


Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	05 June 2017	
Report Title:	Paperless Review	

1 Purpose / Summary

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a review of Members ICT provision in 2015 following a request by Cabinet. The emphasis at that stage was to set up a working group to review the paperless Cabinet pilot, to look at and recommend the way forward for Members' IT equipment, and feed in their conclusions to the Members' Allowances review.

The review findings were agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and further endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting on 17 September 2015. As a result of the Overview and Scrutiny Review all Members of Fenland District Council became Paperless from the start of the municipal year in 2016.

Members have been paperless for a year and therefore the Overview and Scrutiny panel felt it timely to undertake a review following the paperless implementation to ensure the review is achieving its intended objectives. The review team were also keen to understand if any issues have arisen following the implementation, which may require addressing to ensure the paperless project continues to be a success.

2 Key issues

- Following the initial Cabinet paperless pilot and review by the Overview and scrutiny Committee, all elected Members successfully became paperless in May 2016.
- Members were keen to understand if the savings identified as a result of becoming paperless have been achieved.
- A number of elected Members have raised issues regarding the ease of accessibility of electronic information, particularly in relation to complex Planning Committee site plans, therefore the review team were also keen to understand from Members any other issues or future training needs resulting from the implementation of the Paperless Review.
- Members also wanted to consider as an integral aspect of the review the implications of Officers being paperless during committee meetings including the potential merits as well as any associated disadvantages.
- Members also wanted to consider the merits of the existing Committee Management Software system in supporting elected members in being paperless.
- Finally Members wanted to understand the take up of hard copy reports made available for members of the public attending any of Fenland District Council public meetings and whether an alternative solution is available which would satisfy this requirement but provide a more efficient and cost effective approach.

- Members of the Review Team were clear that a further Review of the Paperless project did not represent the opportunity to reconsider the matter of the provision of equipment and therefore this was not part of the scope of the review.

3 Recommendations

That Overview and Scrutiny are requested to agree the below recommendations:

- That all Members note the savings successfully achieved as a result of the paperless project to date, which make a significant contribution to the Comprehensive Spending Review Savings targets.
- Members note the consultation feedback received as a result of the Paperless consultation questionnaire and subsequent face to face discussions between Review Team Members and members of all the individual Committee meetings.
- Members continue to endorse the paperless approach which has been successfully implemented utilising their existing Tablets/Laptops.
- No exceptions should be considered in relation to Members not engaging with the Paperless project as the existing scheme already enables Members exercise discretion in relation to printing committee meetings agendas and reports at their own cost.
- That the small number of laptops available on loan from Member Services for use in committee meetings should continue as this has been an effective fail safe.
- That Members delegate to Officers to research and identify a secure, confidential electronic mechanism for sharing confidential agenda items with Members.
- That Members delegate to Officers the research of a long term electronic resolution to the specific issue of accessing Planning Committee site maps and plans without experiencing any issues in relation to distortion. In the short term Members of the Planning Committee should be provided with hard copy site plans and maps. The Review Team are keen this is a short term remedy as the ultimate aim is to return to a fully paperless approach.
- Copies of each meeting agenda will not be routinely provided for members of the public attending meetings unless requested in advance. The ability for members of the public to request copies of Committee papers should be promoted prominently on the website and in One stop shops and Community hubs. Members of the public should also be encouraged to download committee reports to their own electronic device.
- Officers of fenland District Council should commit to being Paperless when attending Committee meetings to ensure parity with elected Members.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	N/a
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor David Oliver, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Heritage (including ICT)

Report Originator(s)	Councillor Mrs Anne Hay Councillor Mark Buckton Councillor Mrs Kay Mayor Councillor Andrew Pugh Anna Goodall, Head of Governance and Legal Services Email: agoodall@fenland.gov.uk Tel: 01354 622357
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Background Paper(s)	N/a

