



ANNUAL COUNCIL - 10TH MAY 2018

SUBJECT: ELECTRONIC VOTING AT FULL COUNCIL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES

- 1.1 The report attached at appendix 1 was presented to Democratic Services Committee on the 12th April 2018 Members were asked to consider the outcome of the additional training provided to Councillors in respect of the electronic voting system and form a view on its possible reintroduction at Full Council meetings.
- 1.2 The Democratic Services Committee was advised that Members and Officers benches have an individual control panel containing a microphone, LCD screen and buttons to allow Members to vote 'Yes', 'No' or 'Abstain'. The electronic voting system has been configured so that only Members control panels have the ability to vote. Members would need to ensure that they sit in their allocated seat in order for their vote to be recorded against their name.
- 1.3 Members also considered the procedure for electronic voting which has been adopted for meetings of Full Council in the Chamber and is currently contained within the Council's Procedure Rules as set out below: -

PROCEDURE FOR ELECTRONIC VOTING

- a. *The Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer will confirm the motion to be voted upon and declare the outcome of the vote. Members first press button 1 to confirm their attendance.*
- b. *The vote will be open for 20 seconds and Members must cast their vote in this time. Members can change their vote while the vote is open, however, their vote cannot be altered once the vote has been closed.*
- c. *The Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer will announce that the vote is closing and confirm the vote is closed after 20 seconds have passed.*
- d. *The outcome of the vote will be displayed on television screens in the Chamber. The Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer will check the number of votes cast does not exceed the number of Members in attendance and then announce the outcome of the vote. The vote will only take effect once the outcome is confirmed by Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer and Chairman*
- e. *The individual voting results will be displayed in the Chamber and a hard copy of the results will be generated. This record will be subsequently published on the Council's Website the day after the meeting.*

Should the electronic voting system be unavailable or breakdown during a meeting of Full Council, voting will revert to being undertaken by a show of hands.

The Mayor shall have the casting vote in the event that the vote is tied. The Mayor's casting vote shall be made verbally irrespective of whether the vote is being taken electronically or by a show of hands.

- 1.4 If Members agree to endorse the recommendations from Democratic Services Committee and re-introduce the electronic voting system, it might be beneficial to consider a transition period. The electronic voting system could be used for one report at the first meeting, and this could be increased incrementally over the next 3 meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Having considered the training and procedures for electronic voting the Democratic Services Committee unanimously.

RECOMMENDED to Council: -

- (i) that all meetings of Full Council should utilise the electronic voting system for all votes taken;
 - (ii) the procedure agreed by Council on 7th October 2014 as detailed above be reinstated.
- 2.2 Members are asked to consider the recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee and if recommendations 2.1 (i) and 2.1 (ii) are endorsed to have a transition period, whereby the electronic voting is introduced incrementally over 4 meetings.

Author: Cath Forbes-Thompson, Interim Head of Democratic Services

Consultees: Christina HARRY, Interim Chief Executive
Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services
Mark S. Williams, Interim Corporate Director of Communities
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Lisa Lane, Interim Monitoring Officer
Cllr D Poole, Leader of Council
Cllr B. Jones, Deputy Leader - Finance Performance and Governance
Cllr C. Mann, Chair Democratic Services Committee
Cllr Tudor Davies, Vice Chair of Democratic Services Committee
Cllr K. Etheridge, Leader Independent Group

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to Democratic Services Committee 12 April 2018 – Agenda item 6
Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Assessment



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 12TH APRIL 2018

SUBJECT: ELECTRONIC VOTING AT FULL COUNCIL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES

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.

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Consultees: Christina HARRY, 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

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM

April 2016

THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITIES STATEMENT

This Council recognises that people have different needs, requirements and goals and we will work actively against all forms of discrimination by promoting good relations and mutual respect within and between our communities, residents, elected members, job applicants and workforce.

We will also work to create equal access for everyone to our services, irrespective of ethnic origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religious beliefs or non-belief, use of Welsh language, BSL or other languages, nationality, responsibility for any dependents or any other reason which cannot be shown to be justified.

