

SUBJECT:	PAPERLESS MEETINGS TRIAL
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the Committee's consideration on 31 January 2013 of the potential for providing committee papers to councillors electronically, this report is provided to outline details of the trial already agreed in principle.

2. Background to Paperless Meetings

- 2.1 At the meeting of 31 January 2013, the Ethics and Engagement Committee resolved that its members would be willing to take part in a trial of paperless working in committee meetings.
- 2.2 The Council has recently completed a transfer from its previous unsupported committee management software to the Modern.Gov software package. One of the benefits of the new software is the provision of electronic tablet applications which allow for straightforward access to committee papers via either Android or Apple (the two major mobile device platforms for tablets and smartphones). As such, systems are now in place to allow the trial of paperless meetings to begin at members' convenience.
- 2.3 Councillors will therefore be requested to confirm whether they require a tablet device to be issued to them for the purposes of the trial, which is intended to run until the meeting of 1 October 2013, at which members' findings can be considered.

3. Intended Outcomes

3.1 The advantages of paperless meetings

The primary benefits of paperless meetings are the financial and environmental savings made possible through a significant reduction in the amount of printed material produced for each meeting. Without having carried out a trial or agreed the specifics of any scheme it is difficult to provide precise estimates for likely savings, partly because savings per councillor will vary significantly according to which committees they receive paperwork for. However, in order to give members an outline of the possibility for savings, figures are provided below for information.

- 3.2 The Council currently prints approximately 300,000 pages every year for its committees at an average cost of £0.04 per page. Excluding the cost of paperwork provided for officers and the public (estimated as accounting for half of all papers), an average councillor is calculated to receive 4,500 pages per year at a cost of

£180 per year. In addition to this, the majority of agendas are then posted to councillors at an approximate cost of £30 per year per councillor. Over the course of a 4-year term, a cost of £840 per councillor is clearly higher than the provision of a tablet computer costing £360. While these estimated figures are only indicative and subject to multiple variables, paperless working certainly justifies further investigation in view of the potential financial and environmental savings. The provision of tablet computers would also provide a further benefit in giving councillors an additional way of accessing their Council IT accounts for mobile working.

3.3 Testing usability

The main purpose of the trial will be for members to experience using tablet devices both for reading materials prior to a meeting and referring to them during it. This is inevitably a significantly different experience from using paper, but will still allow members to add highlighting, annotations, and notes to an agenda as required. As such, members will be requested to keep a brief log of their experience with the devices and feedback any comments or issues to officers and, if necessary, the Committee.

3.4 Exempt information

The standard tablet application for accessing committee papers is provided purely for public material, meaning that anyone, including members of the public, will be able to download the public sections of any committee agenda. The Council also has access to a secure version of the application which would allow exempt information, i.e. Section B of an agenda, to be provided to the relevant members. While this facility would form a key part of any full move to holding paperless meetings, as a result of the need to secure any exempt information it is not recommended that this is trialled until members and officers are fully confident in using the standard application.

3.5 Practical points

In response to questions raised by members previously regarding insurance for tablet devices and the possibility of the Council providing a choice of Android or Apple tablets, officers have liaised with IT Services to establish the current situation. With regard to insurance, tablet computers issued by the Council are insured under a pre-existing policy. In terms of making use of different mobile operating systems, the Council currently only provides Apple iPads; alternative Android tablets, while often initially cheaper, carry additional service costs which outweigh any potential savings in comparison with Apple iPads. While it is likely that these service costs will soon be eliminated, it is intended that any paperless meetings trial would primarily make use of Apple iPads.

3.6 It is proposed that members of the Committee for the municipal year 2013/14 will be issued with an Apple iPad for use during an initial three-month trial. Any members already in possession of a suitable Apple iPad or Android device will be encouraged to make use of that device for the purposes of the trial. During that time, these members will not be issued with paper agendas unless an electronic copy cannot be provided.

3.7 The specific outcomes of the trial and members' experiences of paperless meetings will shape the steps following the trial's conclusion. In particular, consideration will need to be given to the possibility of the broader use of tablet

devices by councillors outside the confines of the initial trial.

4. Organisational Impacts

4.1 Finance

The initial investment for members trialling tablet devices can be funded from within existing budgets. As outlined above, any cost in providing tablet devices on an ongoing basis is likely to be funded from savings made in printing costs. Part of the printing costs reflect the lease of a printer held specifically for the production of committee papers. While the base cost of the lease will remain the same regardless of the number of agendas being printed, it is anticipated that a significant move towards paperless working would allow for further rationalisation of printing, by either leasing a smaller and cheaper printer, or by combining printing with other departmental printers.

4.2 Legal Implications

Members taking part in the trial will be requested to sign a document requesting that their Council summons be delivered to City Hall, rather than their home address. This reflects the unusual position of Council meetings within the Local Government Act 1972, which requires that printed papers are formally served on members.

4.3 While the issue of the incompatibility of Council summons with paperless working has been raised with the Department for Communities and Local Government previously, no clear indication has been made of when the legislation will be revised to reflect modern working practices. In the absence of clear direction from central government, delivering the summons to City Hall at members' request is felt to be an adequate compromise between practicality and the purpose of the original legislation.

5. Recommendation

5.1 That members endorse the approach set out within the report for the trial of paperless working with elected committee members.