

MEETING	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
DATE	19 NOVEMBER, 2019
SUBJECT	COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY
PURPOSE	Present an update of the work to improve communication through the use of technology
RECOMMENDATION	Members of the Committee are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and approve the way forward • Identify a small Group of Elected Members to assist with a trial of the new Porth
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BACKGROUND

1. At the meeting of the full Council on 18 July 2019, Councillor and Cabinet Member, Nia Jeffreys stated *"that there are environmental benefits of using modern technology and of being more inclusive, increasing the potential for participation and attracting more individuals from different backgrounds into Local Government, and it would also save money."*

2. The Council has made progress with its use of technology, but there is room for further improvement, and the Democratic Services Committee has a specific function in looking at this.

3. Among the developments to note to date are:
 - ✓ Most members receive and read their committee documents electronically
 - ✓ By moving to the Office 365 provision, Members can now gain access to their member e-mail accounts/documents on any device in any location (wi-fi access permitting). A large number of members have reported that this has made a great difference.
 - ✓ All information about Councillors is updated automatically on the web site through the "modern.gov" development
 - ✓ Members can easily claim travel costs electronically
 - ✓ Skype provision is available to all members in order to contact each other and officers electronically. *

- ✓ The Council also uses video conferencing facilities at some informal meetings – internal and external meetings.
- ✓ Most members communicate electronically with the electorate (e-mail, social media, etc.)
- ✓ 1-1 training sessions have been provided (and are still available) for members who wish to receive any technological assistance - from using equipment to accessing Skype

*equipment varies from officer to officer

4. However, we must not rest on our laurels, and more could be done to further improve the provision.
5. One key thing to note is the need to try different ways, and recognise that we may not succeed every time!

VIDEO CONFERENCING

6. The Council has a video conferencing facility in Caernarfon (Ysgafell Ogwen and Siambwr Hywel Dda) and at one meeting room each in Dolgellau and Pwllheli. The equipment also enables simultaneous translation.
7. Informal meetings have been held with members and officers at the various locations, and have worked well on a few occasions, and at other times, not as well. However, every experience is constructive as we can learn from every experience. We are currently gathering views about the different user experiences to date.
8. Assuming that the technology works well and that the translation proceeds without a hitch, one of the main challenges when holding video conferences is the chairing of the meeting - especially when the Chairperson is at a "satellite" site. Because of the experiences to date, and the comments we have received about those experiences, we believe that a training session needs to be developed for chairing under such circumstances.

SKYPE

9. As previously noted, Skype is available on every Member's equipment - to be used for text, voice calls, or face to face calls only (were the recipient has full provision). We are aware that some Councillors use the technology. The main advantages identified is that this simultaneously saves time and travel costs.
10. Some informal meetings have been held via Skype - with a small number of members "calling" in to the meeting.

11. Once again, the experience to date has been variable, and specific factors need attention in order to further develop the provision. The Chairmanship element of such meetings again brings its own challenges - and this element must be included in any work programmes.

THE WAY FORWARD

12. Therefore we believe that the bigger picture must be considered whilst developing the way forward with the above. It is essential that this be done in a rational way that coincides with other relevant developments.
13. This is considered to be a joint project between the Finance Department and the Corporate Support Department. A Project Group has been established to move the work forward, and the Project Group will update the Democratic Services Committee with further developments.
14. Coupled with the above, it is considered that our current provision could still be improved. We will continue to trial the use of video conferencing and Skype, and will gather evidence about user experience, and will endeavour to eliminate barriers to making the best use of the current provision.
15. Furthermore, we will be working with the Learning and Development Service to develop training for chairing such meetings and will look into the work of other councils in the field, and will learn from their experiences.

MEMBERS' PORTH

16. In addition, one of the matters that have been receiving attention over recent months is the members' porth. Members will recall that the Porth was established at members' request as an electronic location from which to gain easy access to information.
17. Members submitted many comments on the practicality of the portal, and gave ideas about what they wanted to see. In short, the ease of use of the portal could be improved (user friendly), but that it contained very useful information - especially for new Members.
18. These comments have led to the development of the 'new look' portal, which is far easier to use and has been constructed from the perspective of the members who use it, rather than the design staff.
19. A pilot site has been created, with the aim of sharing the portal with all members soon as it is ready. The main advantages of the new portal are:
 - Simple

- Visually easier to use
 - Aiming to look through the eyes of a new member (who is unfamiliar with the Council)
20. The Democratic Services Committee asks for 3 or 4 members from your midst who are willing to be introduced to the portal and to use it over time in order to feed comments back to the officers. We also request comments on how to launch and promote the portal in its new form.

RECOMMENDATION

21. Members of the Committee are asked to:
- Consider and approve the way forward
 - Identify a small Group of Elected Members to assist with a trial of the new Porth