17 March 2020

Report of	**Assistant Director for Corporate and Improvement Services**	**Author**	**Owen Howell**
			☏ **282518**
Title	**Review of paperless working for Scrutiny Panel**		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1.   Executive Summary

1.1   Scrutiny Panel has now operated using digital agendas for several years. This item has been tabled to allow members of the Panel to give their views on this way of working, raise any benefits or issues they have experienced and make suggestions for potential improvements to arrangements currently in place. The Panel will then decide whether there is feedback that it wishes to give on its use of digital agendas.

2.   Action Required

2.1   To consider the operation of paperless meetings by the Scrutiny Panel, the benefits and possible drawbacks of this current way of working and whether there are ways to make further improvements.

3.   Reason for Scrutiny

3.1   On 29 August 2019, Scrutiny Panel resolved to hold a review of its move to paperless/ 'digital by default' meetings and scheduled this for March 2020.

4. Background Information

4.1 At its meeting on 19 July 2016, Scrutiny Panel were informed that the Council was seeking to increase its use of digital agendas for formal meetings of Committees and Panels.

4.2 On 7 March 2017, as part of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working, Governance and Audit Committee recommended that the Scrutiny Panel be asked, alongside the Committee and Revolving Investment Fund Committee, to trial the use of digital agendas for its formal meetings. The Scrutiny Panel agreed to participate in this trial and has continued to use digital meeting documents by default ever since.

4.3 The provision and use of agendas in digital format (rather than paper) has now become the default option for councillors attending formal meetings in rooms which permit this (such as the Grand Jury Room). This encompasses all routine meetings of the Council's Committees and Panels, except Full Council and Planning Committee. This means that the assumption is that councillors will not be provided with a hard copy agenda and that members will access their papers online though the Council's website or the MyCMIS app.

4.4 It is acknowledged that the move to digital agendas has sometimes been challenging and involved a culture change for councillors and officers. Some councillors have indicated a preference to continue to receive hard copies of agendas and the Democratic Services team does accede to these requests.

4.5 Regarding printed agendas for people wishing to attend and observe a meeting, one hard copy is always available for members of the public. Experience has shown that the demand for paper copies has lessened over recent years and that members of the public are increasingly accessing meeting papers digitally using their personal devices.

4.6 To assist councillors in switching to use digital agendas, arrangements were made for the Council to lend iPads to those councillors who required a suitable device. There are currently six iPads out on loan for this purpose.

4.7 The Democratic Services team provide equipment, such as portable charging points and power leads, to ensure that councillors are able to power their devices during the course of meetings. Digital agendas downloaded to councillors' devices via the MyCMIS app, either prior to or at meetings, remain accessible even in the event of a potential failure of the Council's Wi-Fi. These measures greatly mitigate any risk that IT failures may interrupt or delay meetings where digital agendas are in use.

4.8 To evidence the positive financial effect that the use of digital agendas has had, Fig. 1 (below) shows the reduction in councillors' printing costs incurred by the Council since the move to digital agendas for most Committee and Panel meetings:

Figure 1: Councillors' printing costs incurred by the Council

Municipal year	Year-end total for printing costs
2015-16	£21,633.72
2018-19	£6,649.26

This shows a reduction in annual printing costs of £14,984.46 since the use of digital agendas was introduced, a reduction of 69%. Whilst there are other factors which may also have influenced the decrease in costs to a minor extent, the introduction of digital agendas has been by far the most significant driving factor influencing the reduction in printing.

Scrutiny Panel Review of digital/paperless meetings

4.9 On 29 August 2019, Scrutiny Panel resolved to hold a review of its paperless/digital by default working in March 2020, to collect all points or recommendations that the Panel may wish to make.

4.10 Prior to this meeting, Panel members were sent a brief questionnaire to gather views regarding the current arrangements and provision of agendas and meeting documents. The anonymised results and feedback from this questionnaire can be found in Appendix A of this report.

