

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was held on 27 March 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors Brunton (Chair), Harvey, J Hobson, Mawston, McPartland, G Purvis, J Sharrocks and P Sharrocks.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Junier
Representatives of Vodafone.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, S Bonner, A Crawford, J Field, S Pearman, S Reynolds and S Wall.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

MINUTES-AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL 26 OCTOBER 2012

The minutes of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel held on 26 October 2013 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

PAPERLESS COMMITTEE MEETINGS - IT EQUIPMENT

The Chair welcomed all representatives to the first paperless meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted an introductory report which provided an update on the issues covered so far as part of the Panel's overall examination of the scrutiny topic of paperless committee meetings. In addition a briefing note was displayed at the meeting regarding a meeting of Scarborough Borough Council's Full Council meeting held on 5 November 2012 attended by the Chair, Scrutiny Support Officer and the Senior Resources Officer in order to observe proceedings. Scarborough Borough Council had been the first authority in the country to adopt an entirely paperless approach in respect of its committee meetings and the 5 November 2012 Council meeting was the first to be held without the use of any meeting papers. All Council Members (50) and relevant Officers (27) had been issued with tablet devices containing meeting agenda, minutes and reports which for this meeting involved over a hundred pages. Members used touchscreens with pens and made notes either by a keyboard on screen or separate keyboard attached to the device.

An indication was given of the overall implementation process adopted by Scarborough Borough Council which started with a small trial in May 2012 involving several Members and Officers running paper and electronic systems in parallel prior to the roll out of the system in late 2012. An important aspect of the process had been the provision of appropriate Member training.

One of the main issues which faced Scarborough Borough Council related to a cultural change and the Authority working in a completely different way. Adverse publicity had been an issue but Scarborough Borough Council had indicated that they were confident of long term savings.

The representatives from Vodafone gave a demonstration of a tablet device with relevant software which showed the following features:-

- (a) how to organise and operate the email system in a secure environment;
- (b) organise calendar facilities;
- (c) accessing, downloading and storing of documents and taking of notes;
- (d) security, encryption of documents, use of passwords.

In response to a Members' query it was confirmed that arrangements could be made for a link

to CITRIX. Although an indication was given of the availability of screen protectors Members referred to likely problems experienced by people with dyslexia as a result of the glare from the backlight on screen. The Vodafone representatives confirmed that work was progressing on such matters.

Members acknowledged that for some Councillors it might initially be an overwhelming task but with appropriate training and speaking from experience referred to how easy it was to use such devices and gave an indication of the benefits of such equipment in their role as a Councillor.

Although reference was made to current problems in maintaining a consistent 3G/Wi Fi connection the Panel was advised that the fall -back situation would be to display the information on the screens in the Committee Rooms although given the size of such rooms and committees a portable screen would also have to be used on many occasions. Members referred however to potential difficulties of relying on and reading such information on the Committee Room screens for the duration of meetings.

The options for providing a facility by which Members would be able to attach notes onto a document to act as a prompt for seeking clarification or asking questions at meetings was currently being examined. An indication was given of the current contractual arrangements with Vodafone and indicative purchase and ongoing costs and comparative costs with Scarborough Borough Council. Given the current economic climate and severe budget cuts facing the Authority the Panel reiterated the importance of demonstrating the long term benefits including financial considerations should the Council pursue a paperless approach in respect of Committee meetings.

Officers from Adult Social Care and Regeneration demonstrated the benefits from their perspective of having a portable device which was time saving and capable of downloading scanned documents and could be used for note taking directly onto the equipment in relation to interviews with service users, applicants and at site visits.

Reference was made to the potential benefits of such devices not just in relation to Committee meetings but in other ways such as Community Council and resident meetings and associated work which would assist Members in undertaking their role as a Ward Councillor.

As previously indicated reference was made to the Council's Desk Top Strategy and Application review with the aim of providing a common hardware/software platform solution, reducing costs and avoiding duplication. As part of such a review it was hoped that such an approach would ensure common standards, purchasing in bulk to reduce costs and identifying the most appropriate device for Members to operate and undertake their role as a Councillor. Other factors to be taken into consideration included the provision and costs of a good consistent 3G/Wi Fi connection which would be the subject of a report for consideration by the Executive in June 2013.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That Officers and representatives from Vodafone be thanked for the information provided which would be incorporated into the overall scrutiny examination.
2. That a draft final report based on the findings of the Panel be compiled and submitted for Members' consideration at its next meeting the date for which would be arranged in consultation with the Chair.