

27 June 2017

Report of	Assistant Chief Executive	Author	Andrew Weavers
Title	Review of Meetings and Ways of Working		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

This report concerns the work completed to date on the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working and includes recommendations for the next steps of the review.

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To note that Officers will continue to loan IT equipment to Councillors who do not currently have a suitable device to enable the digital agenda trial to proceed.
- 1.2 To *RECOMMEND* to Council that all meetings be audio streamed and to facilitate this the Council enter into a contract with Audiominutes.
- 1.3 To agree the contents of the report templates and agenda templates as set out in the appendices to the report and these be implemented across all Committees.
- 1.4 To *RECOMMEND* to Council that the Meetings General Procedure Rules be amended, as set out in the appendices, to allow a public speaker to speak for an additional minute in order to ask a supplementary question or make a further comment during Have Your Say! Arrangements.
- 1.5 Following the completion of the six month trial of later start times, the Governance and Audit Committee review the implications.
- 1.6 To consider the options to improve the Members Room and to determine whether a recommendation should be made to Cabinet that funding be made available for such improvements.
- 1.7 To agree that a more proactive approach be taken to the promotion of Council meetings via social media.
- 1.8 To *RECOMMEND* to the Member Development Group that it consider the issue of mandatory training for Councillors and to report to Cabinet by December 2017.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 The Governance and Audit Committee conducted a review during the last municipal year to investigate how use of technology by Councillors in meetings could be improved and how public engagement with the meetings process could be increased. A progress update was provided to the final meeting of the municipal year in March.
- 2.2 This report provides the Committee with a number of proposals as well as further updates on the review since March.

3. Councillor ICT

- 3.1 It is proposed that those Councillors who do not have access to a suitable device for accessing agendas digitally during meetings be loaned the required equipment. Those Councillors who already have their own suitable personal device will be encouraged to continue to use this device.
- 3.2 Following approval at the previous Governance and Audit Committee to trial digital agendas, and invite members of the Revolving Investment Fund Committee and the Scrutiny Panel to participate, an IT survey of those Committee members has been conducted. It is anticipated that at least five devices will be required to ensure that all Councillors from the three trial Committees will have a device to access digital agendas. Further research will be required when other Committees begin to use digital agendas to establish how many additional devices will be required.
- 3.3 Three demonstration devices operating the three main software systems (Apple, Android, Windows) have been ordered; all of which are compatible with the Councils IT systems, including the MyCMIS digital agenda application. This is in recognition that Councillors will have different levels of experience and knowledge between the different operating systems. Providing a device that a Councillor already has experience with will assist in speeding up the transition to digital agendas. Councillors will also be able to trial each device to ensure that they receive the most adequate device for their needs.

4. Digital agendas

- 4.1 The Chairpersons of the Revolving Investment Fund Committee and the Scrutiny Panel have agreed to participate in the digital agendas trial.
- 4.2 Suitable training will be provided to all members of the trial Committees and this Committee will be provided with an update on the adoption of digital agendas after six months. Lessons learnt from the implementation of digital agendas in the three Committees will be factored in for full digital agenda implementation.
- 4.3 Members of those Committees using digital agendas will be required to ensure that their devices are fully charged prior to the meeting. Meeting rooms do not currently provide adequate charging solutions and suitable options will need to be investigated.

5. Streaming of committee meetings

- 5.1 The Governance and Audit Committee in March expressed a preference for audio streaming over video streaming on the basis of cost. Subsequently Colchester Borough Council have entered into a three month trial with Audiominutes who provide live streaming and recording of Committee meetings that integrates into the Committee management system.
- 5.2 A number of meetings have now been successfully streamed using the Audiominutes service. An example of an Audiominutes stream can be found at the link below;
<https://colchester.cmis.uk.com/colchester/MeetingCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/438/Committee/30/Default.aspx>
- 5.3 Experience so far suggests that the system is easy to use, provides good value, and integrates seamlessly into Colchester Borough Councils Committee Management system. The integration provides a professional look and feel and ensures that all information relating to that Committee meeting can be found on one webpage. This

system also provides for the delivery of social media posts, see Paragraph 9.2. **Appendix A** contains further details about the functionality of Audiominutes.

