MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
REPORT

SUBJECT: **Council Chamber Meeting Software**
MEETING: **Democratic Services Committee**
DATE: **14 July 2025**
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 To provide the committee with an update on the upgrade to the Council Chamber and the software used to host Council meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the committee consider the advantages of the implementation of the new software and how it can be used to enhance the experience during the meeting and for residents.

3. REASONS:

3.1 In 2021 the Council Chamber was refurbished due to an increase in the number of councillors appointed to the Council and the existing equipment with the chamber used for meetings is coming to the end of its lifespan. New regulations coming into force in 2022 also mandated the requirement for councils to provide for councillors to attend meetings remotely and to ensure that as a minimum, meetings of Full Council were live streamed.

3.2 As a council, a policy of live streaming all public meetings where possible was adopted many years ago and those recordings are available on the councils Youtube channel. Similarly, changes were made to the constitution to allow the Council to adopt remote attendance well ahead of the legislative changes and many successful trials had already taken place to allow councillors to do so. It was however not without its challenges and required many time-consuming workarounds, including the use of external hardware, to run these successfully.

3.3 With that in mind, a full review of the requirements of the council chamber was undertaken both for council meetings as well as ordinary use as a meeting room which resulted in the current equipment being installed and future proof the council chamber for future upgrades.

3.4 At that time, the main suitable platform for hosting council meetings was Microsoft Teams. Zoom was used by some councils but was not adopted by Monmouthshire due to ICT concerns relating to the platform. Whilst there were options from external providers that could be used as a potential options, they were still in their infancy and offered little opportunity to tailor the system to our local needs or the costs of adopting those platforms were,

and continue to be, prohibitive. Additionally, there were little costs associated with Microsoft Teams due to it forming part of the Councils ICT arrangements and given the way technology was going to adapt in the years since the pandemic, offered a suitable holding position until a platform became available that could do what the Council required it to do. Unfortunately, development in this area since the pandemic has been relatively slow due to the small customer base that is able to utilise the software. Current regulations in England do not allow for remote attendance at meetings so it can only be utilised in Wales and Scotland which has led to slower development than expected.

3.5   Whilst Microsoft Teams and some of the functionality within it proved effective from the outset, the local elections in 2022 significantly altered the political balance of the Council and required greater auditing and information of the votes being cast at Council meetings. With that not available within Teams, it has resulted in a greater number of recorded votes being requested. Similarly, functionality used for meetings that could previously be relied upon have become unsupported and risk meetings not functioning as expected. Teams also does not interact with the equipment that is installed in the Council Chamber well and essentially means there are two meeting environments (in person and remotes) that somehow need to be brought together. There is also a lot of functionality within the new Council Chamber equipment that is not being fully utilised due to the interoperability issue.

3.6   As such, following a procurement exercise a new provider of meeting software, MVI Meeting Management, has been identified that can lead to significant improvements in the meeting experience for both councillors and for residents and will be installed during the August recess.

3.7   The new platform allows integration with the equipment in the Council Chamber and provides an interface for remotees similar to Microsoft Teams but also replicates the microphones in the Council Chamber. Importantly, all users will have access to the same functionality and be within the same environment regardless of whether they are remote or in person. It will also allow for users to be identified by type (officers / councillors / public) and set different roles within the meeting which is important for voting purposes.

3.8   Additionally, it will allow for a better end user experience on the live stream by including things such as agenda item titles, placeholder cards to identify who is speaking at a particular time and the option to display the voting results on the live stream once they are completed.

3.9   It has also been requested to have a timer displayed in the council chamber for speakers to be aware of the time limit available to them when debating an item. Clearly though, a device in the chamber will not be useful for those attending remotely and the platform allows for speaking times to be allocated to users which will display on the screen for all to see during the meeting regardless of where they are. This will also benefit the planning committee where there are strict restrictions on how long contributions on particular items can be.

3.10   Similarly, the new meeting software will allow for interaction with our software that manages the website and the publication of agendas and minutes. As discussed at the committee earlier this year, there was a desire to explore the option of publishing all councillors voting preferences on the website. The new meeting software will automatically record each councillors votes and send those results to our other software which can allow for greater publicity and transparency of voting preferences if that is something the committee wants to take forward.

3.11   The introduction of new software will obviously require new ways of working. On the whole, the meeting experience will be similar to the one that councillors are already used to. There will however be pre meeting set up such as placing an id card in the microphone to identify individual councillors or ensuring that your device is registered correctly to attend remotely. Given the uniqueness of each individual and their profile, sharing of joining links before meetings will not be possible and councillors will need to join through the link provided to them. The 'push to speak' functionality that is currently in place will also be removed and the chair will operate the switching of microphones when they are ready to invite the next speaker to give their contribution. Voting will also switch to pressing buttons on the microphones for those attending the meeting in person.

3.12   Currently Cardiff City Council and the Vale of Glamorgan have adopted this software for their council meetings. Examples of how the software can be utilised is available on their respective websites and the live streaming of their meetings.

3.13   Installation of the software is due to commence during the August recess alongside training for the staff operating the system. Following this an extensive testing a training plan will put in place for councillors to make them aware of how to use the software fully during meetings.

4.   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

4.1   Costs for the installation of the new software were met from a surplus in the services budget from the previous financial year. There is a small ongoing annual licence for the meeting software that will be met through in year budgets.

5.   CONSULTATION:
n/a

6.   BACKGROUND PAPERS:

n/a

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