

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

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the outcome of a trial by members into the use of tablet computers in place of printed committee agendas.

## 2. Background to the Trial

- 2.1 At its meeting of 29 May 2013, the Ethics and Engagement Committee resolved to proceed with a trial of paperless working. Committee members were issued with tablet computers installed with the Modern.Gov software. The tablet application allows councillors and members of the public to download committee agendas and minutes from the majority of Lincolnshire councils, including the City of Lincoln Council. This includes access to joint committees such as the Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee (hosted by Lincoln) and the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee (hosted by North Kesteven District Council). Dual-hatted members are also able to access Lincolnshire County Council meeting information through the application.
- 2.2 Members agreed at the outset of the trial to receive all public committee agendas via their tablet computer rather than receiving a printed copy. The potential advantages of paperless working include reduced printing and postage cost, environmental benefits through reduced use of paper, and savings in officer time spent in printing agendas.
- 2.3 As part of the trial members were requested to consider their experience of using the tablets and provide feedback to officers in order for the Committee to consider the findings of the trial as a whole.

## 3. Trial Outcomes

### 3.1 Training

The iPads were issued to councillors by Democratic Services Officers, who gave members an initial run through using the iPads and the committee agenda application. Since that time any additional guidance has been provided as and when requested by councillors.

### 3.2 Ease of Use (Tablet Computer)

Members experienced some initial problems with using tablet computers including:

- Connecting to wireless internet connections at home and at City Hall.
- Orientating tablet computers to view landscape agendas when using a

- physical keyboard.
- Holding the tablet computer while standing to speak at Full Council meetings.

Overall feedback provided to Democratic Services regarding the devices issued has been positive and initial concerns regarding the battery life and portability appear not to have been borne out. The issues outlined above can primarily be resolved through changes to working practices or additional training.

### 3.3 Ease of Use (Committee Papers Software)

Feedback from members regarding using the Mod.Gov tablet application has been broadly positive, with particular emphasis on the ease with which councillors have adapted to reading papers on tablet computers. A number of comments regarding the application overall are provided for members' consideration:

- There is a need for members to use the software sufficiently frequently to be able to make effective use of it.
- Access to alternative document viewers including thumbnail views of the agenda would be useful for some agendas.

### 3.4 Security

In order to ensure the security of data held on the tablet computers, the devices have been set to lock if unused for 5 minutes. This setting has provided challenges to members using the tablet computers in meetings, as the delays caused by having repeatedly to log-in can disrupt the flow of the meeting. The setting has been chosen for 5 rather than 15 minutes in accordance with the Cabinet Office's secure email Code of Connection. At members' request, a small number of other councils using tablet computers for committee agendas were contacted to discuss the arrangements in place elsewhere. While noting the security risks associated with all computers, the shortest screen lock time in place at the local authorities consulted was 15 minutes.

In addition, while the initial intent for the trial had been to test only the public functions of any agendas, some members felt that receiving only the first part of agendas excluding exempt information prevented them from using the tablet computer to its greatest extent. As such, work has been undertaken to allow councillors to access exempt information through the Modern.Gov application. The application will continue to prevent public access to any secure information but will presently allow councillors to access all of the information usually accessible through the Council's internal network. There are also opportunities for internal meetings attended by councillors to be transferred onto the Modern.Gov platform if required.

### 3.5 Additional Uses

As members are aware, the tablet computers have been issued primarily with a view to saving costs on printed agendas. In order to maximise these savings, any additional software, including access to Council emails and remote working, was not included with the trial device. For members' information, the cost of providing access to the Council's full network would be around £200 per device as a result of the additional Microsoft Office licensing costs. This additional cost would reduce the likely savings from paperless working.

- 3.6 However, if tablet computers were used for a wide variety of uses this additional cost could potentially be justified. Some other potential uses include:
- Giving councillors access to their email in a more convenient manner, allowing for better communication with residents and officers.
  - Access to social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, allowing direct communication with service users, particularly with younger residents who might otherwise have less direct contact with councillors.
  - Reporting details of problems directly to officers using the camera on the tablet computer.
- 3.7 Equally, there remains the possibility of members being able to access their emails and calendar directly through a tablet computer, rather than logging in via the Citrix system. This option is likely to be considerably less expensive and more user-friendly for councillors, although its adoption would be subject to any applications meeting the required security standard.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1 Having concluded the trial, members are requested to consider any appropriate action which should be taken with regard to the future implementation of paperless working.
- 4.2 Members will be aware that the tablet computers issued for the trial were provided on a temporary basis pending the trial's outcome. Any changes made on a permanent basis regarding the issuing of ICT equipment would require a change to the Elected Member ICT Policy (attached as **Appendix A**). In particular, any changes recommended to the Executive should have regard to the position of councillors who have not taken part in the trial or who previously accepted a tablet computer in lieu of either an allowance or a Council-issued laptop.
- 4.3 Based on the apparent success of the trial it is suggested that members consider recommending a change to the Elected Member ICT Policy to allow councillors who agree to receive all committee papers via the tablet application to receive a tablet device for this purpose. Any retention of this device would be contingent upon continuing not to receive printed agenda papers.

#### **5. Organisational Impacts**

- 5.1 Finance  
Funding for the tablet computers used during the trial was provided from a number of different budgets. Funding for any additional devices could be justified and met on the basis of the proposal in paragraph 4.3, while reductions in the printing budget are likely to be sufficient for new devices on an ongoing basis. Any funding agreement would be subject to ongoing review by the relevant budget-holder.
- 5.2 Legal Implications  
As noted previously, any members receiving electronic agendas 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. Members may also wish to note that the Department for Communities and Local Government has recently written to

another local authority stating that while reform to the relevant law might be beneficial, it is not a government priority at this time.

## **6. Recommendation**

6.1 Members are recommended to consider the outcome of the paperless working trial and resolve a suitable conclusion to the trial having regard to:

- Whether paperless working is suitable for general use by councillors.
- Requesting any extension in the screen lock period for tablet computers used at committee meetings.
- Recommending any necessary changes to the Executive in order to amend the Elected Member ICT Policy