AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was held on 19 September 2012.

PRESENT:	Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Harvey, Hubbard, Mawston, G Purvis, P Purvis (as substitute for J Sharrocks) and P Sharrocks.
ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:	Eve Holder, Management Consultant, Mouchel Advisory and Project Services.
OFFICERS:	J Bennington and A Crawford.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Hobson and J Sharrocks.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at this point of the meeting.

1   **PAPERLESS COMMITTEE MEETINGS - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted an introductory report on the scrutiny topic of 'Paperless Committee Meetings'.

As part of the background information provided it was noted that during the 2011/2012 financial year, approximately £78,200 had been spent on paper for photocopying across Middlesbrough Council for which approximately £2,650 was attributed to Member meetings. It was recognised that not all of this sum related to the production of meeting papers and it was noted that work was ongoing to obtain a more detailed breakdown of costs in this area.

In a supplementary note circulated at the meeting indicative costs were given of annual printing costs of agendas and associated reports for Council, Executive, scrutiny and other meetings.

It was noted that the Authority had significantly reduced printing costs by replacing stand alone desktop printers with more efficient larger volume machines. The default option on such machines was for double sided printing which had also significantly reduced costs.

Although an indicative figure of 0.46 pence had been identified per copy it was confirmed that further details were being pursued regarding such costs. In discussing financial aspects Members referred to associated costs of Members' printers, costs of the current courier service and additional design or specific requirements for reports such as the use of colour and binding.

Given the scale of the sums involved, nationally and locally, a number of local authorities had adopted, or were in the process of pursuing a 'paperless authority' or 'paperless committee meetings' approach. Such authorities included North Yorkshire, Sunderland, Brent, Flinstshire, Tameside and Havering.

Under a paperless system, information was disseminated electronically, resulting in a significant reduction in the amount of paper required and purchasing and printing costs. It was also recognised that it reduced an authority's carbon footprint as less energy was used to produce printed papers and, ultimately, less photocopying equipment was required.

Instead of receiving printed copies of agendas and meeting papers, groups of Members and appropriate Officers would under such a system typically use tablets, small hand-held portable electronic devices to access such papers and other documents. Such an approach would usually involve an 'invest to save approach' where the initial financial outlay involved in purchasing the required equipment was more than recouped in the savings generated over the longer term as a result of introducing the new system.

In Middlesbrough, Mouchel was 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.

The Chair welcomed, Eve Holder, Management Consultant, Mouchel Advisory and Project Services who provided an update on how the concept of paperless committee meetings might be taken forward more generally across the Authority. It was confirmed that a copy of the flyer which highlighted the main areas of the presentation would be emailed to the Panel.

Since October 2011, as part of the Middlesbrough Transformation project, the objective had been to making efficiencies, reducing costs and improving ways of working for staff to establish efficient and effective new ways of operating and generate benefits for service users.

Such work had to date promoted a 'paper light' approach and 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 could be achieved. Such an approach had so far been well received and certain teams were now working well in this way.

It was suggested that rewards and savings from such an approach could be substantial and that there might be some quick ways to move the issue forward that were relatively easy to implement. It was acknowledged that one of the main challenges often related to the change of culture associated with new working methods.

Information was provided on the review of current practices which demonstrated how improvements could be achieved in relation to problems of storage of files with particular regard to those of a confidential nature. The aim of the transformation was to reduce duplication and find ways of improving security of information and enhance confidential working practices and other cost saving benefits.

It was acknowledged that initial investment would be required for the systems and ensuring that staff were prepared for such major changes by arranging awareness sessions, demonstrations and structured training.

The implementation of an e-Portal would offer service users and providers a confidential media for sharing documents and communication. An example was given whereby reviews were undertaken involving the recording of information during interviews with service users which resulted in reducing the time taken to write up subsequent case notes but maintained confidentiality and data protection requirements.

Members referred to the importance of sharing of appropriate information and ensuring that any generated IT systems worked together.

As previously indicated one of the main challenges related to the changed culture of new working practices. The need to demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of any changes was considered to be vital in pursuing such an approach.

During the ensuing deliberations the Panel referred to a number of areas to be taken into consideration and/or required further discussion which included:-

(a) if the pilot in Adult Social Care proves successful was it intended to be introduced into other departments;

(b) the extent to which staff had embraced the new ways of working;

(c) initial investment of the necessary equipment to pursue paperless committee meetings;

(d) assurances about confidentiality being maintained where appropriate and adhering to prevailing legislation including Data Protection Act;

(e) different levels of IT skills and reliability of IT systems;

(f) options for small hand-held portable electronic devices to be used for accessing documents and use at meetings;

(g) information to be sought from other local authorities where paperless committee systems had been implemented.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That Eve Holder be thanked for the information provided which would be incorporated into the overall review.

2. That further information be provided at the next meeting in respect of the following:-

(a) printing costs of meeting papers;

(b) details of other local authorities which had introduced a system of paperless committee meetings.