

**Report of the Chief Officer Democratic and Central Services**

**Report to Member Management Committee**

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012**

**Subject: The use of electronic equipment in Committee**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. The use, in committee, by elected members and officers, of electronic devices to read agendas or to use as note pads is a trend that is growing and is likely to continue. This has been recognised by Scrutiny chairs, who have experienced this in their respective Scrutiny Boards. This matter was discussed at a recent joint meeting of Scrutiny Chairs.
2. At present there are varying degrees of acceptance of this situation. Whilst there is some suspicion that such electronic devices may not always be used for the business in hand, there is a general recognition that future working practices will embrace the use of paperless technology.
3. With that in mind Scrutiny Chairs were of the opinion that a consistent approach should be adopted by all committee Chairs in terms of the advice given to elected Members and officers on the use of electronic devices in Committee and asked that this matter be considered by Member Management Committee.

**Recommendation**

4. Member Management Committee is asked to reflect on the issues which might arise from the use of electronic equipment in committee meetings and to consider whether advice to Chairs and/or Officers on the matter would be beneficial.

## 1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. This report discusses the growing use, by Members and officers of electronic equipment in Committee and seeks the views of Member Management Committee on the benefits of advice being provided to Chairs.

## 2. Background information

- 2.1 At a recent meeting of all Scrutiny Chairs, the issue of Members and officers using electronic equipment in committee was discussed.
- 2.2 Recognising that the future would be electronic note books and other such electronic devices, Scrutiny Chairs felt that there should be a consistent approach to the advice given by Chairs across all Committees and asked that the matter be brought before Member Management Committee for consideration.

## 3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The use, in committee, of electronic devices to read agendas or to use as note pads is a trend that is likely to continue. At present there are varying degrees of acceptance of this situation. Whilst there is some suspicion that such electronic devices may not always be used for the business in hand, there is a general recognition that future working practices will embrace the use of paperless technology.
- 3.2 At present the Constitution is silent on the use of electronic equipment in committees. However the order paper for full Council states; *“On the instructions of the Lord Mayor all Members’ mobile telephones and other electrical equipment shall be switched off when they are occupying their seats in the Chamber.”* This level of instruction is not given at other Committee meetings.
- 3.3 Core cities have been contacted to ascertain current practices. These are shown below. The overall picture is that electronic devices are allowed in Committee.

Authority	Current practice
Birmingham	Members and officers are welcome to bring electronic devices into meetings. Currently trialling in Planning using electronic devices instead of paper for reports
Bristol	Currently trialling tablet devices for exec members, members involved in scrutiny, senior officers and governance officers. No restrictions on using electronic devices in meetings.
Liverpool	Devices such as blackberries/phones are discouraged (Lord Mayor/Chair can single out and ask them to stop), but are currently trialling ipads in certain meetings instead of hard copies.
Manchester	All councillors have council-provided tablet devices, and officers are welcome to use laptops etc in meetings.
Newcastle	Currently updating policies regarding electronic devices, so no current restrictions in place.
Nottingham	No specific policies

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Current practice</b>
Sheffield	No specific policy/trials, but Members and officers are welcome to use their own laptops etc in meetings if they choose

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 This matter has been discussed at a joint meeting of all Scrutiny Chairs who asked that the matter be considered by this Committee

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration.**

4.2.1 Whilst no specific examples have been identified there is potential for the situation to arise in the future where an elected Member or officer is required to use electronic equipment in Committee in order to carry out their duties. The Council should be mindful of this potential when considering any future guidance with regard to the use of electronic equipment in Committees.

### **4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 There are no implications with regards to the Council's policies and City priorities

### **4.4 Resources and Value for Money**

4.4.1 Following a recent upgrade of the Council's Democratic Services Information system (Modern.gov), the Council has the capability to utilise 'App' based technologies to automate access to committee papers.

4.4.2 The technology allows for users to jump to items by using built in book marks and provides a simple means to highlight text, add notes or add free-hand comments. All comments etc can be accessed by a simple search facility and the system allows for annotated documents to be saved and/or emailed.

4.4.3 Whilst the 'App' technology is currently only available for 'open' items (rather than exempt information) – the direction of travel will allow for an extranet based service which would enable access for Members and Officers to both exempt and confidential information. Savings in the Council's committee print budget could be realised through adoption of this revised way of working.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 Regulation 4 (5) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, states that while a meeting is open to the public, any person attending the meeting for the purpose of reporting the proceedings is, so far as practicable, to be afforded reasonable facilities for taking their report.

4.5.2 Pragmatically those facilities would extend to all meetings of the authority, not just Executive meetings, and it may be difficult to sustain a position whereby the public (in so far as there were reporting on the business of a meeting) were permitted facilities to report electronically but members and officers were prevented from doing so.

## **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 The potential risk comes from Elected Members and officers challenging any decision not to allow the use of modern technology to carry out their duties in Committees.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 Member Management Committee is asked to reflect on the issues which might arise from the use of electronic equipment in committee meetings and to consider whether advice to Chairs and/or Officers on the matter would be beneficial.

## **6 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.