OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
BOARD   3rd December 2018

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP – PAPERLESS COMMITTEE MEETINGS REVIEW

Lead Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brian Cooper
Relevant Head of Service	Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Ward(s) Affected	No specific ward relevance
Non-Key Decision	

1.   SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report outlines the findings to date of the Corporate Performance Working Group in respect of paperless meetings and reducing paperwork for Committee meetings.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to RESOLVE that

1) **a trial of paperless meetings should be undertaken by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board;**

2) **the Overview and Scrutiny Board should launch a trial whereby the agenda should be displayed on a screen during the meetings.**

3.   KEY ISSUES

Background

3.1   In December 2017 Councillor Brian Cooper proposed that a scrutiny review should be launched into how to reduce the paperwork generated for Bromsgrove District Council's Committee meetings. The Overview and Scrutiny Board recently concluded that this work should be undertaken by the Corporate Performance Working Group, rather than a bespoke Task Group.

3.2   The Corporate Performance Working Group held an initial meeting on Wednesday 7th November 2018 to discuss this matter further. Members considered the amount of paperwork generated for Committee meetings, the financial costs to the Council involved in producing this paperwork and action that could be taken to reduce the amount of paperwork that is printed for Committee meetings. As part of their discussions Members of the group accessed agenda packs in an electronic form using the modern.gov app on their iPads.

3.3   The group learned that at present paper copies of agenda packs are produced for every Member of a Committee, the Officers attending that meeting, the public and any other guests who may be present. Spare copies of agenda packs are also produced for every meeting in case needed. This results in a lot of paperwork being printed for Committee meetings every year.

3.4   During the meeting of the group in November Members learned that Democratic Services produce agenda and minute packs using the modern.gov Committee management system. Public copies of the agenda packs, minutes and Cabinet Work Programme together with information about each Councillor, each Committee, outside bodies and other relevant matters can be accessed on the modern.gov pages of the Council's website.

3.5   The agenda and minutes can also be viewed on the modern.gov app. There is a public version of the modern.gov app which accesses copies of agenda and minute packs that are in the public domain.   There is also an exempt app which can be activated to provide Members and some Officers with access to private information in agenda packs and minutes. Those using both the public and private app can annotate their copy of the agenda or minutes of a particular meeting as well as view the information provided on that document.

3.6   Members welcomed the functionality of the modern.gov app and concluded that this could be used by Members in meetings to replace paper copies of agenda packs. They concurred that this could potentially help to achieve financial savings for the Council. However, as paperless meetings would represent a new development for the Council Members agreed that it would be helpful to trial paperless arrangements at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings.

3.7   During the meeting the agenda was projected from the app on to the television in the room and was used as a training aide. The Corporate Performance Working Group noted that this could be a helpful tool at Committee meetings and would be particularly helpful for enhancing the transparency of Committee meetings to the benefit of the public. The group also noted that the projection of the agenda on to a screen would help Members to familiarise themselves with the app. Again, the group concluded that it would be helpful to trial this arrangement at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Financial Implications

3.8   The Council's printing contract changed in August 2018 and the charges for the new service differ from those under the previous contract. As the change in the contract was so recent, Officers are only able to provide an estimate of projected annual printing costs for Bromsgrove District Council based on the average number of print jobs requested in previous years.

3.9   Bromsgrove District Council's demand for printing for all services is projected to cost £44,450 per annum. The Council has a shared print service with Redditch Borough Council. When the costs of printing at Redditch are taken into account, together with the costs of maintaining the Print Unit, the projected overall cost of running the service is £127,000 across the two authorities.

3.10   The Democratic Services team sends 90 per cent of all their printing requirements to the Print Unit. Given the nature of the work undertaken by Democratic Services, which involves producing often lengthy agenda packs, 51 per cent of all demand for printing from the Print Unit is received from Democratic Services. This equates to a projected cost of £22,700 per year, roughly half of the total printing costs for the Council.

3.11   There are fixed costs attached to printing, including maintaining a Print Unit, staffing costs, utilities and so on. These fixed costs have been set at a level that will allow the Print Unit to provide a service that meets existing demand for work. There are also marginal costs, which are the costs of each printing job. The fixed costs represent two thirds of the costs of printing and the marginal costs make up the remaining third.

3.12   In this context if Members reduce demand for printing by a small margin, only the marginal costs will be affected. However, if a majority of Members and Officers chose to go paperless for Committee meetings demand from Democratic Services for printing will reduce significantly and this could have implications for both the fixed and the marginal costs.

3.13   Members should also note that printing in colour costs more than printing in black and white. Colour printing costs range from 2.9 pence to 37.5 pence per page whilst black and white printing ranges from 1 pence to 15.5 pence, with economies of scale achieved for longer reports. Democratic Services have urged officers for some time to print only in black and white but sometimes colour printing is necessary, (for example to display charts in the Corporate Performance Reports).

Legal Implications

3.14   The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, Part 2 (7) requires a copy of an agenda for a public Committee meeting to be available for inspection at the Council's offices and on the Council's website. Councils are also required under these regulations to provide a reasonable number of copies of agenda packs for the public to access at meetings, though local authorities are able to determine what number of copies would be reasonable for any meeting.

Service / Operational Implications

3.15 Currently every Member has an iPad, which can be used to access emails, the modern.gov app and the measures dashboard. However, concerns have been raised by Members about the general functionality of the iPads and whether this equipment is meeting the needs of Bromsgrove Councillors.

3.16 For this reason the Members' IT Project Group has been established to review the IT equipment provided to Members. The group's conclusions could have implications for the ways in which Members can access electronic versions of agenda and minute packs for Committee meetings. For example whilst the modern.gov app can be accessed on Members' iPads, the app will not be accessible on laptops until the Council has upgraded its software.

3.17 At present some Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board do not have access to the exempt modern.gov app. Should the Board agree to launch a trial whereby the meetings of the Board are paperless, Democratic Services will need to work with members of the Board to provide access before the first meeting when the trial will commence. Training will need to be provided to Members to enable them to use the modern.gov app during meetings. This training could be provided on a one-to-one or group basis.

3.18 The Member Development Steering Group discussed the potential to reduce the amount of paperwork generated for Committee meetings at a meeting on 8th October 2018. The group concluded that it would not be appropriate to impose a paperless approach to all Committee meetings on every Member, though individual Councillors could opt to go paperless. However the group did suggest that a shorter version of the agenda pack could be printed for Committee meetings; covering reports could be published whilst appendices would be available to access electronically (except for at least one copy for the public and a copy in the Members' Room). The group has also proposed that, if a report must contain colour, it should be printed in a separate colour supplement. This will help to reduce the costs of colour printing as only the relevant report, rather than an entire pack, will be printed using a colour printer.

3.19 The conclusions reached by the Member Development Steering Group do not preclude the Overview and Scrutiny Board from undertaking a trial for paperless meetings. Overview and Scrutiny is a Member-led process and if Members decide to launch a trial that would require meetings of the Board to be paperless this could be undertaken.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

3.20 Some Members may prefer to access paper copies of agenda packs or may need to do so. The screens on the iPads currently used by Members are relatively small which some Members may find difficult to view. The Board should therefore note

that a paperless approach to attending Committee meetings may not be suitable for every Member.

4.   **RISK MANAGEMENT**

No specific risks have been identified.

5.   **APPENDICES**

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