

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

SUBJECT:	New Meeting Software
MEETING:	Democratic Services Committee
DATE:	20 July 2026
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	N/A

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To consider feedback from Councillors on the use of the new software for Council meetings and identify any areas for improvement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee consider the feedback received and consider any further actions that can be taken to mitigate any concerns or improve the overall user experience.

3. REASONS:

- 3.1 Since the start of the Covid pandemic, Microsoft Teams has been used to host remote attendance at Council meetings either fully remotely or in a hybrid situation as it has been for this term of Council. As ever with technology, as it progresses and functionality changes, the suitability of the software to meet the needs of the Council as well progress in other areas, meant that a review of the technology was required with a new meeting software implemented in recent months.
- 3.2 Additionally, this committee called for greater transparency, accountability and audits of the technology within the meeting environment with a view to being able to publish greater detail in relation to meetings included how members have voted in meetings.
- 3.3 A new meeting system was procured that meets the needs of hosting Council meetings whilst meeting the desires of members to allow greater transparency in the meeting process. This has been utilised at a number of committee meetings over the last few months with the biggest test being used at the June Full Council meeting.
- 3.4 Given that it was the first meeting where all members were present to use the software, feedback was sought from members on their experience and a summary is detailed at appendix A.
- 3.5 Overall, the user experience was positive but there were mixed opinions and experiences on similar issues in the feedback from members.

Positives

- Easy to use, particularly by those who attended the training
- Clear audio and stable meeting experience
- Voting was positive and straightforward
- Screen displays is a major improvement
- Meeting management improved with fewer interruptions

Negatives

- Absence of a gallery view is the main concern with the new system focusing on a single speaker. Lead to members attending remotely feeling disconnected with the chamber.
- Lack of chat function
- Visibility of order of speakers for those present in the meeting room
- Unnecessary and distracting for the chair to remain on screen
- Some blurred and low quality connections of remotees
- Some concerns around central control of microphones and participation

- 3.6 Some questions for the committee to consider with the pros and cons of it are below, however it may be worth a small task and finish group of 3 committee members, assessing the system in full to make the decisions for the council collectively.

Gallery View

A gallery view option is available with the system. Whilst it can show all remotees and the chamber in one picture, you will lose a lot of the functionality of the screen displays as there is not enough space on the screen for those to be clearly visible. All members, including the chamber will also be very small on the screen.

Chat Function

Members perceived the lack of a chat function as a negative aspect of the new system. There should be no background chat taking place during the meeting and contributions should be made through the chair and at the discretion of the chair. There is functionality embedded in the system to allow for remote members to get the chairs attention to raise points of order or point of personal explanation but again, allowing these is at the discretion of the Chair. The chat function was sometimes used for background chat between members that was not helpful to proceedings, distracting for the chair and as mentioned above, should be clearly made as a contribution to the meeting proceedings.

Chat therefore should only be used for requesting issues of support to Democratic Services and all members received an email ahead of the previous council meeting with details of who to contact to raise any issues and will continue to do so ahead of future council meetings.

Meeting Management

Some members raised concerns around their microphones not automatically being live once they press them whereas others members praised the new functionality and thought it improved the meeting experience. With any new system there will be different ways of doing things that some members may like or dislike. The technology within the new

system aligns with the constitution of the Council in that the chair has the power to manage the meeting as they see fit, can see the requests from members at all times and are able to make a decision based on that information as they wish.

Visibility of order of speakers within the meeting room

A new display is being progressed with the supplier to show on the screen to the right of the chamber the list of speakers, those wanting the chairs attention and live speakers with a timer alongside their name to display how long they have spoken for. This display mimics the information and display available to the chair throughout the meeting.

Remotees feeling disconnected

In the meetings where the system has been used ahead of Full Council, this feedback was received and is particularly heightened where a chair is attending the meeting remotely as the chamber camera shows very little of the chamber itself.

To that end, it was recommended to the chair to leave their camera on throughout the meeting so that remotees can see the chamber at all times. As above, for some members that was unnecessary and distracting and for the second half of the Full Council meeting we reverted to having the chairs camera off.

Feedback on experiences and a recommendation on the preferred option are welcomed but may need to be utilised more to fully understand the issue.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 There will be a small additional cost to implement the list of speakers display on the side screen of the Council Chamber currently being assessed.

5. CONSULTATION:

All Councillors

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

N/A

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