4 Savings

- 4.1 Prior to the implementation of the Paperless project, all elected Members were routinely provided with colour copies of Committee reports. In addition the Council also provided paper and ink cartridges to elected Members. The cost associated with this provision in the twelve months prior to the wide scale implementation of the Paperless project was £12,935 per annum, equivalent to £1,077.92 per month.
- 4.2 The savings for the past twelve months post the implementation of the Paperless project are £11,816 equivalent to £985 per month. The savings successfully achieved were as anticipated at the outset of the project and therefore the initiative has successfully contributed to the Council's Comprehensive Spending Review efficiency target.
- 4.3 During the original review Members felt it was incumbent upon all Members to show to constituents that elected members were doing their bit to make savings where possible and the Paperless review is a successful achievement in that regard.
- 4.4 The recommendation arising from the original Overview and Scrutiny Review of Members ICT provision recommended that whilst it is a legal requirement to provide a 'reasonable' amount of paper copies free of charge to members of the public attending Council committee meetings it was felt that no more than 6 copies be provided for any one meeting.
- 4.5 Officers were asked to review over the coming months how many copies were used /requested and thereon tailoring the amount produced to satisfy demand. When monitoring the take up of the hard copy committee reports, Officers identified that it is often the case that none of the 6 copies of committee reports printed and available for members of the public were utilised.
- 4.6 Members of the Review team considered the potential additional savings achievable as a result of further tailoring the number of hard copy reports available to members of the public. As a result Members agreed to recommend that hard copy reports should not be routinely provided however they should be available upon request. The opportunity to request hard copy committee reports should be widely published on the District Council's web site, One Stop shops and Community Hubs to enable access to this provision where required.
- 4.7 In addition however Members also feel that the council website should point members of the public to parts of the website where they can download and print off print packs of upcoming meetings. This should be advertised on the website more prominently to encourage members of the public to print off their own copies or download reports to their own electronic devices. This could achieve further savings in addition to those already achieved depending on the number of hard copy reports requested.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 At the outset of the Overview and Scrutiny Review of the Paperless project the Review Team were keen to engage with all elected Members to ascertain their experiences of being Paperless and gain a comprehensive understanding of where the initiative was working successfully as well as gaining an insight to any issues which have arisen.
- 5.2 All Members were surveyed to understand their views. The survey was on-line and in addition Members of the Review Team attended each of the Committee meetings in order to conduct face to face consultation.
- 5.3 All 39 Members were asked for their opinion, of which 28 completed the survey. In summary 81% of respondents found Officer briefing notes helpful prior to the wide scale paperless implementation. 82% of elected Members download Committee reports onto their electronic devices prior to attending Committee meetings with just 18% of responders accessing reports directly via the Fenland website live. Just 10% of elected Members who completed the survey print Committee agenda's and reports at home, 55% of members do not chose to print off reports and 35% print Committee documentation occasionally. The main reasons cited for printing reports at home prior to meetings was for convenience particularly when chairing meetings or when presenting Committee reports as this was deemed easier. 52% of elected Members confirmed they have become more confident when utilising their electronic devices during committee meetings. 54% of Members confirmed they have not experienced any particular problems as a result of being paperless during any committee meetings. 46% of Members confirmed they had experienced issues during Committee meetings due to the paperless initiative. The large majority of those who experienced issues confirmed the issues were specifically related to the Planning Committee and in particular accessing large planning site diagrams. One respondent identified that being paperless when attending Corporate Governance Committee was also occasionally problematic due to the need to access complex spreadsheets. Ideally Members would like a resolution to these issues.
- 5.4 The large majority of free text comments made on the survey and via the direct face to face consultation was positive in relation to the paperless project, including 'keep up the good work', 'Continue to be paperless', 'support any members who have experienced difficulties but must not reverse the paperless project', 'Whilst I do not particularly enjoy being paperless I recognise it is the right way to go'
- 5.5 Members of the review team have considered all the consultation feedback and fully support the wider view that the Paperless Project is a success and should therefore continue.
- 5.6 Members also acknowledge the issues experienced by Members particularly in relation to Planning Committee, specifically the ability to effectively access electronic plans and site maps. Members are keen these issues are resolved to ensure the continued engagement with the paperless project across all Committees.
- 5.7 The Review team agree to delegate to Officers the research of a long term electronic resolution to this specific issue which would enable site maps and plans to be accessed effectively without experiencing any issues in relation to distortion. In the short term Members of the Planning Committee should be provided with hard copy site plans and maps. The Review Team are keen this is a short term remedy as the ultimate aim is to return to a fully paperless approach.
- 5.8 A limited number of laptops are currently available to all Members upon request to utilise on loan during Committee meetings. The consultation survey confirmed that members were aware of this service. Whilst take up has been relatively low the continued provision of this resource provides contingency and resilience in the event that individual devices fail or loose charge.

- 5.9 The face to face consultation identified that a number of elected Members raised the issue of how confidential reports are shared following the paperless project implementation. Prior to becoming Paperless confidential reports were available to members in hard copy format. These reports were previously printed on pink paper to make them identifiable as being confidential. Members were required to hand them in following committee meetings therefore the ability to inadvertently share confidential information was limited.
- 5.10 Following the implementation of the Paperless project, confidential reports are circulated electronically via email. These documents are not accessible on the public website due to the nature of their content. Members are advised regarding confidentiality however consultation feedback suggests that there are concerns that circulating reports via email poses a risk that the information could be inadvertently shared leaving Members vulnerable to criticism.
- 5.11 Members of the Review Team are keen that the paperless project continues to build on the best practice that Fenland has in place in relation to confidentiality. Members therefore delegate to Officers to research and identify a secure, confidential electronic mechanism for sharing confidential agenda items with Members.
- 5.12 A couple of free text comments documented via the consultation survey suggested that Members who have experienced difficulties regarding being fully paperless, should be provided the opportunity to opt out and revert back to having Committee papers.
- 5.13 Members are keen that any one experiencing difficulties should continue to have access to Officer support to build confidence and knowledge as significant progress has already been made. Members also identified that the paperless scheme does enable members to exercise discretion regarding printing their own hard copy reports and committee agendas, therefore this choice already exists.
- 5.14 Finally the consultation process revealed that Members identify there should be parity with Officers being required to adopt a paperless approach when attending committee meetings. The review team acknowledge that this does not require the entire organisation to become paperless as that would have significant cost implications however they endorse that Officers should also be required to reflect best practice in relation to being paperless.
- 5.15 The Review team recommend that a number of laptops should be made available for Officers use akin to the loan process available to elected Members.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Based upon the evidence included in this report and the feedback from the majority of Members, the working group recommends the way forward as below.
- That all Members note the savings successfully achieved as a result of the paperless project to date, which make a significant contribution to the Comprehensive Spending Review Savings targets.
 - Members note the consultation feedback received as a result of the Paperless consultation questionnaire and subsequent face to face discussions between Review Team Members and members of all the individual Committee meetings.
 - Members continue to endorse the paperless approach which has been successfully implemented utilising their existing Tablets/Laptops.
 - No exceptions should be considered in relation to Members not engaging with the Paperless project as the existing scheme already enables Members to exercise

discretion regarding printing off committee meetings agendas and reports at their own cost.

- That the small number of laptops available on loan from Member Services for use in committee meetings should continue as this has been an effective fail safe.
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- Officers of fenland District Council should commit to being Paperless when attending Committee meetings to ensure parity with elected Members.