



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**12<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2018**

#### **DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS – PROGRESS UPDATE**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Democratic Services Committee with an update in respect of the phased approach to paperless Committee meetings which was agreed at the [Council meeting](#) on the 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Note the progress made to date and the plans put in place to further enhance the quality of the 'paperless' Committee meetings and;
- 2.2 To determine an appropriate time for the Council Business Unit to stop distributing hard copies of agendas and reports for those who wish to utilise the Modern.Gov system to its full potential.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018, it was agreed that the progress of the phased 'paperless Committee' approach would be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 3.2 Providing feedback to Members in respect of the phased approach to paperless Committee meetings will ensure that Members are confident and comfortable with the current process in using the system going forward.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The Council has 29 “live” committees in operation including Cabinet, Full Council, Scrutiny Committees, Planning & Development and Licensing, which 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.
- 4.2 In May, 2016, Cabinet Members resolved to trial ‘paperless’ working through the Modern.Gov application, in Cabinet meetings and Cabinet Sub-Committee meetings, committing to maximising opportunities to make efficiency savings and to reduce the Carbon footprint of the Authority.
- 4.3 The pilot of paperless Cabinet meetings was considered to have been successful in assisting the Council with delivering printing, paper and production cost savings as well as permitting Members and Senior Officers to access other relevant information during meetings, thereby allowing them to more effectively and efficiently undertake duties.
- 4.4 It was felt that the further adoption of the paperless approach to all Committees of the Council would illustrate a modern approach to conducting and contributing to Committee meetings, boosting productivity, saving space, and making documentation and information-sharing easier.
- 4.5 At the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018, Members noted the positive feedback in respect of the Cabinet pilot and it was resolved to further support the phased adoption of the ‘paperless meetings’ approach to all Committees of the Council.
- 4.6 Members raised concerns in respect of technical issues with devices, wifi connection and meeting room location facilities going forward, with officers assuring Members that although these issues could not be completely disregarded, contingency plans to reduce such problems would be taken forward.
- 4.7 At the Council meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, Members considered the ‘Document Management Proposals’ report which outlined the positive feedback and recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee.
- 4.8 During the Council meeting, Members resolved that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each of the Council’s Committees, along with Members of the regulatory Committees, Planning & Development and Licensing Committee would be the first to take forward the new way of working.

- 4.9 The opportunity to utilise the Modern.Gov system would then be offered to all remaining Committee Members should they wish to take forward the approach.
- 4.10 To ensure that all Members were comfortable with the system, officers stressed that the phased roll out approach would be run to suit Committee Member needs and that when Members were ready, they would need to provide notification that they are happy to receive future Committee Summons through electronic means.

## **5. THE MODERN.GOV SYSTEM**

- 5.1 Modern.Gov is used by 19 of the 22 local authorities in Wales and is also used by the National Assembly for Wales.
- 5.2 Modern.Gov software allows Committee agendas and reports to be collated and “pushed out” via an app which can be accessed through tablets and laptops set up and available to those on the prescribed distribution list.
- 5.3 The Modern.Gov app has a range of annotation tools to allow Members and Officers to make notes, highlight sections etc. as required.
- 5.4 In addition to publication of Committee papers, the Modern.Gov system assists with the recording of Member attendance, declarations of interest, forward plans and the registering of interests and training information.
- 5.5 The Modern.Gov application is available in both Welsh and English, with Members being able to choose which language they wish to utilise when accessing Committee documents.

## **6. PROGRESS TO DATE**

### **6.1 Elected Members**

- 6.1.1 The Council’s ICT department have now supplied 74 of 75 Elected Members with a device of their choice to assist them in undertaking their Council duties.
- 6.1.2 Of the 75 Councillors, 67 have chosen the Apple iPad, whilst 8 are utilising a Windows tablet.
- 6.1.3 In August, 2018, an email was sent to all Elected Members, offering them the opportunity to utilise the ‘paperless’ approach and undergo a short one to one training session at their earliest convenience.
- 6.1.4 During the training session, officers register the Members’ devices with the Modern.Gov application and Members are taken through the step

by step support guide on how to access papers electronically, and how to annotate documents where required.

