

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

30 APRIL 2013

**FINAL REPORT OF THE AD-HOC
SCRUTINY PANEL
- PAPERLESS COMMITTEE
MEETINGS**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of the topic of paperless committee meetings.

BACKGROUND

2. Under paperless meetings systems, information is disseminated electronically. Instead of receiving printed copies of agendas/meeting papers, groups of Members/appropriate officers will typically use tablets (ie small, hand-held portable electronic devices) to access meeting papers and other documents.
3. The Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel initially sought to investigate the possibility of introducing a paperless system in respect of Middlesbrough Council's 'committee system' - ie all of the main local authority meetings involving elected Members. However, in investigating this topic, the scrutiny panel found that a paperless approach involving elected Members using tablets could not be considered solely in the context of committee meetings. Such a system would involve Members adopting an entirely new way of working, which could completely change how they function as Councillors. The panel's investigation was therefore broader than originally envisaged and included some work on whether there might be opportunities to develop more efficient ways of working and improve Member access to information.
4. The panel investigated this topic over the course of three meetings held between September 2012 and March 2013. The panel's meeting held on 27 March 2013 was held on a paperless basis, with the agenda, minutes and report circulated to Members and Officers on an electronic basis. A final panel meeting, on 11 April 2013, considered a draft final report on the subject. The Chair of the scrutiny panel, and Officers, also visited Scarborough Borough Council to observe the operation of its paperless Council meeting. Arrangements were also made to provide a demonstration of tablets/mobile working applications to the scrutiny panel.

5. In addition, one Councillor used his own iPad to access the Middlesbrough Council meeting papers from the Egenda system and attended the meeting on a paperless basis.
6. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the investigation. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
7. A record of discussions at panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Egenda committee management system, which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
8. This report has been compiled on the basis of information submitted to the scrutiny panel by Middlesbrough Council Officers and representatives of Mouchel, Scarborough Borough Council and Vodafone.
9. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors J Brunton (Chair) and Councillors T Harvey, J Hobson, B Hubbard, T Mawston, J McPartland, G Purvis, J Sharrocks and P Sharrocks.

THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINDINGS

10. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of paperless committee meetings are set out below. In examining this topic, the panel considered information on:
 - Benefits of a paperless approach.
 - Costs of printing committee papers.
 - Development of paperless systems in Middlesbrough Council.
 - Scarborough Borough Council's paperless meetings system.
 - Demonstration of tablet devices and mobile working.

Benefits of a paperless approach

11. A number of local authorities nationally have adopted a paperless approach to committee meetings and/or introduced the use of tablets by elected Members. These include Scarborough, Brent, Flintshire, Tameside and Havering. Work has been done by Councils to analyse the benefits of tablet usage, which can generally be summarised as follows:
 - Devices are small, portable, convenient and easy to use once users become familiar with them, although intensive training is likely to be required.
 - They enable mobile working.
 - There is less paper to carry.
 - Access to information can be improved - eg all meeting papers (current and previous) are easily available.

- Information can be stored very securely, which is important when meeting papers contain sensitive, or confidential, information.
- Savings can be made on paper, printing and despatch/delivery of meeting papers.
- An authority's carbon footprint can be reduced - paper and stationery usage is reduced, less energy is used to produce printed papers, less photocopying equipment is required and less transport is involved.
- Tablets can result in more efficient and effective use of both Member and Officer time and increased productivity.

12. It should be noted that authorities have also identified some issues associated with the use of tablets, as follows:

- Major cultural and organisational change is required. Not everyone may be willing to use tablets or embrace the necessary change. Such change covers the whole organisation, from elected Members to Officers involved in producing meeting documentation/reports.
- There may be limitations on the use of the devices in terms of operating systems/links with local authority systems.
- Negative publicity can be generated - for example press headlines such as 'iPads to be Handed to Councillors in Bid to Save Cash' are not uncommon.
- Wireless printers are required to print documents - though their supply/use may discourage a paperless approach.
- All costs need to take into account - that is not only capital/procurement costs for the tablets but also ongoing monthly connection charges, as well as those associated with any required peripheral equipment, such as wireless printers.

13. In general, adopting the use of tablets will involve an invest to save approach. This means that the initial capital outlay of purchasing the required equipment is eventually recouped in the savings that are generated over the longer term as a result of introducing the new system.

