RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

12th FEBRUARY 2018

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY TO THE CABINET IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLORS A MORGAN AND M WEBBER, RESPECTIVELY.

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide feedback on the results of the paperless pilot of Cabinet meetings and to outline a proposal for Members consideration to extend this approach to all committee meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Note the feedback provided on the pilot of paperless Cabinet meetings;

2.2 Agree to support further extension of the the paperless approach to all committees of the Council as detailed within the report;

2.3 Subject to agreement of 2.2 above, recommend to Council that a phased approach to paperless Committee meetings is taken forward.

2.4 Note that subject to agreement of 2.2 above, consequential changes to the Council's Constitution would be required.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The adoption of a paperless approach to meetings will result in the Council delivering printing, paper and production cost savings, reducing the Council's carbon footprint as well as permitting Members to access other relevant information during meetings, thereby allowing them to more effectively and efficiently undertake duties.

4.   BACKGROUND

4.1   At the Cabinet meeting of the 19th May 2016, it was resolved that Cabinet and members of the Senior Leadership Team pilot a trial of paperless working in Cabinet Meetings and Cabinet Sub Committee meetings, committing to maximising opportunities to make efficiency savings to protect frontline services and to reduce the Carbon footprint of the Authority.

4.2   The recent transfer to the Modern.Gov software package, which assists officers with compiling committee agendas and reports, has also assisted in this pilot with the provision of electronic tablet applications, which allow straight forward access to Committee papers via either Android or Apple devices.

4.3   The Council has 29 "live" committees in operation including Cabinet, Full Council, Scrutiny Committees, Planning & Development and Licensing. This figure does not include any additional 'working group' meetings or Licensing Hearings.

4.4   Committees meet at varying frequencies throughout the year with agendas and reports printed and distributed to Elected Members, Co-opted Members and relevant officers prior to each committee meeting. Committee agendas are also published to the Council's website with relevant links circulated to Members and a wider distribution for information purposes.

5.   PAPERLESS SOLUTION – MODERN GOV

5.1   The primary benefit of paperless meetings is the elimination of paper. Other benefits of the pilot include financial savings; highlighting the Council as being environmentally responsible, boosting productivity, saving space, and making documentation and information-sharing easier. It also illustrates a modern and forward thinking approach to Committee meetings in a digital age.

5.2   Several Councils have implemented paperless committees, some of which have been recognised as examples of best practice. For example Teignbridge Borough Council's Democratic Services were awarded the MJ Achievement Award 2010. Part of the award was in relation to Members using laptops and the non issuing of paper agendas. The award noted that this allowed the Council *"to improve efficiency and participation by both Members and the public… the*

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scheme has helped Members work more effectively, putting democracy first while cutting costs and supporting Teignbridge's green agenda".

5.3   Following market testing, software demonstrations and reference visits to other local authorities and organisations in the locality, Modern.Gov was identified as the preferred software option to support the Council going forward in this area.

5.4   Modern.Gov is used by 19 of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities to assist in the timely production of Committee papers and to assist Authorities with further efficiency savings through a paperless Committee approach.

5.5   Modern.Gov software allows Committee agendas and reports to be collated and "pushed out" via an app which can be accessed through tablets and mobile phone devices set up and available to those on the prescribed distribution list.

5.6   Once agendas and reports have been published, Members and Officers on the distribution list receive an alert to advise papers are available for download.

5.7   The Modern.Gov App has a range of annotation tools to allow Members and Officers to make notes, highlight sections etc. as required.

5.8   The Modern.Gov App, allows anyone to download publicly available meeting papers. This saves the council time and money when coordinating meetings and reduces the need to print and distribute lots of paper.

5.9   Using the Modern Gov App also means that Members would be able to access other Local Council's agenda and reports if published through Modern.Gov i.e.
   ➤ Joint Scrutiny of Cwm Taf PSB – agenda and reports for both Councils could be made available through the Modern.Gov App avoiding duplication of work for each Authority.
   ➤ RCT members, who sit on Glamorgan Archives Committee (currently administered by Cardiff Council), would be able to view the agenda and relevant reports on their Ipad.

5.10   The Modern.Gov App also allows us to push Private or Restricted (Exempt Information) papers securely only to those members of the meeting that should have access to the information. This also saves the council time and money, but has the added benefit of ensuring that only the people who should see the papers have access to them.

5.11 Publication of all Committee papers through the Modern.Gov system will further assist in respect of publishing Committee papers on the Council's website. This is currently undertaken by Committee staff and involves a duplication of time and resources due to the need to access two different systems. Utilising the Modern.Gov system to populate the Council website will assist in one central database storage for Members details and upkeep of information. The system will also assist in the promotion and engagement aspect with the public, as this functionality can be built into the website design. i.e. automated promotion of the publication of Committee agenda papers through tweets from the Council's twitter account.

