



## Governance and Audit Committee

Item

8

10 July 2018

Report of

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Author

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Title

Review of Meetings and Ways of Working – Digital Agendas Update

Wards affected

Not applicable

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the digital agendas trial conducted by the Governance and Audit Committee and Scrutiny Panel which formed part of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working. The report identifies issues identified during the trial and measures taken to assist with the transition to digital only meetings. It is intended that measures outlined in the report will allow for all Colchester Borough Council Committees to become digital.

### 2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the progress on the use of digital agendas in Committee meetings, as included in the report.
- 2.2 To RECOMMEND to Council that where appropriate facilities exist, meetings are conducted using digital technology to access agendas.
- 2.3 To RECOMMEND that Council assess the implications of using digital technology to access agendas in the Council Chamber and consider whether the facilities in the Council Chamber should be improved to enable agendas to be accessed digitally.
- 2.4 To note the cost of improving presentation facilities in the Grand Jury Room and Council Chamber.

### 3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 Following the conclusion and success of the trial, it is suggested that all Committees using rooms that have suitable facilities, such as the Grand Jury Room, use digital technology to access agendas. This would assist in significantly reducing the cost of printing paper copies of agendas, the budget for which has already been significantly reduced.
- 3.2 To enable the use of digital technology to access agendas in the Council Chamber, the current facilities will need to be upgraded to provide power sockets and USB ports near each seat. The Governance and Audit Committee will need to consider whether this investment required to upgrade the facilities in the Council Chamber should be pursued and if so, to recommend that Council consider the issue.
- 3.3 The Governance and Audit Committee will also need to consider the cost of improving the presentation facilities in both the Grand Jury Room and the Council Chamber. The

intention behind upgrading the facilities is to provide greater visibility to screens for both Councillors and members of the public.

#### **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The Committee could decide that they do not wish to further the roll out the use of digital technology to access committee agendas, however there is a significantly reduced budget for agenda printing during 2018/19. The Committee may also decide that the presentation facilities in the Grand Jury Room and Council Chamber are adequate and do not require improvement.

## **5. Background Information**

- 5.1 As part of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working review, the Governance and Audit Committee, the Scrutiny Panel and the Revolving Investment Fund Committee agreed to undertake a digital agendas trial between January and April 2018. During this time, the Governance and Audit Committee met twice and the Scrutiny Panel met five times. Each of these meetings were conducted without Councillors receiving a paper copy of the agenda. A single paper copy of the agenda is still placed in the Library five clear working days before the meeting and a limited number of paper copies of the agendas are provided in the public gallery at the meeting.
- 5.2 In advance of the trial Democratic Services Officers ensured that all Councillors had a suitable device that could access agendas during meetings. Whilst the Council encourages the use of personal devices, those Councillors that did not have access to a device were loaned equipment to enable access to digital agenda. During the trial a total of five iPads were loaned to Councillors for use at meetings, with training provided upon collection of the device. In addition to the devices, Democratic Services Officers also devised a solution to provide power during meetings in the Grand Jury Room using power towers with USB connectors.
- 5.3 During the trial, no major issues occurred and Councillors were able to access agendas at all times. For the first digital meeting of each Committee, members of the Democratic Services team were on hand to provide support if necessary. Those members substituting were provided with guidance on accessing the agenda on their personal device, or given a device for the duration of the meeting.
- 5.4 The move to using digital technology to access agendas comes at a time when the Council is increasingly adopting and focusing on the use of digital technology. In line with this move, the 2018/19 Committee agenda printing budget has reduced by 69%. This, combined with a number of years where agenda printing cost exceeded the existing budget, highlights the pressing need to utilise digital technology to access agendas. The move to digital agendas also falls at a time when the devices and applications available are more versatile and allow for easy document manipulation.

### **Digital Agendas going forward**

- 5.6 At the beginning of this municipal year the Chairmen of the Governance and Audit Committee, Scrutiny Panel, Policy Review Panel, Revolving Investment Fund Committee and Cabinet all agreed to access agendas digitally going forward. The purpose of this report is to formalise the use of digital technology to access agendas for all Committee meetings that use rooms with appropriate facilities.
- 5.7 Experience has shown that the majority of Councillors are content to use a suitable personal device to access agendas digitally. The Committee previously agreed that where Councillors did not have a suitable device, they be loaned a device by the Council. This device would only be for the duration of the Councillors remaining on the Council and would be redistributed if the Councillor is no longer in office. Councillors would be able to choose between an iPad, an Android tablet, or a Windows hybrid laptop, all of which would run both software for accessing agendas and Office365. If the policy to go digital were to be extended to cover all Committees that take place in the Grand Jury Room, it is expected that approximately 10 further devices would be required.
- 5.8 During the trial the predominant method for Councillors accessing Committee agendas was to download a copy of the PDF from the CMIS website prior to navigating the document through the Adobe PDF reader. Whilst this method was successful, following a

recent upgrade it is now recommended that Councillors use the widely available MyCMIS application. This is designed specifically for use in meetings, automatically downloads agendas (which means that the agenda can still be accessed without a Wi-Fi connection) and provides an increased level of security using a PIN code, timed log out and automatic deletion of agendas after a period of three months. A user guide has been created by Democratic Services Officers and further training opportunities will be provided outlining how to use MyCMIS. It is recommended that Councillors use PIN codes or passwords for their devices to further increase the security levels.