- 5.4 Comments made at the previous meeting suggested looking into alternative streaming solutions. Further research has not indicated any suitable audio or video streaming products that provide the same advantages as Audiominutes. A local solution for video streaming was identified, however this was considerably more expensive than the Public-i streaming solution that had already been rejected by the Committee.

6. Shorter meeting agendas/Executive Summary

- 6.1 In response to requests for agenda documents to be more accessible, less detailed and generally easier to read, the Council's agenda and report templates have been rewritten and updated.
- 6.2 The Council's report templates are available for report authors on the intranet, with the intention that a 'house' style be followed as far as possible. As an example for illustrative purposes a revised Cabinet report template is attached to this report as **Appendix B**. The revised template retains the 'header' format at the top of the report as this already adequately sets out the title, which meeting the report is for, who is responsible for it and the wards affected. A guidance note (not for inclusion in the written reports) has been added explaining the requirement for Plain English, avoidance of jargon and acronyms as well as font and formatting suggestions.
- 6.3 The report itself proposes an Executive Summary immediately beneath the 'header' in order to clearly set out in brief terms the fundamental details of the report. Following this section are separate paragraphs for the decision being recommended, the reasons for the decision and any alternatives. The intention being that these four sections together will form a stand-alone summary, avoiding the need to look through the whole report in order to grasp the important issues. The detail of the report will then be found starting on a separate page, in the form of one section headed 'background information', after which will follow the various 'standard' paragraphs which are used to prompt report authors to include 'housekeeping' information to illustrate that certain legal and financial practices have been followed, as appropriate.
- 6.4 The opportunity has been taken to also revise the Council's agenda templates, an example of which is a Planning Committee template attached to this report as **Appendix C**. No changes are proposed to the design of the front cover. The one page information sheet has been retained because it provides useful information to anyone who is not familiar with the meetings arrangements although this section has been reworded to give more clarity and avoid jargon. The page listing Committee members and substitutes now defines these more clearly and includes an explanation of an agenda for those unfamiliar with meetings jargon. The 'standard' items included in agendas have also been reviewed for clarity, brevity and removal of jargon. These are illustrated at **Appendix D** to this report which also includes an example of revised explanatory text to be used in the agenda 'running order' below each report title.

7. Meeting Start Times

- 7.1 At its meeting on 7 March 2017 the Governance and Audit Committee agreed to trial a 7.00pm start time from the start of the current municipal year. Positive implications of this change could include increased public attendance and easier attendance for Members with day-time employment. Negative implications could include an increased cost of servicing these meetings by officers. It is suggested that this trial continue for a period of six months, which should provide a sufficiently long period for any implications

resulting from the change in start time to be identified. As well as this meeting, this will cover the following scheduled meetings:-

- 25 July 2017
- 19 September 2017
- 17 October 2017
- 28 November 2017

7.2 It is proposed that a report on the trial of the later start time be considered at the Committee's meeting on 16 January 2018

8. Review of Have Your Say!

8.1 Whilst the Constitution already allows for a speaker to speak for an additional minute in response to a question from a member of the Panel it is proposed to extend this provision further. It is proposed to recommend to Council that the Have Your Say! provisions be amended to allow public speakers an additional minute to ask a supplementary question or respond to any answer given to them during Have Your Say! This will apply to all meetings with the exception of those of a quasi-judicial nature such as Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee hearings. A draft of the revised extract from the Meetings General Procedure Rules is attached at **Appendix E**.

9. Social Media

9.1 The report to the Committee in March 2017 explored in some detail issues around the use of social media to promote and report from Council meetings. The current practice is to tweet a link to the agenda of a meeting once it is published on the Council's website. No further communication is posted on social media before the meeting begins. It is proposed that more regular social media updates be sent both pre and post meeting. As an example, a schedule of tweets that could be sent in respect of a Cabinet meeting is set out below.