NAME OF NEW OR REVISED PROPOSAL *	Electronic Voting at Full Council Meetings
DIRECTORATE	Corporate Services
SERVICE AREA	Democratic Services
CONTACT OFFICER	Catherine Forbes-Thompson
DATE FOR NEXT REVIEW OR REVISION	

***Throughout this Equalities Impact Assessment Form, 'proposal' is used to refer to what is being assessed, and therefore includes policies, strategies, functions, procedures, practices, initiatives, projects and savings proposals.**

INTRODUCTION

The aim of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is to ensure that Equalities and Welsh Language issues have been proactively considered throughout the decision making processes governing work undertaken by every service area in the Council as well as work done at a corporate level.

The form should be used if you have identified a need for a full EIA following the screening process covered in the [Equalities Implications in Committee Reports](#) guidance document (available on the [Equalities and Welsh Language Portal](#) on the Council's intranet).

The EIA should highlight any areas of risk and maximise the benefits of proposals in terms of Equalities. It therefore helps to ensure that the Council has considered everyone who might be affected by the proposal.

It also helps the Council to meet its legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and supports the wider aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. There is also a requirement under Human Rights legislation for Local Authorities to consider Human Rights in developing proposals.

Specifically, Section 147 of the Equality Act 2010 is the provision that requires decision-makers to have 'due regard' to the equality implications of their decisions and Welsh Language Standards 88-97 require specific consideration of Welsh speakers under the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales has also published 'Good Practice Guidance for Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments and Scrutinising Changes to Community Services in Wales' to ensure that Local Authorities, and other service providers, carry out thorough and robust impact assessments and scrutiny when changes to community services are proposed, and that every consideration is given to mitigate the impact on older people and propose alternative approaches to service delivery.

The Council's work across Equalities, Welsh Language and Human Rights is covered in more detail through the [Equalities and Welsh Language Objectives and Action Plan 2016-2020](#).

This approach strengthens work to promote Equalities by helping to identify and address any potential discriminatory effects before introducing something new or changing working practices, and reduces the risk of potential legal challenges.

When carrying out an EIA you should consider both the positive and negative consequences of your proposals. If a project is designed for a specific group e.g. disabled people, you also need to think about what potential effects it could have on other areas e.g. young people with a disability, BME people with a disability.

There are a number of supporting guidance documents available on the [Equalities and Welsh Language Portal](#) and the Council's Equalities and Welsh Language team can offer support as the EIA is being developed. Please note that the team does not write EIAs on behalf of service areas, the support offered is in the form of advice, suggestions and in effect, quality control.

Contact equalities@caerphilly.gov.uk for assistance.

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSAL

1	<p>What is the proposal intended to achieve? <i>(Please give a brief description of the purpose of the new or updated proposal by way of introduction.)</i></p> <p>To re-commence using electronic voting system which is already available in the council chamber at all meetings of Full Council.</p> <p>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. 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.</p>
2	<p>Who are the service users affected by the proposal? <i>(Who will be affected by the delivery of this proposal? e.g. staff members, the public generally, or specific sections of the public i.e. youth groups, carers, road users, people using country parks, people on benefits etc.)</i></p> <p>Councillors and staff will be using and operating the system.</p> <p>Members of the Public.</p>

IMPACT ON THE PUBLIC AND STAFF

3	<p>Does the proposal ensure that everyone has an equal access to all the services available or proposed, or benefits equally from the proposed changes, or does not lose out in greater or more severe ways due to the proposals? <i>(What has been done to examine whether or not these groups have equal access to the service, or whether they need to receive the service in a different way from other people?)</i></p> <p>Councillors have been trained on the use of the system, at present there are no concerns with regard to any physical barriers to using the system, however should any Councillor suffer from future sight, hearing or physical impairment or be unable to press the voting buttons, specific support would need to be provided.</p> <p>Members of the Public who are observing or viewing meetings may be affected if meetings are slower in order to use the electronic voting at meetings. In addition any observers would not have the visual clarity of voting whilst the meeting in progress. This would however be available once the minutes are published.</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <p>An assessment of needs would be required if a councillor were to become sight, hearing or physically impaired or a newly elected councillor had a disability that prevented them from seeing or using the voting buttons and suitable support would need to be provided or an exemption from using the voting system allowed.</p>