6.1.5 To date, 46 Members have received a one to one training with officers from the Council Business Unit and ongoing support is available should they wish to utilise it.

6.1.6 The current percentage of Members utilising the Modern.Gov application at the Council's Committees is outlined below:

<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Scrutiny Chairs &amp; Vice Chairs</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Planning &amp; Development Committee</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Licensing Committee</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Council</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>47%</b>
<b>Public Service Delivery, Communities &amp; Prosperity Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Finance &amp; Performance Committee</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Children &amp; Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Standards Committee</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>VER</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Appeals</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>LEA</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Appointments</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Audit Committee</b>	<b>53%</b>

6.1.7 Members have been advised to use both their electronic copy and paper copy of Committee reports during meetings, until such a time, where they feel comfortable with the system and confident to move forward with only the electronic device.

6.1.8 During the Modern.Gov training session, officers from the Council Business Unit stress to Members that the Committee agenda and reports will continue to be distributed to them via post, until they advise otherwise.

6.1.9 Feedback from those Members who have begun to utilise the paperless approach has been positive with many Members choosing to use Modern.Gov to access reports in its entirety.

## **6.2 Co-Opted Members**

6.2.1 At the Standards Committee meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> September, the Committee resolved to take forward a paperless approach to their Committee meetings, with agreement by both Co-opted and Elected Members.

6.2.2 To assist the Committee in this approach and to support other co-opted Members on other Committee memberships the Council Business Unit along with ICT have been liaising with Co-opted Members regarding the provision of devices.

6.2.3 Training on the Modern.Gov app will also be provided to the Co-opted Members going forward.

6.2.4 Co-opted Members will need to sign up to an ICT policy to ensure that they abide by an acceptable use of conditions as set out in the policy.

## **6.3 Member Support**

6.3.1 Officers within the Council Business Unit have been fully trained on producing Committee agendas, reports, minutes and Decisions through the Modern.Gov system, providing a more efficient and effective approach..

6.3.2 Council Business Unit Officers have begun to utilise the system to its full potential by inputting attendance details, producing forward work programmes and Members details.

6.3.3 The Modern.Gov system acts as a central database where officers are able to store detailed information, avoiding duplication of time and resources.

6.3.4 Furthermore, Simultaneous Translators from the Council's Welsh Language Department have been trained on the system to enhance efficiency and the service provided for Members. The application allows officers to easily navigate back and forth the Welsh & English agendas and to find words and phrases with the click of a finger, instead of searching through a hard copy of papers.

## **6.4 Officers**

6.4.1 The Council's ICT department have worked closely with officers from the Council Business Unit to roll out tablet computers and access to the Modern.Gov application to Service Directors and Heads of Services.

## **7. WAY FORWARD**

### **7.1 Elected Members**

- 7.1.1 Sessions can be organised with staff from the ICT and HR department for those Members who may require further training on the functionality of their device, emails and producing word documents. It is recognised that Members utilise their computer tablet for many day to day tasks, and not only to access Committee papers. It is, therefore, essential that Members feel confident in conducting all other aspects of their work through their device.
- 7.1.2 The Council Business Unit will contact those Members who have not yet responded to the offer regarding a Modern.Gov training session and should they wish to utilise the paperless approach, individual training sessions will be organised. As mentioned in previous Document Management Proposal reports, the remainder of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs and Regulatory Committee Members will be contacted first.
- 7.1.3 Ongoing support will be provided by the Council Business Unit to Members and officers who may be experiencing issues accessing papers through the system.
- 7.1.4 The aim of the Council Business Unit will be to ensure that each Committee of the Council has 100% of its Members who wish to utilise the paperless approach, accessing reports electronically whilst still receiving paper copies.
- 7.1.5 It is proposed that once all Members of an individual Committee are fully utilising the Modern.Gov system, a period of one month will be given prior to stopping the distribution of paper copies, unless stated otherwise by each Individual Elected Member.
- 7.1.6 It is anticipated that by the Council's 2019 Annual General Meeting the Council will be operating a completely paperless approach to Committee meetings.

