



Policy and Finance Committee

Date: 29 July 2019

Title: Paperless Meetings: review of first year

Purpose of the Report: To provide Committee with an overview of the first year of paperless committee papers.

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Corporate Objective/s	To consolidate processes and procedures, ensuring operational efficiency.	
Implications:		
Financial	√	
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery	√	
Legal		
Risk	√	

1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1 To note the report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Town Council began giving consideration to moving towards paperless meeting papers in 2013, following recognition of the benefits this could bring in terms of reducing paper waste, faster access to documents and time savings in copying and collating.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 20 April 2015, the Policy and Finance Committee was advised of a change in legislation whereby The Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 enabled meeting summons to be sent to elected Members electronically, with their consent.
- 2.3 At the same meeting, the Committee noted that an average of 5,500 sheets of paper per month had been printed/copied over the previous two years and that methods of sharing data efficiently and securely would need further investigation.

- 2.4 Following the Town Council's decision to allocate funding within the Five Year Financial Plan for I.T. Projects, further investigation was undertaken regarding potential options for a move towards paperless meetings. In addition, councillors were surveyed for their preferences and a telephone survey of 28 larger sized parish councils was carried out.
- 2.5 At its meeting held 21 November 2016, the Policy and Finance Committee agreed a hybrid approach in the first instance, whereby those Members who wished to continue to receive paper copies could do so, while others could opt to receive meeting papers electronically by email.
- 2.6 At the same meeting, a clear steer was given by Committee as outlined in the below extract of minutes:

Minute reference 191/PF

The view was expressed that the Town Council was carrying a significant burden in terms of financial cost and officer time in providing committee administration. It was further felt that there were opportunities to explore information technology solutions currently employed in both the private and public sector.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the move towards paperless meetings should be progressed as soon as was practicable. The Committee's recommendation was for consideration to be given to a secure document management system such as that used by the local authority.

- 2.7 At its meeting on 20 November 2017, the Committee gave approval to the purchase of Modern.gov meetings management software as the Council's preferred option for a comprehensive, secure method for issuing agenda papers electronically. Amongst its many advantages, it was noted that the software was used by a large number of local authorities, offered the ability to publish meeting papers to the website at the push of a button and also offered efficiencies in managing the workflow process in the creation of meeting reports.
- 2.8 The Committee endorsed that the first and second year costs be funded from the allocated Future Projects fund.
- 2.9 Costs thereafter were to be embedded within the revenue budget and reflective of the anticipated savings to be made on consumables such as paper, envelopes, printing, copying and postage. Anticipated savings were up to a maximum of £3,500 per year, with further savings to be made in terms of resources.

3. REVIEW OF FIRST YEAR

3.1 Following a period of several months for installation, website modification, staff training, testing and the import of historical data, the Mod.gov system went live in Spring 2018. Agendas from May 2018 onwards were created in Mod.gov, with the first paperless meeting taking place at the end of June 2018, following councillor training on use of the app.

3.2 In the period 25 June 2018 – 3 July 2019, a total of 59 Council/Committee/Sub-Committee meetings have taken place.

3.3 The move to paperless meetings has saved in excess of 22,400 sheets of paper over the twelve month period – thereby meeting environmental ambitions, with estimated cost savings of:

Paper:	£673.26
Copying:	£273.98
Envelopes:	£ 31.96
Postage:	£993.41

Total: £1,972.61

3.4 Whilst less than the originally anticipated savings, it is believed that this is reflective of efficiencies elsewhere within the Council, such as the committee restructure in 2016 (which resulted in a reduction in the annual number of meetings), the creation of the weekly councillor e-newsletter for the provision of information (rather than including in meeting agendas) and an overall reduction in the number of written reports taken to committee.

3.5 In November 2018, with Committee approval, a number of Central Services budget lines were adjusted to reflect the reduced spending on printing, postage and stationery, resulting in the creation of a new budget line for Mod.gov.

3.6 In addition to the tangible cost savings on consumables, the move to paperless meetings has contributed to the Town Council's drive to reduce waste and operate in a more environmentally friendly way, as well as providing both Councillors and members of the public with faster access to meeting papers.

3.7 The move to Mod.gov has also enabled greater access to information and transparency, with meeting agendas from 2011 and meeting minutes from 2007 now available to view and search on the Town Council website.

3.8 Equally importantly, the use of the Mod.gov software has resulted in a significant saving in officer time. This saving has enabled additional workload (cemeteries and allotments related administration) to be absorbed within the Central Services team, thereby freeing up salary budget towards the creation of the new Grounds and Environmental Services Supervisor role.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The move to paperless meetings has achieved a number of Town Council objectives relating to operational efficiency, as set out in its Five Year Plan:

#1: to regularly review how we communicate and seek to embrace new technologies

#2: to continue to aim towards a paperless office

#5: to review waste and recycling options

#7: to increase environmental awareness and where practicable, seek to install planet-friendly measures

4.2 The choice of Mod.gov as the solution provider has enabled the Council to benefit from local authority experience, with a sector-specific product which offers far greater functionality than simply the production of meeting papers.

4.3 Mod.gov continues to develop and enhance its offer and it is anticipated that the Android and Windows versions of its app will be upgraded with improved functionality in the near future.

4.4 A significant amount of time and money has been invested into the set-up of the Mod.gov system and in learning to use this effectively. There is further training which can be done and wider functionality which may be beneficial to the Council, further increasing efficiencies and time management.

4.5 It is therefore intended to include provision for the third year licensing costs for Mod.gov within the 2020-21 budget. However, officers will continue to review comparable, alternative products to ensure that the solution being used by the Council remains the best option. As previously advised to Committee, officers anticipate undertaking a review of all software over the next 12-18 months.

End.