- 5.9 Going forward, it is intended that those Councillors with access requirements that would mean the use of a digital device in meetings would be difficult would still receive a printed copy of the agenda, if they so wished.
- 6.0 Consideration has also been given to contingency plans to enable meetings to proceed should the Wi-Fi connection be lost or if a Councillor does not bring a device. A solution to the issue of Wi-Fi connectivity is using the MyCMIS application which automatically synchronises with the server and downloads the agenda when it is ready. If a Councillors device fails, or a device is forgotten the Democratic Services team have a standby device available.
- 6.1 During the course of the trial, a further query was raised about the environmental issues of using devices. Using devices to access digital agendas significantly reduces the cost and environmental impact of printing Committee agendas, which following the conclusion of the meeting have limited uses. Devices also enable Councillors to utilise the entire Office365 package reducing the requirement to print other documents relating to their role as a Councillor. Microsoft, which produces the Office365 software package is Carbon Neutral and has an average power usage effectiveness at its data centres of 1.125, which is a third less than the industry average data centre. Whilst devices are provided on a loan basis and will be reissued where possible, any device that has reached its end of life will be wiped and recycled in accordance with the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment (WEEE) protocol.

### **Council Chamber**

- 6.2 Whilst there is a power solution for the Grand Jury Room, there are greater restrictions for the provision of power sources in the Council Chamber. Due to the design of the room and location of power sockets it is not feasible to set up a flexible solution. Following discussions with the Colchester Borough Homes Facilities team it was suggested that power sockets with USB charging ports could be installed at floor level near each seat.
- 6.3 It is estimated that the cost of such works would be £12,500, which would include the cost of providing the power sockets and lifting of the listed fixtures and fittings. It is also expected that such works would take approximately four weeks to complete, which is likely to impact on the number of private bookings for the Colchester Events Company. By way of comparison, printing Council agenda through a municipal year is just over £2k.
- 6.4 An alternative solution of battery packs was considered, however there are no UK suppliers of battery packs or docking stations. Due to uncertainty regarding battery quality and difficulty in terms of support and maintenance it is not considered a feasible option to procure a solution manufactured outside of the UK. Councillors will still be able to use their own battery packs during meetings, but a centrally administered system will not be provided.

- 6.5 The Committee will need to consider whether to recommend to Council that the Chamber be upgraded to allow Council meetings and other meetings that take place in the Council Chamber use digital devices to access agendas.

### **Presentation Facilities**

- 6.6 The Committee may want to consider upgrading the presentation facilities in both the Grand Jury Room and the Council Chamber. Currently the Town Hall only has one widescreen television for presentation, which restricts the viewing angle and distance. This means that the current provision is not fit for purpose. Whilst a temporary solution for the Grand Jury Room, devised by the Democratic Services team, uses a PC monitor screen in the West Committee Room this is not a satisfactory long term solution.
- 6.7 Following discussions with ICT, it has been suggested that two large widescreen televisions and mobile stands be purchased so that they can be used in both the Grand Jury Room and the Council Chamber. With regards to the Grand Jury Room this would allow for one TV to be positioned for members of the Committee, and another to be based in the West Committee Room for members of the public. For the Council Chamber the two screens would be placed in opposing corners. If an upgrade of the power facilities in the Council Chamber is undertaken this could provide an opportunity to also lay HDMI cabling.
- 6.8 The cost of the new television and stands would not be in excess of £2k and could be used for other events in the Town Hall.

### **7. Standard References**

At this time there are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; publicity or consultation considerations; equality, diversity and human rights; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

### **8. Financial implications**

- 8.1 The costs of the works required to upgrade the Council Chamber are set out at paragraph 6.2 of the report. In addition providing 10 additional devices to loan to Councillors is likely to cost approximately £3,800. Should the Committee refer the issue to Council and Council consider that the Chamber facilities be upgraded, then Cabinet would need to consider whether the funding could be made available. However, the proposals need to be considered in the context of the savings to the printing budget that will be secured by maximising the use of digital agendas.