

Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

NAFWC 2011 (Paper 5)
Assembly case management system
(electoral registers)

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru
National
Assembly for
Wales



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Assembly case management system

1.0 Purpose and summary of issues

- 1.1 This paper provides an update for the Commission on the Assembly case management system (“Caseworker”).
- 1.2 At its meeting on 16 June 2011, the Commission was invited to consider seeking a change in the regulations which would allow Assembly staff (as well as Members as at present) to upload the electoral register onto Caseworker.
- 1.3 The Commission asked for further information on the number of Members using Caseworker, the costs of Caseworker to date, the resource, cost and data protection implications of Commission staff involvement in requesting and obtaining electoral register data and the risks of the data being used for party political advantage.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Assembly Commission is invited to note the information provided and to decide whether a request should be made for the Commission to become a named body within the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001, allowing Assembly staff to receive the electoral registers

direct from Returning Officers rather than through individual Assembly Members.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 Caseworker is intended to offer a consistent way of working to Members and Support Staff which could replace a number of different systems, currently not supported by the Assembly. This system was the first of its kind for any UK Parliamentary body, so there was innovation in its development and as its adoption by Members would be voluntary, uncertainty about the level of use.

Number of users on the system

3.2 Caseworker is currently running at its capacity of 204 user licences. Since the system was fully integrated into the new ICT network, and following the Fourth Assembly election, requests for new accounts have increased. User numbers are expected to decrease shortly, as the licences for non-returned Members and Support Staff are reused after the winding down period. Use of the system has increased by approximately 70 per cent over the last four months as detailed below:

Time Period	Activity instances
1 Nov 2010 - 14 Feb 2011	1,892
15 Feb 2011 - 29 Jun 2011	2,716

3.3 At 1 July 2011, there were over 4,700 cases on Caseworker, shared between 41 Assembly Members' offices.

Project costs

3.4 The proposal was developed using project start-up funds of £50k. Further costs of £200k were estimated, which took into account the anticipated take up of licences, supplier and technical development costs. The final cost of the project was £414k. The increase was due to:

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- more licences being required than were anticipated (although prices were negotiated and subsequently discounted);
- an increase in the number of project management days required;
- further development work by suppliers due to the legal and technical challenges that user requirements presented;
- non-recoverable VAT being chargeable on the user licences, following a change in VAT treatment not taken into account at the start of the project.

There are annual maintenance costs of £43k which are included within relevant budgets.

Electoral Register and Caseworker

- 3.5 Caseworker currently contains all the electoral registers for Wales, placed on the system with assistance from lead support staff in each party group. The system does not depend upon the presence of the electoral registers and could operate without them. However, this data makes it easy to check that anyone writing to a Member for help is a constituent or within the Member's region.
- 3.6 Commissioners asked if the presence of electoral register data on Caseworker would allow the system to be used for party political purposes. Caseworker cannot dictate the content of letters or emails, this would be a matter for the judgment of the Member concerned. In terms of potential political use, for example, Caseworker would not support the use of electoral register information for a mailshot to constituents or those in a certain area or a street.
- 3.7 However, if a group of constituents had written to a Member about a problem and their address details had been entered on the system, a reply or update could be generated for that group from Caseworker. It would be the content of the communication which defines it as either a legitimate use of Assembly resources or as a party political communication.

- 3.8 Were the Assembly Commission to become a named body within the *Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001*, Assembly staff could obtain copies of electoral registers directly from the Registration Officer in each local authority and import the data on to Caseworker, without the need for Members or AMSS to obtain and format the material.
- 3.9 Formatting and uploading the Wales electoral registers in their entirety onto the case management system will take approximately 30 hours. This could be done once a year within existing Assembly staff resources with no additional cost, using staff in the ICT Service. Members preferring monthly updates could request copies from the Returning Officers themselves and forward to ICT for uploading after formatting, as happens at the moment.
- 3.10 Commissioners asked about the data protection implications of Assembly staff obtaining the registers direct from Registration Officers. The Commission would become a data controller for these purposes. The information is taken and stored in a secure part of the system. Members and their staff can access it as they do at present and would need to process it properly in accordance with data protection legislation, but this would not change the current position.