

Bolsover District Council

Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee

26th November 2018

<p>Technology to Improve Support to Members and Transparency within the Democratic Function</p>
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Report of the Governance Manager

This report is public

Purpose of the Report

- To inform Members of the options available to improve transparency within the democratic function and how technology and new systems can improve the professional image of the authority in respect of democracy.
- For Members to pre-scrutinise options that are to be presented to Executive for decision for the purchase of a committee management system.

1 Report Details

EVIDENCE OF NEED / DEMAND

- 1.1 The Governance Team currently operate manual collation and despatch of reports which relies heavily on experienced and meticulous team members to ensure complete accuracy. It is paper heavy, with many physical processes to fold, staple, and stamp reports which is neither efficient nor supports reduction of paper usage and electronic working.
- 1.2 It is a challenge to locate Committee paperwork and current databases do not manipulate information to provide useful statistics to assist or improve the service nor to support other departments across the Council and Members.
- 1.3 There are a number service risks apparent in the existing arrangements, not only in incorrect information being published, but also version control on reports and exempt information.
- 1.4 Members' usage of the current electronic systems is limited and the technology solutions provided are not the most easy or quick to use.
- 1.5 A need for a committee management system has been long identified, and an in-house solution was partially developed. Sadly this fell short of the functionality required to deliver the service and it was not feasible to continue the project.

- 1.6 It becomes increasingly apparent that an 'off the shelf' solution to committee management would resolve the inefficiencies of the service, mitigate risks, and support Members to move to a modern way of delivering democracy.

OUTLINE OF PROJECT

- 1.7 It is proposed that an 'off the shelf' committee administration system be procured that provides an end to end service for agenda and report management. At the same time this system needs to support officers and Members to deliver democracy in a professional manner and in line with statutory requirements for transparency. It is effectively a back office software that is pre-populated with all the information that Democratic Services hold that is used to electronically create and despatch all committee paperwork. It pushes that information to an iPad application for Members, reducing the need for printing, numbering and posting. It has a much wider functionality, details of which are set out later in the report.
- 1.8 Such a system would involve officers and Members adopting a different way of working. For Members this would be using the iPad application to provide them with the ability to access information and to work electronically where they felt was not possible before. Each application would be tailored to each Member's preference – allowing quick access to reports they want to see, with the ability to annotate/mark up as if they were paper.
- 1.9 This technology would be compatible with existing systems in use and have the potential to open the Council to other options to improve transparency in decision making (outlined later in this report). Consideration would be given throughout the project to supporting Members – both in training and usage, and the IT and Governance service have been consulted from the scoping phase including the Members' IT and Training Officer who would be key to supporting the member side of this project.
- 1.10 The aims of the project concur with the Council's Carbon Reduction Management Plan and a paperless way of working for Members as well as officers who are involved in Committees and Working Groups and has the potential to create significant savings on printing, postage and physical resources.
- 1.11 The procurement of a committee management system forms part of the Council's Transformation Plan and ties in with wider digitalisation projects to modernise accessibility and ways of working.
- 1.12 Members should be aware that over 300 Local Authorities use Committee Management software, including the LGA and neighbouring Councils such as Chesterfield and Derbyshire County. The systems on the market are well used and have programmes of continual improvement and functionality.
- 1.13 A timeline for procurement to full launch of such a system has been devised, and at the appropriate time, will be presented to Executive for approval. It will include a tender exercise, system tailoring, training in stages for both staff and Members, a testing phase with a full launch proposed approx. 9 months following procurement.

KEY DELIVERABLES

1.13 The Executive and key members of staff have received a number of briefings and demonstrations on examples of software that can deliver the following:

1.13.1 A Fully Automated System – an automated workflow will ensure consistent working and mitigate service risks. Current working practices rely on individual knowledge and memory and this does not aid accuracy and team resilience. Below are some examples of how this would improve the service:

- Automated document packing – time efficiencies
- Automatic referral of items between Committees - accuracy
- Automated page numbering – time efficiencies / accuracy
- Agenda creation from Forward Plan – accuracy
- Electronic authorisation process for reports – version control / assurance
- Consistent Report, Minute and Agenda formats – accuracy/ ease of use
- Automated reminders to report writers – time efficiencies / accuracy

1.13.2 Audit Trail and Data Management – Data collection through a system would support the service in its effectiveness, and support senior Members and officers in the delivery of their roles.

- Automatic registration of DPIs and collation of declarations
- Forward Plan Management – full overview of Council business, not just Key and Exempt Decisions
- Database of all reports, minutes, agendas and supporting documents
- Archiving of old committee documents with search function
- Themed searches on reports – reveals threads between documents and decisions
- Timetable of meetings live and published electronically
- Task allocation from Minutes to Officer delivery
- Member information management which updates automatically with Declarations of Interest, Attendance at meetings, voting, outside bodies etc. Control over publishing different types of Member information

1.13.3 Supporting the Paperless Agenda and Transparency – More modern ways of working using technology complement the effectiveness of the service whilst reducing physical resources required and making savings. There is pressure for more transparency in Local Government around decision making and finances, with requirements frequently extended into new legislation for publicity of decisions and public rights to record and stream meetings. Off the shelf systems can support this in the following ways (however the functions do not all have to be used):

- Automated and simplistic electronic publishing
- Republishing with additional reports / addendums
- Integrated usage with the audio conferencing system (microphones), publishing recorded votes / electronic voting
- Motions, Questions and Substitutions automatically published
- Members Allowances administration

- Specialised simplistic app for Members and officers to access all reports either by iPad or laptop with mark-up features as if you were using paper.
- Integration with the Xpress software for election information
- Electronic consultation with Members, automated reports
- E-Petitions
- Diary Management for Members – creates personal diaries and highlights clashes and automatic reminders and/or delivery of apologies
- Supports and promotes Civic Diary Management and promotion of the First Person
- Potential to connect with webcasting / audio recording and live stream / upload for public viewing.

