Meeting: Environment Sub-committee

Date: 5 October 2016

Title: Paperless Meetings

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Service: Democratic Services

Wards affected: All

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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To give consideration as to whether there should be an in-depth study into the benefits of introducing a system of paperless meetings to the Authority.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That Members note the report.

3. Details

3.1 As part of its work programme for 2016/17 the Sub-committee agreed to give consideration to the subject of paperless meetings and the environmental benefits of a reduction in the amount of paper used to provide agendas and reports for meetings of the Authority. It agreed that a short briefing paper be provided to the Sub-committee to allow it to determine whether the subject warranted an in-depth study.

3.2 The current system for the production of agendas and reports for meetings of the Authority is that a paper copy of the agenda and reports are produced, printed and sent to each member either via the courier or alternatively left at Quadrant for the member to collect at their leisure.

3.3 In addition agendas and reports for formal meetings of the Authority are published on the Authority's website, apart from those reports which are classed as exempt under the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The Authority is also required to make a reasonable number of copies of agendas and reports available for members of the public to use at meetings.

3.4 Last year the Authority spent around £24,000 on producing agendas and reports for formal meetings of the Authority including Council, Cabinet and all the scrutiny and regulatory committees/sub-committees. This equated to approximately 0.5M sheets of paper which had to be printed, stapled/bound and then delivered to members and officers. During the same period the bulk printing costs for the Authority, not counting the work undertaken for the various partners, amounted to approximately £210,000. It can therefore be seen that the production of agendas and reports forms a very small part of the Authority's overall printing costs.

3.5 It is noted that a number of members of the Authority already make use of their tablet or phone to access agendas and reports for meetings. It is also acknowledged that the current method of producing agendas and reports for Authority meetings is not ideal as the documents are not in a format that are user friendly when accessed via mobile telephones and tablets. There is, for example, no easy way of bookmarking specific parts of the agenda/reports or making notes in advance of or during a meeting.

3.6 Whilst there would be some benefits associated with moving to the production of reports and agendas in an electronic format there would be several issues which would need to be addressed before such a system could be rolled out to be used by all members of the Authority. The current technology used within the Authority could be capable of providing the facility of making more use of electronic agendas and reports however to make best use of such a facility there may be a need to examine a software solution to ensure that electronic agendas are user friendly and meet the needs of all elected members and officers.

3.7 The Authority is currently undergoing a significant transformation in the way that it uses technology to deliver its services through the Target Operating Model (TOM) to allow residents and service users to access services delivered by the Authority. As part of this transformation a review of the IT systems used within the Authority has been undertaken and it has been agreed that, for the general day to day administration function, there will be a move to the introduction of Microsoft 365, a cloud based suite of programmes such as Word, Excel, Powerpoint etc. The package also includes Sharepoint which allows for the sharing of files within the Authority and this could be used for sharing files such as agendas and reports.

3.8 There are also a number of packages available which would make the production of agendas and reports easier. Such software solutions would enable the production of agendas and reports which can be easily read on smart phones and tablets. The packages also allow users to highlight sections of the agenda/report and make annotations, as can be done with a paper copy. There would of course be a cost associated with the procurement of such a system and an appropriate business case would need to be developed if such a system was to be considered.

3.9 As previously mentioned the Authority is currently making a significant investment in its IT systems to ensure that the systems in place are fit for purpose and enable the Authority to deliver improved services under its Target Operating Model. Work to complete the roll out of the improved IT systems would of course take priority over the introduction of systems which would not generate significant savings overall.

4. **Appendices**

None

5. Background Information

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

None