



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

27TH NOVEMBER 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

VOTING ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN COMMITTEE SETTINGS

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 future voting arrangements to be taken forward following the relocation of the Council Chamber to Llys Cadwyn and the intended roll out of the arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:
- (i) Acknowledge the proposed arrangements in respect of Committee Voting arrangements following the Council Chamber relocation;
 - (ii) Consider the phased roll out approach to the voting arrangements as detailed within section 4 of the report.
 - (iii) Instruct the Head of Democratic Services to continue reviewing the voting platforms available.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On the [29th 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 consider an appropriate voting system to compliment the webcasting process.

4. BOSCH MICROPHONE VOTING SYSTEM

- 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. This method has worked well for the purposes of formally recording the votes and outcomes of motions and recommendations.
- 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 reviewed numerous options to ensure a system that is easy for Members to utilise, easy to access and to ensure a system that does not cause any unnecessary disruption or delay to the proceedings of a meeting.
- 4.4 Offices and Members have piloted various voting arrangements through the virtual setting, such as the Modern.Gov app and polls arrangements through zoom, however, it was felt that neither option lent itself to the hybrid working arrangements of the Council.
- 4.5 It is clear that online solutions are still being developed and advancements have been made in the digital market with other hybrid voting arrangements being developed which the Head of Democratic Services has been scoping to ensure that the Council take forward the most appropriate voting arrangement.
- 4.6 Whilst we wait for such online solutions to fully mature and 'catch up' with the current way of working, it is proposed that going forward the Council takes forward utilisation of the voting system that is already available within the Council Chamber, through the public I bosch microphone system.
- 4.7 The system provides the opportunity for the Democratic Services team to Pre-submit votes and ad-hoc voting on agenda items at meetings to the microphone system, which can be accessed by those Members in attendance at the Council Chamber.
- 4.8 This process will ensure accountability and transparency where voting has taken place and a clear record of Members' decisions within the Council Chamber. In respect of Members attending through the virtual setting then a continued process of the raising of hands will be conducted.

4.9 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 arrangements, before utilising the system at a meeting of Full Council.

4.10 Below is a timetable of the proposed roll out of the voting system following relocation of the Council Chamber to Llys Cadwyn

Next Steps	Outcome	Scheduled	Progress:
Briefing report on the proposed voting arrangements to members of the Democratic Services Committee (DSC)	To provide Members with details of the proposed arrangements in respect of voting arrangements at hybrid committee meetings	27 th November 2023	On course.
Briefing to Cabinet Members/SLT Officers on the voting arrangements	To familiarise Cabinet Members and SLT on the Chamber voting system	December 2023	To be completed
Demo to Cabinet Members on the voting system	Demo of the system	January 2024	To be Completed
Demo to Democratic Services Committee on the voting system	Demo of the system	January 2024	To be Completed
Usage of the Voting Arrangements at next available Cabinet Meeting	Voting arrangements to be taken forward for Members within Council Chamber	January 2024	To be completed
Demo to Planning Committee Members on the voting system	Demo of the system	January 2024	To be Completed
Usage of the Voting Arrangements at next available Planning Committee Meeting	Voting arrangements to be taken forward for Members within Council Chamber	January / February 2024	To be completed
Demo to Licensing Committee Members on the voting system	Demo of the system	February 2024	To be Completed
Usage of the Voting Arrangements at next available Licensing Committee Meeting	Voting arrangements to be taken forward for Members within Council Chamber	February 2024	To be completed
Continuation of the Demo and roll out of the voting system to all other Committees / Members throughout February.	Demo and utilisation of the voting system by further Committees	February 2024	To be completed

Review Progress end of February 2024			
Implementation of the new voting system to Full Council (Following an open session prior to the meeting)	To utilise voting system within the Council Chamber	March 2024 - 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 voting system with a view to implementing the system at a future meeting of Full Council later in the New Year.
- 5.2 Members of the Democratic Services Committee and Cabinet will be the first Committees to undertake a demo of the system within the new Council Chamber.
- 5.3 Guidance documents and one to one training can be provided to Members, as well as full Committee demonstrations if deemed necessary, to ensure that Members are comfortable with the system before any 'live votes' are taken forward.
- 5.4 If considered successful the Multi Location Meeting Policy will be reviewed to reflect the new voting arrangements in place.
- 5.5 It is the intention that the Head of Democratic Services will continue to seek a full hybrid voting solution that all Members attending a hybrid meeting can access, and it is emphasised that the above proposal is not intended to be the long term solution for voting arrangements at Committee meetings.

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 proposed utilisation of the current voting system available within the Council Chamber 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 voting system will provide opportunities for votes to be cast bilingually.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Previous reports in respect of Committee voting arrangements have been provided to Democratic Services Committee.

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 with a 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 use of the current voting system within the Council Chamber until a full hybrid solution is made available, which would adhere itself within the Council's committee arrangements.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH NOVEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.