RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015-16

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 24 MARCH 2016	AGENDA ITEM NO.4
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLANNING	PRESENTATIONS AT THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

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1.0   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   The purpose of the report is to advise Members of the work that is being undertaken to improve the quality of the equipment and material that is used to present planning applications at the Council's Development Control Committee

2.0   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   To note the contents of the report

3.0   BACKGROUND

3.1   Following the changes that were made to size and set up of the Council's Development Control Committee in 2014 a project was initiated to explore the use of innovative solutions to maximise the use of visual aids at the Committee. The aim was for the presentation to be "brought to life" as part of a more multimedia rich experience that allows for the application story "to be told" as opposed to the current use of traditional linear PowerPoint slides.

3.2   Areas that could be exploited to improve and support the decision making process include, photographs enhanced and supported by a short "onsite" video and Online services such as Google Streetview & Google Earth.

3.3   The objectives of the improvements are:

- To improve the quality of decision making by providing the best level of information available in the most useful format

- To reduce the need for site visits by enabling members to 'walk round' the site at the committee meeting

- To ensure that visiting members of the public are fully engaged in the decision making process

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3.4   The first stage of the project is complete with the purchase (with the support of Welsh Government grant funding) of new screens and a projector for the Council Chamber. These screens improve the visibility of presentations for Members and also allow people attending the Committee in the public gallery to see more clearly what is being presented by officers. This introduction responds to feedback received from a 'mystery shopper' who attended a Committee as part of a study commissioned by the Royal Town Planning Institute.

3.5   In terms of the second stage, Officers from ICT and Planning have been in discussions with software providers with a view to finding a solution that moves away from the very linear PowerPoint slides to a more interactive experience for Members that can be presented in a way that ensures that decisions are made on the best possible visual information and enable Members to make more decisions without the need for a site visit.

3.6   Finding the right product has taken longer than expected but positive discussions are currently ongoing with Microsoft about their latest presentation tools.

4.0   NEXT STEPS

4.1   A full consultancy day is being arranged with Microsoft for officers to be trained in the use of the new software which will then be tested through a trial run of a full Committee agenda.

4.2   The aim then is to have the new format in place for the first Committee after the Council AGM

5.0   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1   The improvements will help reinforce the robustness of decisions made at the Development Control Committee

6.0   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   The costs incurred so far have been funded through the Welsh Government Grant and there will be no further charge for the use of the Microsoft products as they are covered under our current arrangements.

7.0   EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1   The project will assist in making the procedures at the Development Control Committee more accessible to the public.