

Report to Governance Committee

27th September 2023
By the Monitoring Officer
DECISION REQUIRED



Not Exempt

Electronic Voting for Council Meetings

Executive Summary

There has been a request from the Chief Executive to investigate electronic voting for use in full Council Meetings to improve the accuracy of counting the votes.

Voting is currently achieved by Councillors raising their hands and a manual count being performed by Council Officers.

This proposal outlines the costs and work involved if the Council does move to electronic voting. This report recommends that electronic voting is adopted for use in its full Council Meetings.

Recommendations

That the Committee is recommended:

- i) To ask the Council to adopt and use an Electronic Voting system at its full Council Meetings.
- ii) Note that the Monitoring Officer will reflect the above-noted arrangement in the Council's Constitution (pursuant to her authority to do so as per Article 13, paragraph 13.3 b) 3 of the Constitution) should the subject recommendation be approved.
- iii) To ask Council to approve a £9,667 increase to the Technology Services' 2023/24 revenue expenditure budget to cover the one-off implementation costs.

Reasons for Recommendations

- i) To achieve accurate voting.
- ii) Full Council must approve all budget changes.

Background Papers

No background papers.

Wards affected: All Wards

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Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Council's Constitution provides that councillors must raise their hands in order to vote. Owing to the configuration of the meeting rooms used for full Council meetings, it can be difficult to ensure an accurate vote count.
- 1.2 The difficulty stems from the fact that the pillars in the meeting rooms obscure the view of Councillors' raised hands to the Democratic Services Team performing a manual count. The layout of the Council Meeting in the meeting rooms has been investigated to see if it could be changed to see if an unobscured view could be achieved and it was found that this was not possible.
- 1.3 Quotes were obtained by the Councils' IT Team from the AV-System Suppliers in relation to the provision of electronic voting. The Democratic Services Team participated in these conversations to ensure that the presented option was workable and would overcome the current difficulties faced by the Democratic Services Team.
- 1.4 If Electronic Voting is to be introduced, Councillors would vote by the touch of a button (For, Against and Abstain). Democratic Services Officers will see on screen the voting results and if someone has not voted and can ask them to do so. They will also see the result; it will involve no manual counting and therefore is likely to be more accurate.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 A more Modern and Flexible Council.

3 Details

- 3.1 To ensure an accurate vote count at full Council meetings, it is recommended that electronic voting be adopted. The cost of the electronic voting solution is £9,667 excluding VAT.
- 3.2 Democratic Services Officers believe that electronic voting will be beneficial because it will (i) negate the requirement to undertake a manual vote count and (ii) improve the accuracy of the vote.
- 3.3 Accordingly Councillors would not need to raise their hands to vote instead Councillors would vote by pressing a button on their microphones in the meeting room being used for the full Council meeting. The vote results will be displayed on a screen for the Democratic Services Officer to view and report accordingly.

3.4 Financial and other specific issues are dealt with under separate headings.

4 Next Steps

4.1 Should the subject recommendation be approved; it will be referred to full Council for approval.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

5.1 SLT have been consulted on this proposal.

5.2 The Monitoring Officer and the Director of Resources have been consulted to ensure legal and financial probity.

5.3 This report does not relate to policy development and as such, the views of any of the Policy Development Advisory Groups have not been sought.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

6.1 To remain with voting via raised hands. Rejected due to accuracy issues.

7 Resource Consequences

7.1 The financial consequences that £9,667 excluding VAT will need to be spent to facilitate this proposal.

7.2 The Director of Resources has been consulted on the financial implications and does not endorse the one-off cost to purchase the equipment as there is no payback. The simple cost-free, low-tech solution of extending one's arm up to its fullest extent will also work without technological difficulties.

7.3 The one-off cost of £9,667 will be added to the 2023/24 technology Services' revenue expenditure budget.

7.4 There will be some training required by IT Staff, Democratic Services Officer which will be provided as part of the costs by the supplier and for Councillors which will be provided by Officers.

7.5 No impact is expected on the number of Democratic Services officers that clerk the meeting.

8 Legal Considerations and Implications

8.1 The use of an electronic voting system will not deprive councillors from voting nor from requesting a recorded vote (names of Councillors are recorded against their vote).

- 8.2 The Council's Constitution would be updated to reflect the use of the Electronic Voting system.

9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 The risks associated with this project are low, for example officers and Councillors may not engage with the new system, however, to minimise this risk, appropriate training will be provided to ensure that the new system is positively received.
- 9.2 If technical issues prevent an electronic vote from taking place, a manual vote and count will resume for that particular meeting.

10 Procurement implications

- 10.1 The contract value falls within the value for money threshold under the Council's procurement code and this contract represents the best value offering for the Council since it will effectively work with the pre-existing equipment.

11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

- 11.1 Equality analysis was undertaken to ascertain the potential impact on staff, service users, vulnerable groups and wider communities' groups that share protected characteristics and it is believed that other than some training for people using electronic voting there is no other impact.
- 11.2 The recommendation has no impact on any of the above groups.

12 Environmental Implications

- 12.1 No Environmental Implications.

13 Other Considerations

- 13.1 Other considerations such as GDPR/Data Protection; Crime & Disorder has been investigated and it was found that there were no implications relating to these areas for this project.