

AD-HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

19 SEPTEMBER 2012

**PAPERLESS COMMITTEE MEETINGS
- INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF
NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide the scrutiny panel with background information in relation to the new scrutiny topic of paperless committee meetings.

BACKGROUND

2. At the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 24 July and 30 August 2012, reference was made to the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel's possible work programme for 2012-13. At the 30 August meeting, it was reported that arrangements would be made for the panel to examine the issue of paperless committee meetings as its first topic of the municipal year.
3. During the 2011/12 financial year, approximately £78,200 was spent on paper for photocopying across the whole of Middlesbrough Council. Clearly, not all of this sum related to the production of meeting papers and work is ongoing to obtain a more detailed breakdown of costs in this area. It is hoped to report an update at the scrutiny panel meeting. In addition to the costs of paper, there will also be costs associated with the cost of printing itself - such as the purchase/lease of the necessary equipment, maintenance etc.
4. Given the scale of the sums involved, nationally and locally a number of local authorities have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, a 'paperless authority' or 'paperless committee meetings' approach. These include North Yorkshire, Sunderland, Brent, Flintshire, Tameside and Havering. Under the paperless system, information is disseminated electronically, resulting in a significant reduction in the amount of paper required. This in turn results not only in reduced purchasing and printing costs but can also reduce the authority's carbon footprint as less energy is used to produce printed papers and, ultimately, less photocopying equipment is required.

5. Under a paperless system, instead of receiving printed copies of agendas/meeting papers, groups of Members/appropriate officers will typically use tablets (i.e. small, hand-held portable electronic devices) to access meeting papers and other documents. Such an approach will usually involve an 'invest to save approach,' where the initial financial outlay involved in purchasing the required equipment is more than recouped in the savings generated over the longer term as a result of introducing the new system.
6. In Middlesbrough, Mouchel is currently involved in a project with the Department of Adult Social Care and Environment to examine the possible use/introduction of a paperless system in Adult Social Care. Accordingly, arrangements have been made for Eve Holder, Management Consultant, Mouchel Advisory & Project Services, to attend the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel meeting to present information on progress made to date and to identify how the issue of paperless committee meetings might be taken forward more generally across the authority.
7. The Mouchel representative has advised that work has involved promoting a 'paper light' approach. This has involved challenging the internal meetings that could be executed in a paper free way and encouraging change - firstly by leading by example and then demonstrating the savings that can be achieved. This has been well received well and some teams are now working well in this way.
8. It has been further advised that rewards and savings from such an approach can be substantial. It is suggested that there may be some quick ways to move this issue forward that are relatively easy to implement - with the biggest challenges often relating to the change of culture associated with new working methods.
9. The panel is requested to consider how it wishes to proceed with investigation of this scrutiny topic. It is suggested that, after considering the information provided by Mouchel, Members may also wish to hear from a local authority that has made progress in this area.

RECOMMENDATION

10. It is recommended that the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel considers the issues highlighted in the report and presented at the meeting and determines how it wishes to proceed with investigation of this topic.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

11. The following background papers were used in preparing this report: Reports and minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 24 July and 30 August 2012.

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