

<b>Board/Committee:</b>	Policy & Organisation Board
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Work of Climate Change Board Task & Finish group on Board paper usage
<b>Author:</b>	Head of Corporate Policy and Community Safety
<b>Status:</b>	For Decision

## **Purpose**

To report back to the Board on the activities of the Task & Finish group on Board paper usage, which was established by the Climate Change Board.

## **Recommendation**

**That the Board notes the issues and approach considered by the Task & Finish Group on Board paper usage, as set out in this report, and gives delegated authority to the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to:**

- i) alter and formalise processes as required to allow Members to opt out of receiving paper copies of Board papers;**
- ii) procure any training required on an ongoing basis to support Members in using Modern.Gov to access Board papers.**

## **1.0 Background**

**1.1** Members have requested that the Council considers reducing paper use, including use by Boards. Reducing paper helps to minimise use of resource, waste and purchasing costs. Paper use by Council Boards was identified as a possible opportunity which would also demonstrate commitment from Members along with leadership by example.

**1.2** The Climate Change Board agreed on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022 to establish a Task and Finish group to consider opportunities to reduce paper use by Council Boards and report back within 6 months with its findings.

**1.3** Since the Climate Change Board has been discontinued, the Task and Finish group no longer exists. However the issues and approach to reducing paper use that it considered are set out below, to allow the work of the Task and Finish group to be considered by Members and taken forward should they wish to do so.

## **2.0 Overview**

**2.1** It is estimated that approximately 50,000 sheets of paper were used for Board agendas and report packs in 2021/22. Printing and delivery costs were approximately £5500, and associated greenhouse gas emissions were approximately 0.8 tCO<sub>2</sub>e.

- 2.2** It is possible that the reduction in number of Boards and number of Members per Board will reduce these figures; however it is currently too early to confidently predict the impact.
- 2.3** Hampshire County Council has operated a paperless Board system since 2017, with members and officers accessing digital copies of Board papers through the Modern.Gov app, which is produced by Civica. Gosport Borough Council already uses Modern.Gov to manage administration of Member data and Board meetings. Board documents are posted on Modern.Gov and are accessible through the app.
- 2.4** A few Members have opted out of receiving paper copies of reports, and access them either on Modern.Gov or on the corporate website. Members using the corporate website still receive paper copies of confidential reports, since these are not published on the website. Members who have opted out of paper copies also occasionally request paper copies of specific reports and appendices.
- 2.5** Report packs are also printed for officers attending Board meetings. Officers are able to access reports in Modern.Gov if they wish, or may have their own digital copies they can use.
- 2.6** The Task and Finish group recognised that there are potential accessibility issues which may cause difficulties in accessing digital copies of Board papers for some Members and officers. Digital copies can however provide significant accessibility benefits, such as the ability to change text or background colour, to enlarge text, or to use screen readers. There are also concerns that if the Council does not provide any paper copies, some Members and officers may print their own copies, which would be less sustainable than bulk printing by the Council.
- 2.7** Paper use for Council Boards, and the associated costs and greenhouse gas emissions, could therefore best be reduced initially by continuing to make paper copies available, but encouraging more Members and officers to opt out of these and access agendas and report packs digitally instead.
- 2.8** To facilitate this, and ensure Members can still be fully supported once a significant number have opted out of receiving paper copies, the Task and Finish group considered that an appropriate approach would be to introduce a defined opt out process for both Members and officers. It will also be necessary to address several issues that may otherwise reduce the number of Members and officers who opt out, or increase risks associated with doing so, as discussed below.

### **3.0 Issues to address**

#### **3.1.0 Confidential reports**

**3.1.1** Board reports may include confidential information, and it is important to ensure these can only be seen by Members attending the relevant Board meeting and officers supporting the meeting. Confidential reports are currently printed on pink paper. This allows any copies left unattended to be identified easily and shredded. It also helps Members and officers easily identify confidential reports in their possession and so avoid sharing them.

**3.1.2** Digital copies can only be accessed on Members' devices, and therefore the issue of unattended copies does not arise provided the devices are password or biometric protected. The opt out process should ensure that Members confirm this is the case and that they take responsibility for locking devices when not in use.

**3.1.3** There is potentially more risk of digital copies being shared accidentally. Confidential reports are identified as such with a watermark when viewed in or downloaded from Modern.Gov; however this may be less obvious when viewing only the link to a report or its filename. Given this increased risk, it would be advisable that as part of the opt out process, Members and officers are asked to confirm that they understand the confidentiality requirements, and take responsibility for avoiding any inappropriate sharing of reports.

**3.1.4** Since confidential reports are not available on the corporate website, strongly encouraging Members opting out of paper copies to access Board papers through Modern.Gov would help reduce administrative complexity, since they would then be fully opted out rather than requiring printed copies of confidential reports.

#### **3.2.0 Training**

**3.2.1** There is insufficient capacity to provide regular technical support to Members during meetings. Training in the use of the Modern.Gov app will therefore be valuable to help Members realise all its benefits and ensure its use does not have any negative impacts.

**3.2.2** However, even after training there would remain a possibility that Members may still require help on occasion. Officer training would therefore also be needed so that officers could support Members if required. Currently, Legal & Democratic services are familiar with the Modern.Gov back end administration platform, but not with the app that Members would use.

**3.2.3** Some Members are already familiar with the app and will not require training. For others, free videos and documents walking through the key features are available from Civica, which may be sufficient. Training needs and support demands on Democratic Services could also be reduced if Members who are familiar with the app are willing to provide training and support to others in their political group.