<p>4</p>	<p>What are the consequences of the above for specific groups? <i>(Has the service delivery been examined to assess if there is any indirect affect on any groups? Could the consequences of the policy or savings proposal differ dependent upon people's disability, race, gender, sexuality, age, language, religion/belief?)</i></p> <p>If a councillor had a specific disability that prevented them from using the electronic voting system, they would not be able to participate fully in their role and would effectively be unable to fulfil their elected mandate.</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <p>Ensure that all councillors using the system are not prevented from voting due to a sight or hearing impairment or physical disability and carry out an individual assessment if anyone is identified.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>In line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. (No.1) Regulations 2015, please note below what effects, if any (whether positive or adverse), the proposal would have on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. <i>(The specific Policy Making Standards requirements are Standard numbers 88, 89, 90, 91, 92 and 93. The full detail of each Standard is available on the Equalities and Welsh Language Portal)</i></p> <p>There are no additional requirements in respect of the Welsh Language Standards in respect of the re-introduction of the electronic voting system. The system is numbered 1,2,3 & 4.</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <p>None</p>

INFORMATION COLLECTION

<p>6</p>	<p>Is full information and analysis of users of the service available? <i>(Is this service effectively engaging with all its potential users or is there higher or lower participation of uptake by one or more groups? If so, what has been done to address any difference in take up of the service? Does any savings proposals include an analysis of those affected?)</i></p> <p>All councillors would be using the system if it were re-introduced, and were all invited to three training sessions in order to ensure a full understanding of the system</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <p>None</p>

CONSULTATION

7	<p>What consultation has taken place? <i>(What steps have been taken to ensure that people from various groups have been consulted during the development of this proposal? Have the Council's Equalities staff been consulted? Have you referred to the Equalities Consultation and Monitoring Guidance?)</i></p> <p>Democratic Services Committee will consider if they wish to recommend the re-introduction of the system. If the committee wish to recommend it would require a report to Full Council where all Councillors (who would be using the system) would have the opportunity to ask questions, propose alternatives and then vote yes or no to introduce the system.</p>
	<p>Actions required: Ensure that a report is presented to Democratic Services Committee and if it is recommended to re-introduce to report to Full Council.</p>

MONITORING AND REVIEW

8	<p>How will the proposal be monitored? <i>(What monitoring process has been set up to assess the extent that the service is being used by all sections of the community, or that the savings proposals are achieving the intended outcomes with no adverse impact? Are comments or complaints systems set up to record issues by Equalities category to be able analyse responses from particular groups?)</i></p> <p>If the system is re-introduced the Head of Democratic Services will monitor the effectiveness and report back to democratic services committee in the Annual Report for 2018/19.</p>
	<p>Actions required: Monitor each meeting and report on the effectiveness in the Annual Report for 2018/19.</p>
9	<p>How will the monitoring be evaluated? <i>(What methods will be used to ensure that the needs of all sections of the community are being met?)</i></p> <p>The Democratic Services Committee, will consider the effectiveness of the system and consider if any further recommendations are required to Full Council in May 2019.</p>
	<p>Actions required: Monitor if the system is re-introduced and compile data for Annual Report 2018/19.</p>

10	<p>Have any support / guidance / training requirements been identified? <i>(Has the EIA or consultation process shown a need for awareness raising amongst staff, or identified the need for Equalities or Welsh Language training of some sort?)</i></p> <p>All Councillors have been offered training at three sessions, new Councillors would receive training as part of their Induction. Any Councillors with a sight or hearing impairment or physical disability would be assessed and either supported or exempted for using the system.</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <p>Ensure that new Councillors are trained and anyone with a sight or hearing impairment or physical disability is identified.</p>
11	<p>Where you have identified mitigating factors in previous answers that lessen the impact on any particular group in the community, or have identified any elsewhere, please summarise them here.</p> <p>Ensure that all Councillors who need to be trained are offered training.</p> <p>Ensure that any new councillors or councillors that develop a physical disability causing them difficulty in using the system are assessed, supported or exempted from using the system, to ensure that they can participate in all votes at Full Council.</p>

12	<p>What wider use will you make of this Equality Impact Assessment? <i>(What use will you make of this document i.e. as a consultation response, appendix to approval reports, publicity etc. in addition to the mandatory action shown below?)</i></p> <p>This EIA will be appended to the report to Democratic Services Committee and if recommendations are made to Full Council.</p>
	<p>Actions required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EIA, when completed, to be returned to equalities@caerphilly.gov.uk for publishing on the Council's website.

Completed by:	Catherine Forbes-Thompson
Date:	16 March 2018
Position:	Interim Head of Democratic Services
Name of Head of Service:	