Costs of Printing Committee Papers

14. The scrutiny panel was advised that it had not been possible to determine the exact amount spent on photocopying/printing of Members' Committee Papers. This was because, at the time of the panel's investigation, departmental recharges for printing did not differentiate between the various types of printing. This information will, however, be available in future as a new monitoring/recording system is being introduced.

15. However, it was advised that approximately £78,000 was spent on paper for photocopying across the whole of Middlesbrough Council in 2011/12. The authority has significantly reduced printing costs in recent years, to around 0.465 pence per copy. This has been through measures such as replacing stand alone desktop printers with more efficient larger volume machines; using double sided printing as the standard default setting; and ensuring that high-volume printing is undertaken at the central print room facility.

16. As an indicative guide - based on the above cost of 0.465p per copy, an average number of committee meetings and an average number of pages per meeting - it is estimated that around £14,000 is spent each year across the Council on printing 275,000 pages of committee papers.
17. Further details are shown at **Appendix 1** of this report. It should be noted that this sum does not include the costs of additional information produced for Councillors by departments, or the costs of more-specialised jobs such as colour printing, binding documents, design costs, or the production of large plans/brochures. The figure shown above is therefore likely to be a conservative estimate, with actual costs significantly higher.

Development of paperless systems in Middlesbrough Council

18. The scrutiny panel heard from Mouchel's Management Consultant, Advisory & Project Services. Mouchel has been involved in a project with Officers from Adult Social Care in Middlesbrough Council to introduce paperless systems in that work area.
19. Members were advised that this exercise initially involved determining which internal meetings could easily be carried out in a paper-free way and encouraging change. This was done through leading by example and then demonstrating the savings that could be achieved, both in terms of cost and staff time.
20. Following staff briefings on the rationale and purpose of the exercise, the necessary changes were well received and have since worked well. Since that time, the use of tablets/portable devices and paperless working has been extended into other work areas of the Council.
21. Officers from Adult Social Care and Regeneration attended the scrutiny panel to inform Members of their experience of using tablet devices. The officers highlighted the resulting changes in working methods and the benefits that have resulted. Particular reference was made to the ability to input notes directly, either hand written or via a keyboard. This has resulted in more efficient working and significant time savings and is particularly useful when working on site or visiting service users or applicants. In addition, case files can be updated automatically, bulky paper files are now no longer required and information can easily be shared between Officers and relevant organisations. In the areas of Social Care where tablets are being used, paper usage has virtually been eliminated and productivity has been increased.
22. The scrutiny panel also heard from the Senior Resources Officer, Members Office, who advised on current information technology (IT) reviews across the authority and of issues that would need to be taken into consideration in pursuing the use of tablets by councillors.
23. It was explained that work is ongoing in respect of a Middlesbrough Council Desk Top Strategy and Application Review. In order to reduce costs, standardise procedures, introduce common standards and avoid duplication, this aims to provide a common hardware/software platform solution across the authority. Such an approach will also enable bulk purchasing, which will reduce costs and also ensure standardisation.

24. It was indicated that the work of the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel is quite timely in that the issue of possible use of tablet devices/mobile working by Members can be incorporated into the Desk Top Strategy and Application Review. Subject to the outcome of the scrutiny panel's investigation, the review could then be used to identify the most appropriate equipment/devices for use by Members and determine how this issue could be best taken forward.
25. Consideration would also need to be given to existing IT equipment in use by Members. The panel was informed that 43 devices have currently been issued to Members for home use. This includes 18 laptops, of which around 65% are under two years old. It is likely that the Council's future policy will be to provide one device/PC/laptop to each member, with the same equipment to be standardised for all Members. A decision will also be required on the use/disposal of Members' existing IT equipment if it is agreed to proceed with their use of tablets.
26. It is possible that the above is an area where significant long-term cost savings could be made.
27. Reference was also made to additional costs relating to existing and future Members' IT systems, such as licence fees, broadband or 3G service provision. These will also need to be taken into account in determining future service provision.