1.14 In addition, a committee management system can support the Council in the following ways:

- Mitigating risks around exempt information – A paper based system carries many risks around exempt reports with hard copies being produced and could be misplaced / left in meeting rooms, undisposed. Whilst exempt information will present risks in any format, a system can lock down information, sending it only to those who require it and make it available in searches to those authorised to view.
- Support Member usage of technology – An off the shelf system for Elected Members can be simplistic with an app on the iPad which is set to their needs and priorities for information. Members' use of IT has plateaued and it is hoped with the invigoration a new system could bring, that is completely designed with Member-use in mind, that Councillors will be inspired by a different way of working. Members may embrace paperless working as a better solution for them if barriers are removed such as the less than effective systems currently in place.
- Ensuring systems are up-to-date with new legal requirements as they are brought in – software providers are continually updating and improving their systems and ensuring that procedures and processes that may be required by new legislation are built in to the upgrades. This will ensure the Council is well placed to implement any new legal requirements without reliance upon the ICT service to develop the necessary infrastructure.
- Professionalise the way in which Governance information is presented to the Public – Automatic publishing of documents to the Council's website in an easy to access format projects a professionalism to the residents of the district who may wish to access this. A short demonstration will be given at the meeting of how other authorities use this kind of software integrated in to it's website.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.15 A joint procurement exercise with North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC) is proposed in order to maximise savings on purchase and ongoing support costs.

Proposals have been put forward to NEDDC on an informal basis, and there has been no objection expressed to a joint purchase on a preferable rate.

- 1.16 NEDDC are considering similar proposals on the basis of a joint procurement for two separate systems to maintain the autonomy of each authority. There is an option available to Members to seek a joint procurement of a singular system, which would be a cheaper option. Members need to be aware however that dual branding and compatible templates would need to be applied in this instance.
- 1.17 Full financial information will be known should a procurement exercise be entered in to, however, enquiries with providers of suitable systems show indicative shared costs of circa £32,000 to purchase, with an ongoing shared license cost (from year 2) of circa £16,000.
- 1.18 It is proposed that as this project falls within the Transformation Programme, that the Transformation Fund Reserve would fund the initial payment for year one, with subsequent years being funded from within existing budgets. Full financial implications will form the proposals when made to the Executive.
- 1.19 Whilst the system supports a 'paper-light' approach to meeting management, this is not the main driver for the proposals made. However, Members should be aware that from research gleaned from similar authorities, paperless delivery of Committee management alone can save approximately £14,000 PA.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- 1.20 As outlined earlier in the report, choosing to invest in improving the service Governance can provide to Members, officers and the public opens opportunities for future developments and access to democracy. The options set out below are not being presented for decision and have not been assessed for financial viability nor necessity or desirability, and are above those provided by a committee management system:

- Webcasting: archive / live for planning and council
- Audio recordings
- Transcriptions services
- Electronic Voting – through conferencing units or handhelds, auto-filled in to committee management software
- Queuing Systems for speakers- names appear on screens
- Traffic light systems for speakers / voting – appear on screens
- Video conferencing between authorities / joint boards
- ID based conferencing system to log in to record voting and attendance so seating plans are not required.
- Live twitter feeds on Planning / Council
- Transcribed live subtitles

2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 Executive Members have requested for pre-scrutiny to take place on the proposals made to them in procuring a committee management system. This is to ensure that

all Members are aware that this matter is to be considered and to consult on their views.

- 2.2 As such a system would have an impact on the ways that Members access Council information and support them in their decision making, Executive members welcome scrutiny's input.

3 Consultation and Equality Impact

- 3.1 Consultation on proposals to improve support to Members and consider transparency options has taken place informally with Members of the Executive including detailed briefings with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance.
- 3.2 In addition, Chief Officers and Governance staff have been involved throughout the scoping of the project.
- 3.3 Wider consultation is taking place by way of pre-scrutiny of proposals that will be put to Executive for decision, and views and recommendations will form final reports.

4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 Members are asked for their views and consideration of this matter. They may of course choose to acknowledge without offering opinion.

5 Implications

5.1 Finance and Risk Implications

- 5.1.1 Full financial implications will be presented to Executive, however indicative costs are set out in 1.15 – 1.19 of the report.

5.2 Legal Implications including Data Protection

- 5.2.1 During the procurement of a committee management system, legal implications will be given full consideration including lock down of exempt information.

5.3 Human Resources Implications

- 5.3.1 The Governance Team have been fully appraised of this project through its scoping phases. It will impact on staff within the service in terms of the type of work they carry out and the way in which the service is delivered. SAMT are also aware of the changes in ways of working required for all members of staff who may use this system. It is not expected for the system to replace work undertaken, only assist in accurate and efficient delivery.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Members give consideration to the proposal to procure a committee management system and offer views and input to be presented alongside the business case to Executive.

- 6.2 That Members note the options available to improve transparency within the democratic function and how technology and new systems can improve the professional image of the authority in respect of democracy.

7 Decision Information

Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: BDC: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> NEDDC: Revenue - £100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £250,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies	No
Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	No
Has the relevant Portfolio Holder been informed	Yes
District Wards Affected	All
Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework	All

8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
None	
Background Papers (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
None	
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