

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
FINANCE, INNOVATION and PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

14 May 2014

Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 E-BILLING UPDATE

A report to provide information to Members regarding council tax and business rates online billing and account information that will be available to customers via the Council's website.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In order to support the transformation and channel shift agendas, plans are in place to deliver the option for taxpayers and ratepayers to be able to view their bills on the Council's website rather than having a paper bill posted to them. There are also plans to provide other useful information to these taxpayers and ratepayers about their accounts via the website.

1.1.2 This option will be available for taxpayers and ratepayers by signing up to the "My Account" facility on the Council's website.

1.2 Services To Be Offered

1.2.1 Once a taxpayer or ratepayer has signed up to "My Account" and requested online billing:

- 1) The request will be authenticated so that there is no doubt that personal information is being provided to the correct person(s);
- 2) From the moment the request to view online bills is successfully authenticated, bills will be available to view online in PDF format;
- 3) A history of bills will be provided on the website, from the time that the request has been authenticated, so that if an adjusted bill is produced, the taxpayer or ratepayer can juxtapose the previous bill with the latest bill;
- 4) PDF bills will be viewable from mobile and tablet devices in addition to desktop and laptop PCs.

1.2.2 Various real-time account information will be available once the taxpayer or ratepayer has signed up to “My Account” and been successfully authenticated. Currently the information that can be provided to the customer is subject to investigation and development but ultimately the aim is to display/facilitate the following on/through the website:

- 1) The balance of the taxpayer’s council tax account or the ratepayer’s business rates account;
- 2) Details of the next payment due;
- 3) Details of current discounts, reliefs or exemptions;
- 4) The option will be available to set up a direct debit from within “My Account”;
- 5) The option will be available to request an email prompt when a payment becomes overdue.

1.2.3 Subject to everything progressing in accordance with the plan, we anticipate that residents should be able to access this information by the autumn. I will keep Members up to date with progress

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 The Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2003 allows for the service of demand notices (bills) by billing authorities in an electronic format on any person who has agreed to accept electronic service.

1.3.2 These regulations specifically state that service of the demand notices via a secure website is legal. However, this can be done only once the taxpayer or ratepayer has provided an email address to the billing authority.

1.3.3 It should be noted that it is not legal to compel taxpayers or ratepayers to accept a demand notice electronically; both parties must be in agreement for service by this method.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 If high take-up of the services via “My Account” is achieved, significant savings can be achieved. For every taxpayer or ratepayer receiving bills on the website, there will be savings achieved through reduced production, printing, administration and postage costs. The rising cost of postage means that the level of savings will, in practice, increase each year when costs are compared to what it would have cost to send every bill using the postal service.

1.4.2 Greater efficiency can be achieved through “channel shift” where taxpayers and ratepayers can seek information and have general account queries answered on

the website. This will reduce the amount of customer contact at our office, in terms of telephone, face-to-face and written contact. This will free up resources to allow other aspects of service delivery to be improved.

- 1.4.3 It will be necessary to carry out certain exercises in an attempt to maximise take-up of the new services. There are certain options that could be used that would carry no additional cost to the Council, such as adding a promotional email footer to external emails; another would be to add text to the website. There are also other options that would carry a cost such as production of promotional flyers. Options will be explored in due course.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 No formal risk assessment is required at this stage.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 No formal equality impact assessment is required at this stage. Members will note that there is no obligation to use the services being described in this report. Introduction of online services may, for certain people, mean that they are able to better connect with the Council as it will provide a 24/7 option..

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Customer Contact
1.7.2 Communications.

Background papers:

Nil

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