Scarborough Borough Council's paperless meetings system

28. Arrangements were made for the Chair of the scrutiny panel and Officers to visit Scarborough Borough Council to observe the operation of its paperless Council meeting in November 2012. Information was also obtained from Scarborough Officers in respect of their operation of a paperless meetings system.
29. In February 2012 Scarborough Borough Council agreed to introduce tablet devices in place of printed papers for committee meetings. Following tests, Officers concluded that the best value option for the Council was the iPad and a project team was established to oversee their introduction in three phases:
- Phase 1: A pilot scheme including six Elected Members
 - Phase 2: Roll-out to the remaining 44 Elected Members
 - Phase 3: Future roadmap for the wider business use of iPads.
30. The purpose of Phase 1 of the programme was to identify risks and problem areas and mitigate these before the wider roll-out. Following Member training, at the September 2012 Council meeting 80% of Members exclusively used iPads instead of meeting papers. At the November 2012 Council meeting, all Members and Officers present used iPads, with no printed meeting papers available.
31. Phase 3 of the project is ongoing and will consider savings in detail. Work undertaken to date indicates that savings are anticipated as follows:
- Provision of iPads instead of new laptops - Maximum saving of approximately £8,000.

- Non-provision of a new printer for each Member - Maximum saving of approximately £5,000.
- Provision of 3G mobile contracts instead of payment of broadband allowances - £750 per year.
- Printing/copying, paper, envelopes and postage - Approximately £10,000 to date.
- Reduction of 1 full time establishment (FTE) printing post - Approximately £29,000 to date, including oncosts (full year saving of approximately £39,000).

32. Total savings to date amount to around £52 000. Scarborough also envisages that further saving will be made when other features of the new system are rolled out. This will include the use of an electronic diary to arrange meetings and the use of 'Facetime.' This will allow Members to hold remote meetings with officers and eliminate the cost and time of travel to the Town Hall.

33. Discussions with Scarborough Officers highlighted the following points:

- As well as all Members (x50) iPads have been issued to 27 officers.
- Intensive Member training was required, including some one to one sessions.
- Although cultural change was a major issue, this has been achieved and the authority now works in a completely different way.
- Members still have their old laptops - it was ascertained that it would not be cost-effective to take these back due to disposal costs. These will be handed back as they cease to work or as Members leave the authority.
- Bad press/publicity was an issue - but the authority is confident that the long-term savings that will be realised will outweigh this.

34. The visit from Middlesbrough to Scarborough in November 2012 proved to be very useful. The Chair of the panel and officers spoke to Scarborough Officers and also observed the authority's Council meeting. The meeting was the first to be operated on an entirely paperless basis. It was found that:

- The meeting ran very smoothly with all Members engaged in the meeting through use of their iPads.
- Members used touchscreens with styluses.
- Some Members used an attached (separate) keyboard.
- Although the meeting papers ran to over 100 pages, Members were able to select any quoted page and view it almost instantly.
- Participants were able to make notes on screen.

Demonstration of tablet devices and mobile working

35. Arrangements were made for representatives from Middlesbrough Council's contractor for mobile working solutions (Vodafone) to provide a demonstration of tablet devices, relevant applications and uses to the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel. Members also had the opportunity to handle and try out the tablets at the meeting. The demonstration showed the following features:

- How to organise and operate the email system in a secure environment;
- Calendar facilities;

- Accessing, downloading and storing of documents, reports etc and the taking of notes;
- Security, encryption of documents and the use of passwords.

36. During the course of the demonstration, a number of issues were highlighted.

- a) The need to ensure a consistent 3G or wi-fi connection so that information could be accessed at all times. It was noted that the authority is currently examining the feasibility and cost of providing wi-fi connectivity in Middlesbrough Town Hall/Municipal Buildings and that a decision on this issue will be made in due course.
- b) The need to resolve security issues/determine whether Councillors' own tablet devices could be used with any paperless system.
- c) That the overall issue is wider than paperless committee meetings and involves Members' ability to function as a Councillor. In this context, tablet devices could potentially improve access to information and enhance the role of Elected Members - for example in ward surgeries; in Community Council and local meetings; and in accessing systems such as e-mail, the Members' One Stop and the Egenda committee administration system.

