Extract from the minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 10 July 2018

116. Review of Meetings and Ways of Working – Digital Agendas Update

Richard Clifford, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working report. The report requests that the Committee note the progress on the use of digital agendas in Committee meetings as well as the cost of improving presentation facilities in the Grand Jury Room and Council Chamber. The report also requests that the Committee consider recommending to Council that where appropriate facilities exists, meetings are conducted using digital technology to access agendas and that Council assess the implications of using digital technology in the Council Chamber. This includes considering whether the facilities in the Chamber should be improved to provide power sockets and USB ports.

Richard Clifford explained that this report forms part of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working project that started in 2016. This report provides an update on the progress of the digital agendas trial, which was conducted at the end of the previous municipal year and suggests the next steps for increasing the use of digital technology in Committee meetings.

It was highlighted that to date the Governance and Audit Committee had held four digital meetings, and the Scrutiny Panel had held a total of six. In addition, since the new municipal year the Cabinet, Policy Review Panel and Revolving Investment Fund Committee have all conducted meetings using digital technology to access agendas. No significant difficulties had been experienced and the meetings had all concluded successfully. Prior to the trial commencing Councillors were invited to attend a training session on how to access digital agendas through their devices. Since then training has continued on an individual basis as and when required.

Committee members were informed that during the trial Councillors were generally happy to use their own personal devices to access agendas. Any Councillor who did not have access to suitable device and was a member of a Committee that was part of a trial, was loaned the necessary equipment. In total five devices were provided to Councillors and it is anticipated that, if digital devices were deemed the default

method for accessing agendas for all Committees, a further ten more devices would be required.

It was highlighted stated that whilst a power solution has been provided for the Grand Jury Room, more significant work would be required for the Council Chamber as the provision of "power towers" would not be viable in the Chamber. Investigations have taken place on how best to provide a solution, it is estimated that it would cost £12.5k and it would take approximately four weeks for the work to be completed.

The Committee welcomed the digital agenda update report and agreed with the move towards using digital technology to access agendas in meetings. Whilst there is a learning process for using digital agendas it reduces the cost of printing at a time when the budget is also being reduced and prevents the waste of paper. Members noted the success of the trial as well as the fact that other authorities also use digital agendas.

A member of the Committee highlighted the need to ensure that Councillors and visitors all use the most up to date agenda pack particularly when urgent items are added to the agenda, as this can change the page numbers for those in attendance. Richard Clifford confirmed that going forward, Democratic Services Officers would ensure visitors were provided with the most up to date digital agenda pack. With regard to Councillors the MyCMIS application provides an automatic update facility ensuring that the latest version of the agenda has been downloaded.

The Committee also discussed the difficulty in using devices in the Council Chamber due to the design of the desks and space available. Members agreed that, whilst Councillors should aim to bring a charged device, the installation of power sources in the Council Chamber would be beneficial. It was suggested that prior to any investment in power sockets, a wider review of the Council Chamber for digital agendas be conducted. This should also look at accessibility issues as well as issues relating to the suitability of the room for the use of digital agendas. Whilst this may increase the cost it was felt necessary as the current set up is not particularly comfortable when using digital technology. A full review of the Council Chamber could also look at electronic voting and look at other possible improvements, providing a range of options to be considered by Members. Investigation would be made to see whether the current desks in the Council Chamber could be opened to assist with using digital devices.

A Committee member raised a query as to whether using digital agendas across all Committees would provide savings due to a reduction in delivery costs. Richard

Clifford confirmed that the current delivery system is provided as part of the hall keeping team and is currently included as part of the running costs for that team. Further research would be required to assess the cost of this service and the possible saving that might be achieved.

Further queries were raised with regard to whether there were safe locations to leave devices at the Town Hall and whether personal devices would be covered by the Council's insurance if damaged or stolen on Council property. Richard Clifford stated that further information on both of these issues could be provided to Committee members following discussions with the relevant Officers.

With regard to the improvement of presentation facilities in the Grand Jury Room and Council Chamber, a member of the Committee questioned whether projectors would be suitable, as an alternative to televisions. In response Richard Clifford stated that projectors would not be as flexible or reliable as using televisions.

In response to a question regarding the current printing budget and cost of devices, Richard Clifford informed the Committee that the budget for this financial year is £4,800, reduced from £15,000 in the previous year. The increased use in digital agendas for Committee meetings has already seen a significant reduction in printing budget costs. With regard to the cost of devices, the ten estimated devices would cost between £3k and £4k. These devices are provided on a loan basis and once returned they would be wiped and redistributed.

RESOLVED that*;*

  a) That the progress on the use of digital agendas in Committee meetings be noted.
  b) To RECOMMEND to Council that where appropriate facilities exist, meetings are conducted using digital technology to access agendas.
  c) To RECOMMEND that Council assess the implications of using digital technology to access agendas in the Council Chamber and that a review of the facilities in the Council Chamber, including their accessibility and their suitability for the use of digital agendas, should be undertaken.
  d) The cost of improving presentation facilities in the Grand Jury Room and Council Chamber be noted.