5.12 In addition to publication of Committee papers, the Modern.Gov system will assist with recording of Member attendance, declarations of interest and delegated decisions, acting as one central database.

5.13 The Modern.Gov app is available in both Welsh and English, with Members being able to choose which app they wish to utilise when accessing Committee papers.

5.14 Unlike other potential options, Modern.Gov costs do not increase with the addition of further committees so it is expected savings could increase should a decision be taken to adopt a paperless approach to all committees.

6. PAPERLESS CABINET PILOT

6.1 Cabinet Members and Chief Officers received individual training sessions from Officers within the Executive & Regulatory Business Unit and ICT officers on both the use of the electronic device and the Modern Gov application with ongoing support provided, if/when needed.

6.2 The first paperless Cabinet meeting took place in September 2016 with all Cabinet Members & Chief Officers utilising their electronic devices to access papers.

6.3 Although connectivity issues in the Council Chamber have been low, it was learnt that once the papers had been downloaded and opened on a device, those papers would open again, regardless of the connectivity in the location.

6.4 Overall, the pilot of paperless Cabinet meetings has been successful with Cabinet Members and Chief Officers gaining confidence in every aspect of the approach.

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6.5 The digital management of papers has resulted in a more effective and efficient way of accessing Cabinet Committee papers compared to the alternative, traditional method.

6.6 Officers of the Senior Management Team have also been able to utilise the system productively when attending other meetings outside of the Cabinet.

6.7 The Cabinet acknowledged that the introduction of paperless working would increase effectiveness, enable information to be accessed more quickly, provide additional security benefits and produce cost savings, and it was therefore felt that adopting this approach to further committee meetings would be a positive step forward.

6.8 The Cabinet recognised that introducing paperless working would mean a fundamental change to the way in which Members accessed information and acknowledged that sufficient training and support would need to be provided to all Members before, during and after Committees if necessary to assist with the transition. It is therefore suggested that this is done on a phased approach with Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs being rolled out in the first instance followed by the full Regulatory Committees, as proposed in section 10 of the report.

7. <u>ELECTRONIC DEVICES</u>

7.1 Nearly all Elected Members have been supplied with electronic devices such as Ipads / Surface Pro's to assist them in undertaking their Council duties.

7.2 Initially it was found that some Members had issues with the functionality of the electronic devices supplied, although all of these issues have now been addressed following the installation of Office 365 and other such applications. (Any outstanding issues with Members' devices should be highlighted to the Head of ICT as a priority.)

7.3 The Modern.Gov application would be available for download on all Members devices and no new or additional equipment would be needed for Members to access Committee papers.

7.4 Training on utilising the Modern.Gov app would be provided to Members in-house and any additional support needs required would be assessed and provided as and when needed.

8. <u>FINANCIAL SAVINGS</u>

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8.1 The initial investment for purchasing the Modern.Gov software infrastructure was met as part of the approved 16/17 investment fund. Operating a paperless approach to Committee meetings will reduce the annual cost further, with a reduction in printing and circulation costs.

8.2 As the frequency of meetings and size of agendas vary for each Committee, and with the addition of adhoc meetings i.e. – Scrutiny Working Groups, Licensing Hearings, Planning & Development Control Site Visits, Appeals, VER it is difficult to put a specific cost saving going forward, although the retrospective costs for the 4 main Committee areas for 2016-17 are outlined below:

RCT Committee Print Costs 2016-17

RCT COMMITTEE PRINT COSTS 2016-17					
CASHABLE SAVINGS	**Planning & Development** 50,760 Sides	**Licensing** 30,289 Sides	**Council** 150,276 Sides	**Scrutiny (All)** 61,639 Sides	**TOTAL** 292,964 sides
Paper Purchase	£86.29	£51.49	£255.50	£104.79	**£498.07**
Black and White 'Click' costs	£126.90	£73.19	£375.69	£154.10	**£729.88**
Colour 'Click' Costs	N/A	£32.45	N/A	N/A	**£32.45**
Outbound Postage	£561.24	£189.46	£1,384.50	£794.44	**£2,929.64**
TOTAL	**£774.43**	**£346.59**	**£2,015.69**	**£1,053.33**	**£4,190.04**

8.3 Members of the Senior Management Team are also utilising the Modern.Gov system to access meeting papers outside of the Committee structure i.e. Senior Leadership Team Meetings / City Deal Committee papers therefore again reducing the paper, printing and production costs.

8.4 There would be no additional costs required in respect of purchasing equipment as accessing agendas and reports would be available through Members' current devices.

