleted from the establishment (one in the Housing Department (vacant post), the other in the Education Department (temporary employee).
3. An implementation plan is drawn up by the CeRDMS Project Team in conjunction with individual departments for the scanning and routing of all incoming mail (with agreed exceptions) to Dundee House and subsequently rolled out to all other Council locations.
4. Departments continue to make efforts to further reduce incoming paper and inter-departmental paper mail.
5. Directors instruct their staff to use CeRDMS, email and multi-functional devices where possible for scanning/emailing internally to minimise paper mail between departments/locations.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The above recommendations are estimated to realise a potential saving of around £40,000 per annum (courier salary savings of £31,313 and vehicle lease and fuel savings of around £8,500). This equates to 50% of the current operating cost of the Courier Service.

Additional savings will also be realised in terms of City Development staff time (estimated at 0.10 FTE) spent distributing mail to the City Square offices and the Environment Department staff time (estimated at 0.20 FTE) spent visiting Dundee House for mail purposes.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

Earlier this year it was agreed to access the National Framework Agreement for Postal Services and appoint TNT Post as the Council's 'Down Stream Access Provider' for outgoing 2nd class mail. This is now well into the implementation stage and considerable savings are being made.

The handling of incoming mail was considered at the same time but it was decided not to make any changes until the move to Dundee House had been completed and staff settled in. The building has now been accommodated for 3 months.

4.1 Current arrangements for the handling of incoming mail to Dundee House

There are currently 2 full time mail room staff employed in the mail room of Dundee House. They are employed by the Support Services Division of the Corporate Services Department. They sort and distribute all incoming mail received into Dundee House.

Four departments (Housing, Social Work, Education, and Chief Executive's) have established full-time courier posts: 1 in each department. The couriers' duties are to deliver mail by car (leased vehicles) to the various departmental locations across the city.

The Environment Department does not have an established courier post but estimates that 0.20 FTE staff time is taken up collecting and delivering mail.

Until recently maintenance staff of the City Development Department were distributing mail from the mailroom in Dundee House (previously they distributed it from Tayside House) to the City Square offices: estimated at 0.10 FTE.

Due to the valiant efforts of staff in all departments the volume of incoming paper mail and inter-departmental mail has diminished considerably over the past year in the lead up to the opening of Dundee House. The Education Department have been particularly successful in this respect, so much so that their courier's time distributing mail is now estimated at 0.20 FTE only and the remainder of his time has been allocated to other duties.

When the courier post within Housing became vacant several months ago it was decided not to fill it but to amalgamate the Housing and Social Work mail routes for delivery by the Social Work courier. This has been piloted with assistance from the courier in the Communities Division to cover for holidays, sickness etc. Despite a few initial teething problems the pilot has demonstrated that 2 posts are sufficient for the distribution of the current volume of mail received.

4.2 Proposed centralised mail handling and courier service

It is therefore proposed that 2 courier posts (in Social Work and the Communities Division) are transferred to the Support Services Division to work together with the mail room operatives in a new team to provide a centralised mail handling and distribution service under the management of the Principal Administration Officer. Whilst this Officer currently manages the mail room operatives he has no responsibility for the courier service. Bringing these disparate roles together would enable the provision of an integrated, more comprehensive Council wide service.

It is further proposed that the vacant Courier post (currently established in Housing) and the Education post are deleted.

Using GIS software the optimal routes can be planned for the couriers to allow them to meet each department's specified needs.

4.3 Proposed Image scanning and routing of incoming mail to the addressee

The main benefits of scanning incoming mail are:

- it will ensure documents get to the addressee as quickly as possible
- information will be handled in a more secure environment
- information will be more easily accessed and shared - staff will be able to access their mail without having to go to their office base to collect it
- it will support the corporate drive to more mobile/flexible working
- it will reduce the need for a courier service
- it will support the drive to a paperless office.

Three service areas within the Housing, Education and City Development departments have been piloting the scanning of incoming mail since moving into Dundee House.

It is now proposed that we put into place a plan for the scanning of all incoming mail to Dundee House: the mailroom currently houses two scanning workstations.

