DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 12TH APRIL 2018

SUBJECT: ELECTRONIC VOTING AT FULL COUNCIL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This purpose of this report is to inform Democratic Services Committee of the recent training sessions on the electronic voting system available in the council chamber and seek views on whether a recommendation should be made to Full Council to re-introduce the system at all Council meetings.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 On 7 October 2014, the Council agreed to implement the webcasting of Full Council meetings and to also commence electronic voting at Full Council meetings. The Council had received a £40,000 grant from Welsh Government for webcasting and the equipment was installed. The Council webcast its first live meeting on 10 March 2015. Electronic voting was tested in meetings in November/December 2014 and January 2015 but the process significantly increased the length of meetings. Since then, voting at Full Council has been by way of show of hands. Voting is clearly recorded within the minutes which are published on the Council's website.

2.2 Democratic Services Committee when considering the Annual Report for Democratic Services on 31st May 2017 asked that the use of electronic voting be re-visited and it was agreed to hold training for all members on the system and that a further report on the outcome of the training would be brought back to the committee before making any recommendations to Full Council. This report outlines the training undertaken with Members on electronic voting and asks Democratic Services Committee to consider any recommendations to Full Council.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

3.1 Electronic voting contributes to the well-being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2016 by providing supporting the democratic process. An electronic voting system is not the only suitable method of recording votes but is a matter of preference. The voting process is a fundamental part of the democratic process and requires support in order to make decisions, which will impact on the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous wales
- A resilient wales
- A healthier wales
- A more equal wales
- A wales of cohesive communities.

4.   THE REPORT

4.1   Democratic Services Committee at its meeting on 31st May 2017 suggested that the use of electronic voting should be re-considered and agreed that training sessions would be held for all members and a further report on the outcome of the training would be brought back for consideration.

4.2   In order to prepare for the training session the system was thoroughly checked by staff in Democratic Services and Vaughan Sounds were brought in to ensure the system was working effectively. Following this three training sessions were arranged between October 2017 and January 2018. A total of 44 Members attended the training sessions with some attending more than one session.

4.3   The training allowed members to vote in a mock environment and use the system for a series of questions. Members were shown how to confirm they were present and were able to choose yes, no or abstain. The results were displayed for Members to see and a recorded vote was taken on each occasion to see how the system was being used.

4.4   The results showed that at two of the sessions, three people recorded that they were present but did not vote either yes, no or abstain. There were a total of four votes taken at each session and at every training session there was a difference from the first vote and the last vote taken, where Members recorded their presence more accurately by the time they had been through one round of voting.

4.5   Democratic Services Committee are therefore asked to consider if they wish to recommend to Council the re-introduction of electronic voting at all future meetings of Full Council. There may be some impact upon meetings if it is agreed to revert to electronic voting, which may slow down the voting process and increase the length of meetings to some degree. In addition if there are any motions proposed during the course of the meeting the motion would have to be input into the voting system by a member of staff before the vote could be taken.

5.   WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

5.1   This report contributes to the well-being goals as set out in links to strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act to ensure that decisions taken by councillors are supported and recorded accurately.

6.   EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1   This report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIA process does not need to be applied.

7.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1   There are no direct implications from this report, as the electronic voting system is already in place.

8.   PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1   There are no direct implications as a result of this report, however if the electronic voting system is re-introduced additional staff may need to be deployed to ensure the system runs smoothly during the initial stages.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 There are no consultations that have not been included in the report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 It is recommended that Democratic Services Committee consider the contents of the report and determine if any recommendations are required to Full Council.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To ask Democratic Services Committee to indicate their views on the re-introduction of electronic voting.

12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Local Government Act 2000, Local Government Wales Measure 2011.

Author: Cath Forbes-Thompson, Interim Head of Democratic Services
Consultees: Christina Harrhy, Interim Chief Executive
                 Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services
                 Lynne Donovan, Interim Head of People Services
                 Cllr David Poole, Leader of Council
                 Cllr Colin Mann, Chair of Democratic Services Committee
                 Cllr Tudor Davies, Vice Chair of Democratic Services Committee
                 Cllr Barbara Jones, Deputy Leader – Finance, Performance and Governance
                 Lisa Lane, Solicitor
                 Emma Sullivan, Senior Committee Services Officer

Background Papers:
Council - 7th October 2014 - Implementation of Electronic Voting and Webcasting of Full Council Meetings