### **7.2 Device Battery Life**

- 7.2.1 Acknowledging concerns regarding battery life, it is suggested that the onus should be on the Members and officers to ensure that their device is suitably charged before a meeting commences.
- 7.2.2 However, it is appreciated that through the course of a day, with potentially attendance at several meetings or lengthy meetings (Council meetings can be over a 3 hour period), the battery life on devices could diminish, leaving Members with no access to Committee reports during a meeting.

- 7.2.3 Short term provisions are being put in place, to ensure that a handful of portable battery chargers are available in the Council Chamber in readiness for Committee meetings.
- 7.2.4 The cost of the portable battery chargers and relevant power leads range between £30 and £50 per person and therefore, it is suggested that only 15 of these are purchased (to supply a full Scrutiny Committee) and for Members to only utilise them where necessary.
- 7.25 Further work into the long term solution will need to be taken forward with discussions with both ICT and Corporate Estates in respect of accessible charging points within the Council's Chamber for both Members and Officers to utilise.

### **7.3 Internet Connectivity**

- 7.3.1 Since Members have been utilising the Modern.Gov application at Committee meetings, there have been no issues regarding the application and its functionality.
- 7.3.2 However, it has been noted that the application is heavily reliant on a strong and secure internet connection.
- 7.3.3 There are currently two wifi networks available to Members and Officers in all Council buildings - the Cloud and the Diwifr. It is important that all Members are provided with their log on details and have sufficient knowledge of how to connect to the internet, should they lose connection at a meeting.

### **7.4 RCT Website**

- 7.4.1 Publication of all Committee papers through the Modern.Gov system will further assist with the publishing of Committee papers on the Council's website. Publication of Committee summons and relevant documentation on the RCT website is currently undertaken by the Council Business Unit staff and involves a duplication of time and resources due to the need to access two different systems.
- 7.4.2 The Council's Web Team are currently working with Modern.Gov in the process of developing the Committee Services section of the Council's website, in order to fully integrate Modern.Gov.
- 7.4.3 A date is yet to be established as to when the Website integration will go 'live', as it is essential that this is a smooth process with no adverse affect to the design and quality of our current pages.
- 7.4.4 Once live, the system will 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.

- 7.4.5 The system will also assist the Council Business Unit in downloading and publishing attendance statistics in a timely and sufficient manner, as well as taking forward many other functions available through the system.

## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 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.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 The 'Paperless Committees' approach was first trialled by Cabinet Members and Senior Officers in 2016 where feedback was largely positive.
- 9.2 The report was considered by the Democratic Services Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018 and approved by Council on 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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'.
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 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.

- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 In light of the above, the Council's Constitution which specifically referenced receipt of summons by post only, has been amended to reference receipt of summons to an 'address', which can include an email address, with the consent of the Member.
- 10.7 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 sign a document agreeing that their Council summons be delivered to their Council Email 'address', rather than their home address.

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

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 Corporate Plan Work stream 'Digitalisation' – The move to a paperless approach to Committee meetings supports the Council's work stream focus in respect of digitalisation.
- 11.3 A Paperless approach to Committee meetings Links to the future generations well being goals of a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities and a globally responsible Wales as we work further to reduce the carbon footprint of the Authority.

## **12. CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 74 of 75 Elected Members have been provided with portable devices of their choice, with more than half having received a one to one training session in respect of the Modern.Gov system and accessing and annotating documents.
- 12.2 The further adoption of the paperless approach has maximised opportunities to make efficiency savings to protect frontline services and highlights 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.
- 12.3 The Modern.Gov training sessions have so far been perceived positively by Members and it is important to note that further training can be provided by the Council Business Unit and ICT and HR department.
- 12.4 Where issues such as internet connectivity and battery life have been identified, officers will continue to work to develop and improve the 'paperless' approach for Members at meetings.
- 12.5 Modern.Gov training will be offered to those Members who have not currently taken up the offer and a plan must be put in place to eventually stop distributing paper copies to those who feel confident in using the system in its entirety.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**12<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 2018.**

**DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & INTERIM HEAD OF  
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**Background Papers**

Democratic Services Committee – [12<sup>th</sup> February, 2018](#)  
Council - [28th March, 2018](#)