Cabinet	Cabinet Papers now available online (link)	First available online
	This week's Cabinet agenda: list items with link	Monday before Cabinet
	Cabinet takes place, 6pm tomorrow in the Town Hall come along to Have Your Say	Day before Cabinet
	Join us in the Town Hall for Cabinet at 6pm this evening	Day of Cabinet (12noon)
	Cabinet starts in one hour, join us in the Town Hall	Day of Cabinet (5pm)
	Decision(s) from Cabinet last night	Day after Cabinet (10am)
	Next Cabinet takes place at 6pm on in the Town Hall	Day after Cabinet (11am)

9.2 Should the Committee agree that live audio streaming of meetings continue, then the need for social media updates from the meeting lessens, as the proceedings are available for members of the public to access in real time. Furthermore, should the Council proceed with Audiomminutes, the system can be enabled to send a tweet when the stream of a meeting commences, when the Committee starts its consideration of a new agenda item and when the full recording of the meeting is available online following completion of the meeting.

10. Develop further training opportunities for Councillors

- 10.1 The Council values member development and has been awarded the LGA's Charter Status for Elected Member Development. The Constitution requires that Councillors undertake training before they sit on Committees exercising quasi-judicial functions, for example Planning Committee and Licensing hearings and to ensure that this training is kept up to date. All other training and development is voluntary. Whilst there is considerable appetite amongst members for training and development, there may be some benefit in considering whether other areas of training and development should also be made mandatory. Possible examples include Chairmanship training for Chairman, Scrutiny training for Scrutiny Panel members and safeguarding.
- 10.2 The all party Member Development Group has been established to consider issues relating to the provision of member development. It is therefore suggested that this group be asked to look in more detail at the issue of mandatory training, such as the subjects that could be considered for mandatory training together with, the implications for Councillors and for resources generally, and to report to Cabinet by December 2017.

11. Members Room

- 11.1 Following feedback from members about the benefits of a space where they can meet cross party in advance of meetings, the costs of refurbishing the Members Room in the Town Hall were investigated and reported to the Committee in March. Following the Committee's feedback about the proposed expenditure a more modest series of proposals have been looked at. This still includes the provision of some basic catering facilities to allow members to prepare hot drinks and light food before meetings in an informal setting. Members have indicated that the provision of such a space could help make meetings more business-like, shorter and less confrontational. The provision of charging points would also help support the move to digital agendas.
- 11.2 It is estimated that to complete the works set out below would cost approximately £10,000:-
- Removal of pigeon holes and installation of replacement mailboxes in group rooms
 - Removal of existing fixtures and fittings and redecoration of ceiling, walls and woodwork.
 - Installation of Tea Bar kitchen
 - Installation of power points and charging facilities for devices
 - Supply of replacement furniture
- 11.3 Should the Committee consider that these improvements should be pursued, a recommendation to Cabinet that the funding be made available will need to be made.

12. Strategic Plan References

- 12.1 The recommendations in this report seek to improve the Council's public engagement with the meetings processes and help to deliver the Council's Digital Challenge proposals.

13. Consultation and Publicity Considerations

- 13.1 A public consultation was conducted at the start of the Review of Meeting and Ways of Working. The results of which were considered by the Governance and Audit Committee in March 2017.

14. Financial Implications

- 14.1 The cost of the contract with Audiominutes and the supply of Councillor IT to the five identified Councillors can be found from within the Strategic Governance budget. The costs of the members' room improvements would be a matter for Cabinet to consider along with the additional costs associated with the delivery of digital agendas.

15 Equality and Diversity References

- 15.1 An updated Decision Making and Meetings Equality Impact Assessment will be completed prior to further decisions being taken by Council.
- 15.2 [Decision Making and Meetings Equality Impact assessment](#)

16. Other standard references

- 16.1 None

Appendices –

Appendix A – Audiominutes functionality details

Appendix B – Revised Cabinet report template

Appendix C – Revised Planning Committee agenda template

Appendix D – Revised Standard Meeting items

Appendix E - Proposed Revised Rule 5 of Meeting General Procedure Rules