9. **PRACTICALITY ISSUES**

9.1 If taken forward, to ensure the smooth running of Committee meetings Members will need to ensure that the battery life of their device is fully charged to last the duration of a lengthy meeting.

9.2 Some issues in respect of internet connectivity within the Council Chamber and other Council buildings have been raised and resolved by ICT, although Members would be recommended to download the Committee papers to their device in advance of the relevant Committee meeting.

9.3 Contingency planning would need to be reviewed, if in any circumstance the ICT system failed.

10. **GOING FORWARD – PHASED APPROACHED.**

10.1 To ensure that Members feel comfortable with the new way of working it is suggested that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each of the Councils Committee's are first to take forward the new way of working before it is rolled out to each of their Committee's. It is proposed that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each of the Council's Scrutiny Committees, plus Democratic services, Licensing and Planning and Development shall be taken forward in this manner in the first instance.

10.2 With the recent change in Committee support functions it is proposed that both Licensing and the Planning and Development Committee will then be rolled out on the Modern.Gov platform for all committee members.

10.3 The Chairs and Vice Chairs plus the Members of both Committees mentioned above (10.2) will be given training and support on how to access Committee papers through the Modern.Gov system and continued support would be provided if / when necessary by the Executive & Regulatory Business Unit and Democratic Services

10.4 In addition, training manuals will be made available to all Members which would include a step by step guide to accessing the system and annotation of reports.

10.5 Once Members and officers are comfortable with the system it is proposed that the remaining Committees including Scrutiny and Council are further rolled out on a phased approach, to support RCT becoming a paperless Council in respect of Committee agendas and reports.

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11   EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1   The move to paperless working should have no impact on Equalities issues. Electronic mediums such as tablet computers are more user friendly and allow greater accessibility than paper to those with visual impairments as the report can be enlarged very easily on the screen.

12.   CONSULTATION

12.1   It is proposed that following consideration by the Democratic Services Committee the item is considered at Council.

13.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1   The financial implications are outlined within section 8 of the report.

14.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1   Consideration has been given to the Local Government Act 1972 – (specifically those sections relating to Access to Information), the Local Government Act 2000 and the Council Constitution.

14.2   The Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 amended Paragraph 4 of Schedule 12 (Meetings and Proceeding of Local Authorities). The amended legislation references that a summons to attend a meeting, of an English Local Authority, specifying the business proposed, can be sent to every member of the council by an 'appropriate method'.

14.3   Reference to sending the summons to a member by an appropriate method includes where the member has given consent for the summons to be transmitted in electronic form to a particular electronic address (and consent has not been withdrawn), sending it in electronic form to that address.

14.4   This amendment however does not extend to Wales. Here the position remains as follows:

If a member of a principal council in Wales gives notice in writing to the proper officer of the council that he desires summonses to attend meetings of the council to be sent to him at some address specified in the notice other than his place of residence, any summons addressed to him and left at or sent by post to that address shall be deemed sufficient service of the summons.

14.5 Until such time as a similar amendment is made which extends to Wales and clarifies the position exactly delivering the summons to an email address at Members' request is felt to be an adequate compromise between practicality and the purpose of the original legislation which as shown above does not explicitly reference such summons being sent electronically albeit it references such summons being able to be sent to an 'address'. It is therefore considered that sending summons electronically is in compliance with the existing legislation.

14.6 In light of the above the Council's Constitution would need to be amended as currently it specifically references receipt of summons by post only, rather than it being able to be sent to an address (which would include an email address) with the consent of the Member.

14.7 It must be acknowledged however that it is for each Member to decide how they receive their summons. Subject to agreement to the paperless approach and with the individual Member's consent Members would be requested to a sign a document agreeing that their Council summons be delivered to their Council Email 'address', rather than their home address.

15. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ / FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

15.1 Living Within our Means - The approach supports the Council's Principle of 'living within our means' by allowing both officers and Members to work in a more streamlined and efficient manner in respect of Committee meetings and therefore, assisting in reducing the Council's running costs in this area.

15.2 Corporate Plan Work stream 'Digitalisation' – The move to a paperless approach to Committee meetings would also support the Council's work stream focus in respect of digitalisation.

16. CONCLUSION

16.1 The pilot of paperless Cabinet meetings is considered to have been successful in assisting the Council with delivering savings and allowing for a more efficient way of accessing papers.

16.2 Further adoption of the paperless approach maximises opportunities to make efficiency savings to protect frontline services and highlights the Council as being environmentally responsible, boosting productivity,

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saving space, and making documentation and information-sharing easier. It also illustrates a modern and forward thinking approach to Committee meetings in a digital age.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

Cabinet – 19th May, 2016

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee – Overview & Scrutiny Committee