



AOS Port Chaplain answers seafarers queries and passes information using his Netbook via his mobile broadband connection

AOS Request for MNWB Funding for Port Chaplain Mobile Ministry Equipment – Report to Council of Management

- 1. Introduction** – The following report has been requested by MNWB Council of Management to provide more details on the AOS GB grant application to MNWB for £10,000 to help fund mobile ministry equipment for their port chaplains. The Council deferred its decision on the application until such time as further information on the type and level of usage of such equipment, used in direct support of seafarers' welfare, had been established. To this end the Board liaised with AOS to observe and report on the use of mobile broadband equipment in a seafarers' welfare 'ship visiting' environment. The Board is conscious that supporting the AOS application would set a precedent with other societies and therefore has wider financial implications.
- 2. Background** – The AOS has trialled mobile broadband technology on the Tyne for almost two years. On the strength of the success of that trial it made a grant application to MNWB on 20th August 2009 for a grant of £20,000 to fully equip their 13 full time port chaplains with mobile ministry equipment. This included a Laptop (£419), Printer (£132), Camera (£87), mobile broadband dongle (£116 p.a.), IT support (£125 p.a.) Microsoft Office (£235 (3 licences)), Mobile Power Cable (£19), Anti Virus Software (£43 p.a.) and Projector (£388) for each full time port chaplain. Following a meeting between the Chief Executive MNWB and National Director AOS GB the original grant application was reduced to £10,000. The verbally amended application removed the cost of providing printers, cameras, projectors (for local fund raising presentations) and annual support costs. The Board does not accept bids in support of revenue costs and these items were considered the responsibility of AOS because they were either running costs or indirect services to seafarers' welfare.
- 3. Mobile Broadband Technology in the Ship Welfare Visiting Environment** - In order to observe mobile broadband usage in the ship welfare visiting environment, the Board organised a full day ship visiting on the Tyne shadowing AOS Port Chaplain Paul Atkinson and accompanied by AOS North East Ports Regional Co-ordinator Tony McAvoy. This included a visit to 2 x laid up Box Feeders with a crew of 6 (Latvian and Filipino) who had been onboard without relief since August and a DFDS Ferry. The latter vessel had a crew of 126 (increasing to nearly 200 in the summer) comprising 60% Filipino (6 months on 2 months off contract), 30% Romanian/Latvian (2 months on/1 month off contract) and 10% Western European (2 weeks on/2 weeks off contract). The ships provided satisfactory, diametrically opposed examples of ship visiting. The laid up ships had a skeleton crew with virtually no support and the Ferry appeared to have everything a crew member could ask for including access to onboard WiFi. The majority of the Ferry crew possessed their own laptops. Unfortunately it was not possible to conduct a visit to a Bulker because it was due to arrive the following day.



Off watch seafarers use their own laptops onboard the Ferry



Crew of the laid up ship wait to use the Port Chaplains' Netbook

The first thing the port chaplain did when he arrived onboard was to set up in the Crew Room/Galley and switch on his Netbook. During all the ship visits the Netbook played a key role in seafarers' welfare interviews and was fully utilised by numerous crew members in the presence of the port chaplain. The mobile equipment was used in a very practical, general sense and not mainly for email communication purposes as was anticipated. Throughout all the visits the port chaplain was fully occupied dealing with welfare requests, many of which required him to refer to his Netbook. In the main this involved the sharing of local information with the seafarer via various websites. The port chaplain provided information in answer to queries via the internet which non UK seafarers would find difficult, time consuming, perhaps even impossible to source without local knowledge. Seafarers considered his help and guidance invaluable and, with precious little shore time, found his visits hugely beneficial to the quality of life alongside. A Filipino seafarer (see photo below) was overjoyed to see the port chaplain so that he could use his Netbook to view on line photographs of his baby boy, which he transferred to his mobile phone.



Seafarer views on line photographs of his baby boy

4. **Equipment** - The port chaplain possessed a Netbook which came free with a monthly broadband allowance of 5Gb as part of an 18 month contract. To purchase this contract today would cost, depending on the Internet Service Provider (ISP), around £30-£35 per month for 18 months or £25 for 24 months. New deals and special offers are becoming available and more competitive all the time. In the port chaplains ship visiting experience the minimum broadband downloadable allowance should be 5Gb and he recommended the '3 Mobile' service because no other provider allowed free access to Skype. Many seafarers have benefitted from the port chaplain's guidance on this matter and with his help have purchased Skype enabled mobile phone and laptops locally at competitive prices. The 'one off' capital cost of purchasing a decent quality new Netbook or Laptop complete with Microsoft Office software and mobile power cable (for recharging in the port welfare vehicle) costs £400 - £600. The current No. 1 deal for free Netbook mobile broadband contract with a downloadable allowance of 5Gb cost £25 per month over 24 months. This represents an overall cost of £600 over two years. Therefore the costs for purchasing and contracting are relatively similar.
5. **Recommendation** – In this global, internet driven, information era a mobile broadband enabled Laptop or Netbook is an extremely important ship visiting tool which can assist port chaplains provide high quality seafarers' welfare services. It is therefore recommended Council consider awarding a grant of up to £500 per port chaplain (full time only) to cover either the outright purchase of a Laptop/Netbook with Office software and mobile power cable or, alternatively, use the grant to sign up to a similar quality free Laptop/Netbook broadband contract. This would mean the total grant to AOS would reduce from £10,000 to £6,500 (13 x £500).

The Council should, however, be aware that if the above grant is approved then the other societies might, quite understandably, submit similar applications for their full time port chaplains. This could lead to applications for around another 55 full time port chaplains across the societies. This would amount to further sum of £27,500; a potential grand total of £34,000.

From an administration perspective, grants could be awarded on production of a purchase receipt if the society decides to follow the purchase outright option or, alternatively, by receipt of a copy of their contract if they choose free Netbook contractual option. This way a maximum budget could be set and the choice and responsibility for the equipment would remain with the society/ies. If the Council so wished the subject could become another MNWB project covering a 3 year period. It would need further work, especially with the societies to finalise numbers, but could easily utilise the BACS payment system already established with the Port Welfare Vehicle Replacement project.