

# BARNSELEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE

### ELECTRONIC NOTICES FOR FORMAL COUNCIL MEETINGS

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for arrangements to move towards giving notice of formal Council meetings by electronic means and to stop the printing of meetings documentation.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That, in accordance with the Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015, Cabinet gives its consent for the summons and papers for its meetings, and for any other meetings attended by Cabinet Members, to be transmitted by electronic means to their barnsley.gov.uk email address;**
- 2.2 **That the Director of Legal and Governance be authorised consult other Members to seek their consent for summons and papers to be issued by the same means, on the presumption that they will be transmitted electronically, subject to any specific requirements those Members may have.**

#### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Over recent months, a programme has been progressing to replace the ICT equipment provided to Elected Members with more up-to-date technology. This has involved the deployment of Windows Surface Pro 4 tablet devices, which are wifi enabled and capable of mobile working. Elected Members have also been provided with a facility to log on remotely to the Council's networks.
- 3.2 Loaded on the devices is the Modern.gov app that provides Members with access to packs of papers for formal Council meetings. The app presents documents in a way that makes them easy to navigate and annotate, and the app also allows secure access to 'private' meeting papers. Although an internet connection is needed to download meetings documentation initially through the app, it is then available, whether the device has an internet connection or not. The app allows you to highlight sections of the pack and make annotations just as you would with a paper copy. Document navigation is made quick and simple via bookmarking and intuitive controls.
- 3.3 Due to a technical problem related to the interface between the Microsoft Surface Pro 4 devices, BMBC settings and the app, the functionality of the app has not been reliable on the Microsoft Surface Pro 4 devices. (The app works on the Microsoft Surface Pro 3 devices). It has therefore not been possible, up to now, to move forward with the proposal to move to paperless Council meetings. However, following detailed investigations on this technical issue by IT Support, this issue has now been resolved.

## **4. PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 A KLOE to save £30,000 on printing costs for formal meeting papers in 2015/6 was approved in February 2015, on the assumption that mobile devices would have been rolled-out earlier. Now that the devices have been deployed to Members and it is possible to access documents through the app, it is proposed to stop printing meetings documentation and issue notices for meetings electronically.
- 4.2 For some time, the legal basis for issuing notices for meetings only by electronic means was unclear. However, the Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 states that the appropriate method can now be by electronic means “where the member has given consent for the summons to be transmitted in electronic form to a particular electronic address”.
- 4.3 It is therefore proposed that Cabinet gives its consent to the summons and papers for its meetings, and for any other meetings attended by Cabinet Members, to be transmitted by electronic means to their barnsley.gov.uk email address. For other Members, Cabinet is requested to authorise the Director of Legal and Governance to consult those Members to seek their consent for this, on the presumption that the summons and papers will be transmitted electronically. On this basis, the printing of meetings papers will stop, as far as possible.
- 4.4 The programme for the roll-out of devices acknowledged that some Members would be more comfortable with using the new technology than others. The programme therefore included a range of training and support, including from officers and Elected Member ICT Champions. Even so, it should be acknowledged that it may take time for all Members to feel equally confident in using only electronic documentation. As a result, it is intended to take into account the individual requirements of Members in implementing the change and adopt a phased approach, where necessary.

## **5. PROPOSED SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR MEMBERS**

- 5.1 It is proposed that drop-in sessions on how to use the Modern.gov app are provided to all Members. These will be arranged at convenient times for Members, around formal Council meetings. A schedule will be drawn up and circulated to Members. In addition, Members will be offered a one-to-one session with officers of the Council Governance Unit should they require one. The operation of the app is fairly straightforward and intuitive so the one-to-one sessions should not take more than fifteen to twenty minutes. A quick guide has also been produced and will be provided to all Members.
- 5.2 The intention is to arrange these sessions in conjunction with the Digital Champions. Based in the Communities Directorate, these officers provide support in the community to people wanting to get more out of their electronic devices, and so support the move to on-line channels of contact with the Council. This support is specifically about the operation of the device, rather than detailed training or for dealing with technical issues, so fills a gap in current provision. Using the Modern.gov app will also give Members an idea of how touch-screen tablet technology works, which the Digital Champions can help them to build upon and use the skills with other apps.

## **6. OFFICERS**

- 6.1 It is important that officers provide leadership in the move to paperless meetings. As stated earlier, Senior Management Team meetings are currently operating without papers using PDF attachments. This has worked well, however, it does mean that multiple documents, usually of a large file size (sometimes up to 10mb), are being emailed around the Council network. The advantage of the app is that it downloads documents automatically to individual's tablets when they open the app and are connected to the internet. In addition it means that individuals have access to all Council meeting documents in one place and that we are not running two parallel systems of circulating electronic papers. (Note: Each meeting has a set of permissions to restrict access to papers to those individuals entitled to see such papers).
- 6.2 It is proposed that Barnsley Leadership Team are given a demonstration of the app as soon as possible with a view to moving to using the app alongside Members. Individual one-to-one training sessions will be made available if necessary.

## **7. WIDER USE OF MODERN.GOV BY OTHER DIRECTORATES**

- 7.1 The Council Governance Unit have been working with other Directorates, particularly Finance, People and Place on how they could benefit from using the Modern.gov software to produce document packs for their meetings. As a result the software is being used to produce papers for SMT, SIGOMA, Member Development Working Party, Barnsley Economic Partnership, MP's Liaison Meeting, Corporate Parenting Panel and senior officer briefing papers. These document packs are available through the app to the relevant Members and officers. Training has been provided to staff in Directorates and consideration is being given to the application of the software for departmental management team meetings and other meetings.
- 7.2 Other Directorates are also invited to consider if the use of the system will enhance their operations.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 The Director of Finance, Assets and Information Services has been consulted in view of the ICT aspects of the proposal. The Director of Human Resources, Performance and Communications has been consulted in view of the Member Development aspects of the proposal.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report, although it should be noted that a KLOE to save £30,000 on printing costs for formal meeting papers in 2015/6 was approved in February 2015. This takes advantage of the opportunities to move toward electronic meetings documentation when mobile devices were rolled-out. This was later than anticipated due to data security considerations and delays in deployment due to problems with remote connectivity.. Some savings have already been achieved as a result of officers using their mobile devices in meetings.

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

- 10.1 Members need to be confident in their operation of the app and all necessary training will be provided, including one-to-one sessions should Members require it.
- 10.2 Contingencies will need to be made should Members or officers have a technical problem with their tablet device at meetings, therefore, spare hard copies of agendas will be available in such circumstances.

## **11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the work on the KLOE referred to earlier in the report. This acknowledged the benefits to the public in providing access to meetings papers electronically in the enhanced form allowed by the Modern.gov system and app.
- 11.2 The availability of papers electronically will enable Members who have difficulty in accessing the Town Hall on a regular basis to have instant access to meeting papers at home with their tablet device. The use of electronic papers for meetings will also provide an enhanced service for the visually impaired as this will allow the text within documents to be zoomed to a suitable size to meet their needs.

## **12. APPENDICES**

- 12.1 None

## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 13.1 2015/6 Budget Papers
- 13.2 The Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015  
  
Available for inspection in the Legal & Governance Directorate, Town Hall,  
Barnsley, telephone (01226) 773421

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