**3.2.4** If interactive training from Civica is required, a one-hour virtual training session for all Members and officers who need it would cost approximately £125. Alternatively, in-person training is available at a cost of approximately £900 for one day, which could include multiple training sessions as well as more informal support.

### **3.3.0** Equipment

**3.3.1** The Modern.Gov app requires devices running Windows 10, iOS 13 or Android 5.1 or later operating systems. The Council currently offers iPads to all Members, and Members who have older devices may need these to use the app.

**3.3.2** There may therefore be an increase in demand for Member iPads, which would require additional devices to be purchased. The cost per device is expected to be approximately £800. It is likely that that very few additional devices would be needed but this cannot be guaranteed.

### **3.4.0** Internet access

**3.4.1** Wifi signal strength and reliability in the Council Chamber are not currently sufficient to allow Board papers to be accessed online.

**3.4.2** In the longer term, further investigation into possible approaches and costs to improve internet access in the Council Chamber would be beneficial. However, given the likely timescale of such improvements, it may be preferred not to wait for this before implementing the opt out process.

**3.4.3** Instead, Members and officers could either access papers using a mobile data connection, or download them to their devices in advance of meetings. The opt out process should ensure that Members and officers are aware of this limitation, and confirm that they can access or download papers without additional support from officers, since there is no capacity in Democratic Services to provide such support.

### **3.5.0** FOI and subject access requests

- 3.5.1** Any annotations made to Board papers by Members or officers may be the subject of freedom of information requests. Any personal data recorded in annotations could also come under the purview of subject access requests under data protection legislation. It is the responsibility of individual Members to ensure they do not retain annotations that they would not wish to make public.
- 3.5.2** This is already the case with paper copies, but the default handling is for these to be returned to Democratic Services for shredding after each meeting. There is no equivalent mechanism that would allow digital copies or their annotations to be deleted by default.
- 3.5.3** It would therefore be advisable that as part of the opt out process, Members and officers are asked to confirm that they understand the potential FOI and data protection implications, and take responsibility for deleting papers or annotations as required.

### **3.6.0** Members' post

- 3.6.1** Post received for Members is currently delivered at the same time as Board papers. Members who have opted out will need to decide whether they wish to continue to have post hand delivered to them, or alternatively whether it should be held in the Town Hall for them to collect.
- 3.6.2** Delivery of post alongside Board paper deliveries would largely negate the cost and emissions savings due to transport (approximately 30% of total cost and 20% of total emissions) of accessing Board papers digitally. However it should be noted that the costs and emissions mostly depend on the number of miles per delivery round, which is only partially related to the number of Members requiring Board papers or post to be delivered.
- 3.6.3** Collection of post by Members could result in long delays, unless Members make additional journeys to the Town Hall for this purpose. Depending on their mode of transport, such additional journeys may again reduce the benefit of accessing Board papers digitally.

## **4.0** **Future direction**

- 4.1** It is inevitable that as more Members and officers opt out of receiving paper copies of Board papers, further issues will be identified. Once these have been addressed and use of digital copies is working smoothly, it would be possible to replace the opt out process with an opt in process requiring Members and officers to advise Democratic Services if they wish to receive paper copies. This would be likely to have a greater impact on the amount of paper used, although the expected impact should be reviewed again at the time to confirm whether this change would be worthwhile.

**4.2** A minor amendment to the Council's constitution would be required to enable a change to an opt in process, since it currently states that "a printed copy of the Summons and Agenda for any forthcoming meeting of the Council or any Board, sub-Board or Committee shall be available for collection from Democratic Services not less than 5 clear working days before such meeting."

## **5.0 Unavoidable paper copies**

**5.1** Regardless of whether Board papers are provided in digital form for Members, a small number of paper copies will need to be produced to comply with the Local Government Act 1972. These include copies for inspection held at the Town Hall, copies for members of the public attending meetings, and copies for the media if requested. Members may also wish the Council to continue printing paper copies to be held by libraries.

**5.2** Members of a Board unable to attend a meeting can be substituted by another Member. It may be the case that the Member unable to attend has opted out of paper copies but the substitute Member has not. In addition, substitute Members would not initially have access in Modern.Gov to the reports for the meeting, to ensure that confidential reports are only available to Members who need to see them.

**5.3** Substitutions are sometimes made at short notice, which would not allow time for Board papers to be printed or for Members to be given access to papers in Modern.Gov. It will therefore remain necessary to print a small number of spare copies to provide to substitute Members.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

**6.1** This report summarises the issues and approach considered by the Task & Finish group on Board paper usage. To take forward the work of the Task & Finish group, it is recommended that a process for both Members and officers to opt out of receiving paper copies of Board papers be introduced, and that if this proves successful, consideration be given in the future to replacing it with an opt in process.

**6.2** Several issues have been identified that could be addressed as part of the opt out process, to encourage more Members and officers to opt out and reduce associated risks and administrative workload.

**6.3** These changes should help to reduce the amount of paper required for Board meetings, and the associated costs and greenhouse gas emissions, although it will not be possible to eliminate all paper copies of Board papers.

<b>Financial Services comments:</b>	Any costs are expected to be managed within existing budgets.
<b>Legal Services comments:</b>	Contained within the report.
<b>Equality and Diversity:</b>	See Appendix 1.
<b>Climate Change implications:</b>	See Appendix 1.
<b>Crime and Disorder:</b>	N/A
<b>Service Improvement Plan implications:</b>	Actions required are already integrated into Service Plans.
<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	Decreasing paper use for Council Boards will help deliver the strategic priorities of responding to the challenges of climate change.
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	Low: some minor risks are discussed in the body of the report, and process changes needed to mitigate them identified.
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Appendices:</b>	
	Appendix 1 Integrated Impact Assessment
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