4.11 Panel members are asked to discuss their experiences of working digitally, both in preparation for Panel meetings and at meetings themselves.

4.12 Overall responsibility for governance arrangements at meetings lies with the Governance and Audit Committee. The Panel may also wish to note that a report will be submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee on 10 March providing an update on the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working. This will include an update on the position on digital agendas more generally across all the Council's Committee and Panels. The outcome of this meeting will be reported to Panel at the meeting.

4.13 Issues the Panel may wish to consider in its review include

- Ways to improve the current system for providing and using digital agendas and other meeting documents.
- Ways in which the use of digital agendas has allowed for more flexible working (e.g. accessing meeting documents on personal devices whilst out and about)
- Issues which have been encountered by members and ways to address any problems regarding the use of digital agendas.
- Whether the Panel wishes to state a view as to whether the use of digital agendas (instead of printed agendas) has a positive effect on the Council's work to further its Strategic Priorities and achieve its agreed goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Ensuring accessibility to meeting agendas and background papers for both councillors and for members of the public.
- Whether current support offered to councillors is sufficient.

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.1 Whilst several Committees and Panels of the Council operate using digital agendas by default, the Council is mindful that it must ensure that all members can participate fully in meetings and therefore members may request a printed copy of an agenda (e.g. where health or accessibility considerations make this necessary).

5.2 A single printed copy of each meeting agenda is produced and placed in the public seating area for each Panel meeting. Over recent years, experience has

shown that the number of members of the public accessing meeting documents via the Council's website has increased and demand for printed copies in meetings has lessened.

6.   Standard References

6.1   There are no particular references or implications relating to consultation considerations or community safety and health and safety, however councillors should consider whether such implications may arise from any recommendations which they may be minded to make.

7.   Strategic Plan References

7.1   This item has implications for the following objectives of the Strategic Plan 2018-21:

- Promote responsible citizenship by encouraging residents to get involved in their communities and to identify solutions to local issues
- Promote green technologies through initiatives such as SMART Cities

8.   Publicity Considerations

8.1   The use of digital agendas, and reductions in printed materials, can help the Council evidence and emphasise its commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 and influence other organisations and members of the public to adopt ways of digital working to reduce their carbon footprints.

9.   Financial implications

9.1   See Figure 1, in section 4.8 of this report, for evidence of the financial benefits relating to the use of digital agendas and paperless working.

9.2   There is a minor cost implication relating to the provision of iPads on loan to members who require them. Each iPad costs approximately £340 for the Council to purchase.

10.   Risk Management Implications

10.1   Mitigations have been put in place to provide strong assurance that major system failure would not prevent meetings from proceeding, where digital agendas are in use. Digital agendas can be downloaded to devices prior to meetings or accessed using the dedicated Wi-Fi hotspot available for meetings at the Town Hall. This hotspot is not linked to the Council's Wi-Fi networks and operates independently, giving two options for members seeking a Wi-Fi connection. The ability to access meeting documents via the Council's website and the MyCMIS app, and to download these on to devices prior to meetings, likewise mitigates the risk that a failure of Wi-Fi may impede the ability for meetings to proceed.

10.2   Charging points are made available for members' use during meetings, mitigating the risk of device failure. This would not be available in the event of a general power failure. Such an occurrence is, however, likely to cause any meeting to be adjourned for a later date, in any case.

10.3 The use of digital agendas mitigates the risk of excluded information accidentally being released into the public domain. Printed copies of confidential reports can potentially be left out or lost, whilst digital copies, accessed via personal devices, are significantly more secure, usually requiring two-factor authentication to access (i.e. password/PIN to unlock the device, and then password or PIN verification required in order to log in to MyCMIS or to access confidential papers via the Council's website).