All incoming mail will be sorted as per normal by the mail room staff. Once sorted, all mail (with the exception of certain documents - to be agreed) will be scanned and indexed in the mail room by the departmental staff who currently distribute the paper mail. Scanned mail will be routed/delivered electronically to a secure location within CeRDMS where it will be accessed by the addressee.

The indexing of the incoming mail is an essential part of the scanning process. The names that documents are given will be derived from the information that is in them and the information that recipients want to see when they open their electronic mail. It is therefore important to consider that the person who is indexing the document may need to have knowledge of what the document is about or who the recipient is. For this reason it is not suggested that the mail room operatives scan the mail at this time although this should be considered once the scanning and indexing process and the CeRDMS are well established.

Initially the original paper will be securely stored (preferably in the mail room) for a period of no more than one month from the date of receipt before being securely destroyed (shredded). A period of one month will give sufficient time for the retrieval of any papers should there be any image scanning quality issues.

Documents will be scanned in accordance with the British Standard BS 10008 relating to 'Legal Admissibility and Evidential Weight of Information Stored Electronically' and in accordance with confidentiality legislation. Corporate scanning procedures which are part of the Corporate Information Management Strategy will therefore need to be completed and adopted by the council prior to the mail scanning process being implemented.

This proposal does not include the scanning of Financial Revenues mail and certain City Development mail which is currently scanned and work-flowed using other electronic workflow systems.

4.4 Document Management and Workflow

Another key element of the scanning process is document management and workflow. Directors have already agreed to make resources available within departments to expedite and establish CeRDMS in each department and the preparation of folder structures for filing purposes has been agreed as a priority. Without a final folder/repository for documents these will simply be stacked in the system or worse still taken out of CeRDMS and stored elsewhere.

It is important that the folders relate to business processes and are stored in a functional hierarchy as part of the corporate file plan (taking account of best practice in document and records management) where all relevant staff can access them in context and share knowledge about them. These files should also be the subject of records management where they are retained for only as long as they are needed and disposed of appropriately. By establishing simple folder structures for storing reference documents, incoming scanned mail will be then be managed completely within the CeRDMS. This will allow simple document management, version control and on-line search/retrieval across all departments and locations – contributing significantly to mobile and flexible working by providing access to centralised information.

Six main business processes are currently live within CeRDMS (Employee Files Folders, DCS - Major Contracts, Housing - Ex Capital Grant Applications, NEC Applications, CeRDMS Project Documentation, and Community Wardens - Major Incident Folders) and a number of others are being developed. A set of corporate workflows will allow staff to send instructions giving direction and time scales for how and when work should be carried out.

4.5 Timescales and Transition Arrangements

It is proposed that the centralised mail handling team is operational from 1st February 2012.

The image scanning and routing proposal is more complex and will require a longer transition period. Scanning will be introduced in phases on a department by department basis in Dundee House and rolled out to all other Council locations - to be completed by the end of 2012.

There are several stages involved in developing this overall process and it is important that each stage is successfully achieved for scanning and workflow to work effectively and provide the maximum benefits for the Council. An implementation plan therefore needs to be drawn up by the CeRDMS Project Team in conjunction with individual departments.

Given the potential scale of the work required: the amount of planning and analysis that will be required to identify users, relevant indexing requirements, folder locations and records requirements, it is essential that adequate dedicated resources are given by each department to developing each stage of the process.

The first phase of the scanning will commence in January 2012 with a target completion date for Dundee House of the end of June 2012. This will then be rolled out to the other offices in the city on a location by location basis to be completed by the end of 2012.

To reduce incoming paper mail and inter-departmental paper mail as much as possible Directors should instruct their staff to remove their names from unwanted mailing lists/junk mail/magazines, identify the source of their incoming paper mail and request senders to submit electronically and to use CeRDMS, email and multi-functional devices where possible.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

There will be a reduction in the Council's carbon footprint achieved by a reduction in mileage to distribute mail and savings in relation to the floor space required for the storage of paper records.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>. There are no major issues.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive and Director of Finance have been consulted in preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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10 January 2012