CONCLUSIONS

37. Having considered the submitted information, the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel reached the following conclusions:

1. Work by other local authorities indicates that moving to paperless committee meetings could result in significant long-term financial savings - for example Scarborough Council has identified savings of approximately £52 000 to date. The use of mobile devices can also produce other benefits for Members, such as more efficient ways of working, more effective use of time and improved access to information, both in meetings and in Members' work as ward councillors. Access to councillors by the public could also be enhanced. If such an approach is to be adopted, it will be necessary to demonstrate its benefits and effectiveness. It is likely that the most cost-effective approach would be to supply a single, standardised, mobile device to all Councillors. Paperless meetings would also produce environmental benefits, and reduce the authority's carbon footprint, through less use of materials, less energy used and reduced transport costs.
2. A paperless approach would entail a major change in organisational culture. This would include all Members and those Officers involved in supporting meetings or submitting information to meetings. An assessment would need to be made in respect of the use and availability of mobile devices by appropriate Officers.
3. It would be essential to ensure that any paperless system that was adopted would be capable of supporting all uses/systems required by Members and that information could be accessed at all times. It would also be necessary to mitigate any potential risks posed by the introduction of any new systems, such as security and lack of connectivity to networks or systems.

4. In adopting a paperless approach, there would be a need to ensure continued and easy access to meeting papers by non-Councillors, such as Co-opted Members, the public and press.
5. There is the possibility that introduction of paperless committee meetings could generate negative publicity for the Council. There could therefore be a need to highlight/publicise the benefits of such a system prior to its introduction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That a paperless approach to committee meetings in Middlesbrough Council - involving the use of mobile devices by all Elected Members and relevant Officers to access all meeting papers - is adopted by the authority subject to the following additional recommendations.
2. That the project is examined/developed as part of the authority's Desk Top Strategy and Application Review. This should identify the most appropriate equipment/devices to be used and undertake a detailed exercise on cost-effectiveness and long-term costs. All costs should be identified prior to the introduction of any new system. The exercise should also include an assessment of the potential risks of the system and how these could be addressed/mitigated.
3. That any mobile devices used are capable of supporting all systems currently in use by Members, together with any enhanced features that may be appropriate to enhance Members' roles in the future, both in committee meetings and in community work.
4. That the necessary training is provided for all Members and relevant Officers.
5. That it is ensured that the press, public and any relevant parties attending meetings continue to be able to easily access all public agenda, reports and minutes. It should also be ensured that the production of any printed meeting papers is reduced to a minimum.
6. That prior to the introduction of a paperless committee system, its benefits are highlighted and publicised.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

39. The Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel is grateful to the following, who submitted information and assisted during the course of this investigation:

Middlesbrough Council Officers:

- B Baldam
- S Bonner
- D Eggermont
- J Field
- S Pearman
- S Reynolds
- S Wall

Mouchel:

- E Holder

Scarborough Borough Council Officers:

- J Crowe
- G Jandzio
- J Wilkinson

Vodafone:

- A Banham
- D Courtney

BACKGROUND AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

40. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Reports to, and minutes of, the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 19 September, 26 October, 26 March and 11 April 2013.

COUNCILLOR JANICE BRUNTON

CHAIR OF AD-HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

April 2013

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**ESTIMATED NUMBER OF MEETINGS ANNUALLY
AND ASSOCIATED PRINTING COSTS**

GOVERNANCE SECTION

- Approx. 450 meetings per year.
- Average 15 pages of printing per meeting (to strike a balance between small agendas comprising agenda, minutes and a short report and larger agendas for meetings eg Council, Overview and Scrutiny Board, Licensing and Planning).
- Average 35 copies distributed (including Members, officers and press).

= Approx. 236,000 pages of printing per year.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

- Approx 60 meetings per year (Covering meetings of The Executive and others such as Individual Executive meetings).
- Average 10 pages of printing per meeting.
- Average 27 copies distributed.

= Approx. 37,000 pages of printing per year.

TOTAL = APPROX 275, 000 PAGES PRINTED PER YEAR

**COSTS (AS SUPPLIED BY CORPORATE FINANCE AND CORPORATE
PROCUREMENT):**

275,000 copies x 0.465p per copy = £12,781.

A ream of paper (500 sheets) costs £2.48.

550 reams would be required to produce 275,000 copies.

The cost of the paper would therefore be 550 x £2.48 = £1,364.

TOTAL COST: £12, 781 + £1,364 = £14,145

NOTE: The above estimate does not include the costs of additional information produced for Councillors by departments. It also does not include design costs or costs of more-specialised jobs such as colour printing, binding documents and large plans/brochures. The figure shown above is therefore likely to be a conservative estimate, **with actual costs being significantly higher.**