



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**22nd SEPTEMBER 2022**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**MODERN.GOV IN-APP VOTING SYSTEM**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with details of the Modern.Gov in-app voting system and to provide committee with an update on the intention to roll out the app.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:
- (i) Acknowledge the progress made (following the demonstration to Committee Members); and
  - (ii) Consider the phased roll out approach to the voting app as detailed within section 4 of the report.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 On the [29<sup>th</sup> June 2021](#), Members of the Democratic Services Committee considered a report in respect of the introduction of the broadcasting of committee meetings and the ability to operate through a hybrid approach which was in line with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 3.2 At that time, members of the Committee supported the arrangements in respect of a phased roll out of the hybrid meetings with a series of mock demonstrations to support the planned roll out across the Council.
- 3.3 As the webcasting and hybrid approach has been successfully embedded into the Council's democratic process it is considered appropriate now to roll out the Modern.Gov in-app voting system to compliment the webcasting process.

**4. MODERN.GOV.VOTING BUTTON (VOTING APP)**

- 4.1 Previously, Members in their multi location meetings have been voting by raising their hands, a function which has been recognised in the chamber

and through the Zoom platform as Members' clear indication of choice. To aid the process of determining a decision, members views have often been sought through identifying objections or by Group Leaders exercising their members vote on their behalf. This method has worked well for the purposes of formally recording the votes and outcomes of motions and recommendations, particularly during the initial lockdown period, where meetings were conducted virtually only.

- 4.2 The intention has always been to explore the in-meeting voting arrangements to ensure a more sophisticated method of recording votes to accompany the progress made with the hybrid meetings. However, priority has always been given to ensuring the hybrid meeting process was fully embedded into the council multi location meetings in the first instance.
- 4.3 In seeking, a formal voting arrangement within a hybrid meeting environment, Officers have been keen to avoid any arrangement which would mean different arrangements operating virtually, to the mechanisms utilised within a chamber or committee room environment.
- 4.4 Voting through the Modern.Gov in-app voting feature will support both physical attendance and remote attendance with simple, secure and transparent voting functionality through a paperless application. The application provides the opportunity for the Democratic Services team to Pre-submit votes and ad-hoc voting on agenda items for hybrid or virtual meetings. In addition, the app also manages attendance, the entire voting process, vote re-runs and casting votes, provide a suit of additional information, which is publicly accessible.
- 4.5 Utilising the Mod Gov App, Members' attendance will continue to be recorded alongside their respective profiles on the Council website with the addition of voting results which will be captured under their 'Voting Record'. This process will ensure accountability and transparency where voting has taken place and a clear record of Members' decisions.
- 4.6 Much in the same way as the webcasting and hybrid meetings were positively rolled out incrementally, which enabled Members to experience the system within their own committee setting, the same is intended for the roll out of the voting app, before utilising the system at Full Council.
- 4.7 Below is a timetable of the training that has already been undertaken and that which will be delivered by the Digital Skills team followed by the roll out on an incremental basis.

<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Scheduled</b>	<b>Progress:</b>
<b>Briefing on new voting arrangements to Group Leaders</b>	To familiarise Group Leaders with the new functionality of the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system	7th September 2022	Complete

<b>Demo on the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system and briefing report on the new arrangements to members of the Democratic Services Committee (DSC)</b>	To familiarise the DSC with the new arrangements for the Modern.Gov in-app voting system	22nd September 2022	22nd September. To be completed
<b>Briefing to Cabinet Members/SLT Officers on the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system</b>	To familiarise Cabinet Members and SLT on the Modern.Gov in-app voting system	26 <sup>th</sup> September 2022	To be completed
<b>Demo to all Elected Members of the Council on the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system</b>	Demo of the Modern.Gov in-app voting system and its full functionality to all Elected Members by the Digital Skills Team	October 2022	To be completed
<b>Demo of the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system in specific committee settings, starting with Planning &amp; Development (P&amp;D) Committee</b>	Demo to and utilisation of the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system by the members of the Planning & Development Committee	October 2022	To be completed
<b>Review Progress November 2022</b>			
<b>Implementation of the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system to Full Council (Following an open session prior to the meeting)</b>	To utilise the new Modern.Gov in-app voting system	To be confirmed as part of the review process	To be completed

## **5 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS**

- 5.1 The above timetable will enable all Members of the Council to receive a demonstration on the Modern.Gov in-app voting system with a view to implementing the app at a future meeting of the Planning & Development Committee and Full Council.

- 5.2 It is considered that the Council is in a positive place going forward and has made steady progress with its hybrid meetings following the initial roll out. Member engagement has been instrumental to the progress made to date, particularly following the Local Government Elections where a number of new Chairs and Vice Chairs will familiarise themselves with the hybrid meetings and the voting app.
- 5.3 Members of the Democratic Services Committee will be the first Committee to undertake a demo by the Council's Digital Skills Team and will continue to receive updates and progress reports on the webcasting of hybrid meetings as well as the in-app voting system.
- 5.4 The Head of Democratic Services is in the process of completing a formal multi-location meeting policy, which will confirm the protocols and procedures to support digital voting.

## **6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 6.1 The provision of a webcasting service promotes democracy and encourages public engagement. By removing potential barriers for members of the public to attend meetings at the chamber, webcasting opens up opportunities for wider public engagement and transparency. The aspect of hybrid and virtual meetings also promotes the democracy agenda, allowing the undertaking of Council business by Members to be more accessible and manageable.
- 6.2 The Modern.Gov in-app voting system will enable a clear and concise recording of Members' voting preferences and support the transparency of the voting process.

## **7 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The developments within the Council Chamber and webcasting infrastructure has strengthened the Welsh language within the democratic process and made it accessible to members of the public when live streaming meetings or watching pre-recorded meetings. The in-app voting system will facilitate the democratic process for members of the public.

## **8 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The opportunities offered by webcasting (and now the Modern.Gov in-app voting) have been considered by Members as part of the business of full Council, Cabinet and Democratic Services Committee.
- 8.2 Promoting transparency in the democratic processes, including webcasting and the in-app voting, has also been discussed in the meetings of the Political Group Leaders, which the Head of Democratic Services attends.

## **9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 9.1 The associated funding to deliver webcasting and the infrastructure were included as part of the Council's 2020/21 Budget, following support provided previously by the Democratic Services Committee. Additional funding has also been sought from Welsh Government in respect of further advancements such as the in-app voting system as outlined within the report.

**10 LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 10.1 The provision of webcasting and any associated improvements link to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to 'living within our means' and an 'efficient and effective Council', ensuring transparency with our decision-making process for the benefits of our residents.
- 10.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for public engagement through webcasting links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities. This proposal would further support the ability of this council to involve communities in key decisions.

**11 CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 Through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Councils were legally required to webcast meetings to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation.
- 11.2 The Council has successfully adopted its hybrid meetings and Members have embraced the multi-location meetings and the new technology. It is proposed that this progress is advanced and developed with the in-app voting system as an example of how further improvements can be made.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**22 September 2022**

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.**

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