

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee** Resources, Performance & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Committee** 29th April 2008

**Report Title** Provision of Water Coolers

**Summary** The report seeks to update the Committee of the Council's approach to the provision of Water Coolers within the Authority's non schools buildings.

**For further information please contact:**

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?** No.

**Background papers** None

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-** Details to be specified

- Other Committees  .....
- Local Member(s)
- Other Elected Members  Cllr Booth, Cllr Atkinson, Cllr Haynes - "Noted"  
Cllr Heatley (Portfolio Holder - Environment)  
Cllr Browne (Chair, Environment O&S Committee)
- Cabinet Member  Cllr Cockburn, Portfolio Holder - Resources
- Chief Executive  .....
- Legal  Sarah Duxbury – comments incorporated
- Finance  David Clarke – Strategic Director, Resources – reporting officer
- Other Chief Officers  .....
- District Councils  .....

Health Authority  .....

Police  .....

Other Bodies/Individuals  Martin Stott – Head of Environment & Waste  
“Recommendation supported”

**FINAL DECISION NO**

**SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:**

Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee  .....

To Council  .....

To Cabinet

To an O & S Committee  .....

To an Area Committee  .....

Further Consultation  SDLT for consideration of implementation arrangements

## Executive Summary

The report sets out the Council's (excluding schools) current use of bottle fed water coolers and seeks the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on proposals to change the nature of provision to mains fed units.

## Agenda No

# Resources, Performance & Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 29th April 2008.

## Provision of Water Coolers

### Report of the Strategic Director, Resources

#### Recommendation

That the Resources, Performance and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the progress to date on the issue of provision of Water Coolers and provide any appropriate commentary on the proposed way forward, prior to seeking the approval of the Strategic Directors Leadership Team to proceed.

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Warwickshire County Council, along with many large organisations, has historically met its legal obligations to provide staff with an adequate supply of high-quality drinking water by a variety of means. Various locations have utilised mains water whilst a number of sites have utilised water coolers, which are procured from specialist suppliers.
- 1.2 As part of the Council's desire to ensure that its activities limit any environmental impact and provide value for money the issue of the continued provision of water coolers has been highlighted as an area for consideration. The issue has recently generated significant media interest and a number of organisations, including local and central government have recently announced reviews of such provision.
- 1.3 This report seeks to inform members of the issues and presents a proposed way forward for comment. Due to the potential environmental implications of the report, the report has also been shared with the Chair of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Portfolio Holder for the Environment, for their observations and comment.

#### 2. Background Information

- 2.1 Cost Centre Managers within the County Council began to procure water coolers for the provision of chilled drinking water for staff and visitors in the mid 1990s. The majority of coolers were rented as single units, mostly from one supplier. There was no corporate approach at that time but this somewhat ad hoc way of sourcing coolers was rectified in 2004 by introducing

mandatory use of an ESPO framework arrangement. There are currently four framework suppliers although one supplier not on the framework continues to be a major supplier to the County Council, but on broadly comparable terms.

- 2.3 Excluding schools, where purchasing decisions are in the main made by individual headteachers and Governing Bodies, data indicates that there are approximately 200 coolers in WCC buildings around the county. In the financial year 2006/07 our expenditure (excluding schools) on water coolers including rental, sanitisation and bottled water was:

Supplier no 1 (no framework)	£51,705
Supplier No 2 (ESPO framework)	£42,664
Supplier No 3 (ESPO framework)	£17,874
Supplier No 4 (no framework)	£3,661
Connect Water (no framework)	£2,446
<b>Total</b>	<b>£118,350</b>

### 3. The Current Position

- 3.1 In February 2008 the media ran articles on local Council's use of bottled water and its environmental impact. BBC Midlands Today (18.02.2008) published a water league table of 5 local authorities, identifying Warwickshire as having the highest spend. Other authorities quoted included:

Coventry City Council	£ 83,000
Wolverhampton City Council	£ 85,000
Birmingham City Council	£ 86,000
Dudley MBC	£110,000

- 3.2 The majority of Warwickshire County Council's coolers are free-standing and use bottled water. We also have a small number of point of use models, which are plumbed into the mains water supply. Electricity consumption of both models have been measured and mains fed coolers are marginally cheaper to run.
- 3.3 Not all suppliers provide both freestanding and point of use coolers. Cooler rental is usually free. Costs relate to two elements – supply of bottled water and sanitisation. The County Council's expenditure information is not sufficiently detailed to provide a split total invoice value between sanitisation and water costs. It is not possible to extract data showing the cost of mains water consumed via coolers.

- 3.4 There is little data available on the life cycle environmental impact of water coolers, from manufacture, through use and to eventual disposal. In addition to the carbon emissions from electricity consumption, there are however potentially significant environmental implications arising from:
- Transport emissions and local congestion from delivery and collection
  - Water extraction, processing and bottling
  - Bottle manufacture, labelling, cleaning and eventual disposal via landfill
  - Use of refrigerant gases
- 3.5 It should be noted however that at least one bottled water supplier is known to draw water from aquifers located in North Warwickshire and has a bottling plant within the County. There is therefore some economic benefit to the local community arising from the enterprise.

#### **4. Proposed Way Forward**

- 4.1 There would appear to be considerable merit, both from a financial and from an environmental perspective in the Council re-considering its continued usage of water coolers. Whilst there is a legal requirement to provide high-quality drinking water, it is believed that in the majority of Council premises this can be delivered by means of utilising existing mains supplies and switching from bottle fed units to mains fed dispensers or by use of the general (tap water) supply.
- 4.2 Committee is asked to provide comment on a proposal that the Facilities Management Service in conjunction with Property and the County Procurement Unit, undertakes a pilot scheme within Shire Hall, to remove the majority of freestanding coolers and replace them with a much smaller number of strategically placed point of use (i.e. mains fed) models. Initial indications are that between 4 and 6 coolers per floor for staff use would be sufficient. Additional coolers may be needed in areas of high usage and in the Civic Suite or where members of the public may be present. Subject to the outcome of the Shire Hall project it would be further proposed that the rationalisation project be rolled out to other (non school) County Council buildings.
- 4.3 It should be noted that some WCC property will require no work as this action has already been taken by local managers or as part of the ongoing building improvement process for example at Saltisford and Kings House.
- 4.4 It is envisaged that it will be possible to use to existing mains water and electricity supplies in some locations but where none are available, the estimated cost of each mains fed installation per location is £450.

- 4.5 Whilst different contractual arrangements exist with the various suppliers the Council will be required to give suppliers' notice for the removal of any freestanding units, most of which are on 1 year rolling contracts. It is likely to be most practical for notice be given for the removal of all freestanding units at the same time, at all location where a mains fed unit is planned to be installed. Whilst this may lead to the payment of sanitisation and/or rental charges where no supply is being received, it is felt that this "big bang" approach will deliver the most benefit in terms of ensuring equality of provision to staff and visitors. In this scenario savings on the purchase of bottled water would commence immediately.
- 4.6 Subject to the comments of this committee it is suggested that Strategic Directors Leadership Team receive a report on the implementation of the proposal in general and in particular on the financing of the proposal and the allocation of costs and savings between Directorates.

DAVID CLARKE  
Strategic Director, Resources

Shire Hall  
Warwick

10 April 2008