10.4 Information and data security are particularly important, given the increase in the commercial activities of the Council and its commercial bodies, and the likely increase in volume of documents and reports relating to these activities. The potential loss of confidential or personal information relating to partner organisations, clients or members of the public represents a reputational, legal and financial risk for the Council.

11. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

11.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The reduction in printing and despatching of meeting agendas has a positive effect on the Council's carbon reduction efforts and makes it more likely that carbon neutrality will be achieved.

Appendices

Appendix A – Responses by Scrutiny Panel members to circulated questionnaire on digital working.

Background Papers

Colchester Borough Council Strategic Plan 2018-21

Scrutiny Panel members' responses to questionnaire on digital working

NB Question 1 was for the name of the respondent and so answers to it will not appear in this appendix.

2. How do you usually read your Scrutiny Panel meeting documents when preparing for meetings?

More Details

🔵 Council webpages and PDFs	2	
🟠 MYCMIS (Device App/program)	1	
🟢 Mixture of the above	1	
🔴 Print-out of PDF	1	

3. How do you usually read your Scrutiny Panel meeting documents during meetings?

More Details

🔵 Council webpages and PDFs	2	
🟠 MYCMIS (Device App/program)	1	
🟢 Mixture of the above	2	
🔴 Print-out of PDF	0	

4. What device/s do you use to access your meeting documents for preparation and for meetings? (Please specify type and make of devices, e.g. PC, Tablet, Apple iPad, iMac, Amazon tablet reader, smartphone etc.):

5 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	PC, iPad
2	anonymous	Apple iPad
3	anonymous	Windows Surface Pro
4	anonymous	Laptop or Smartphone
5	anonymous	Apple iPad

5. What do you like about using digital agendas? Please let us know any ways in which going paperless has helped you prepare for and participate in the Panel's work.

5 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Less waste, easier to navigate the document during the meeting.
2	anonymous	OK for small agendas. No good when reference papers are half the subject heading.
3	anonymous	I liked the bookmarking when I used my old iPad, but have not been successful in downloading CMIS app onto Surface Pro
4	anonymous	Far easier to transport around. Saves wastage. Most of my working life has been paperless, so it hasn't been difficult for me to adapt. It's far easier to search a page number or item on my laptop rather than flicking endlessly through pages.
5	anonymous	If it's a small agenda, the MYCMIS app is OK. I haven't noticed any particular benefits, other than less paper being used.

6. How easy do you find it to access and use your meeting agendas digitally via CBC website or MyCMIS?

More Details

🔵 Very easy	3
🟠 Fairly easy	2
🟢 Somewhat difficult	0
🔴 Very difficult	0
🟣 Impossible	0

7. Please explain the answer you have given to the previous question and give details of any specific issues that you have encountered which makes it more difficult to use digital agendas compared to paper.

4 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	No issues, I find it very easy.
2	anonymous	Budget papers are a bit difficult digitally, so if there is anything I am specifically going to refer to I print out a hard copy of a couple of pages. I set up the tabs and flick between agenda and items and appendices with ease
3	anonymous	It is not more difficult, in any way.
4	anonymous	When I go onto the MYCMIS app, the papers are there, which is useful. I find it difficult and not user-friendly to annotate the agenda, and it's difficult to actively chair a meeting and quickly turn to the pages on which I have questions/comments.

8. Are there any ways in which the Panel's paperless working can be improved? (These could be changes to the way in which officers provide documents, or suggestions we can make to CMIS for improving their services.)

4 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	I don't have any issues so I don't see any obvious ways to improve the current system.
2	anonymous	I need to download CMIS onto my Surface Pro. I am currently using the Digital Sticky Notes to write my questions and comments on
3	anonymous	Potentially hyperlinks on the agenda that would take us straight to an item, rather than having to scroll down. Especially if some cllrs are unable to use the Ctrl+F funtion to search
4	anonymous	I think it would be helpful for the chairman of the meeting to have a paper copy of the agenda to make it easier to actively chair the meeting and also take part.