



Subject:	Electronic Voting at Council Meetings
Date:	17 th August, 2018
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To decide if a system of electronic voting should be introduced at Council meetings.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider if it wishes to introduce a system of electronic voting in the Council Chamber.• As the existing system would not provide Members, the public and the Press present at the meeting with information as to how each Member voted on a matter, the

	<p>Committee is recommended not to use this system as a replacement for the current procedure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Committee is minded to introduce an electronic voting system, then a further more detailed report would be presented to Committee setting out the exact costs and a possible time scale for its introduction. It should be noted that such costs would need to be included in the estimates for the next financial year and therefore the system would be unlikely to be installed prior to the local elections next May.
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Committee, at its meeting on 18th May, considered a proposal from Councillor Corr-Johnston that:</p> <p><i>“The Council agrees to explore the feasibility of and the costs associated with electronic voting and digital display at full council meetings. Through the mechanism of electronic voting Members would be enabled to cast their votes immediately and the results of which returned in a fraction of the time it takes to carry out a traditional recorded vote. Results would be displayed digitally through a large screen at the top of the chamber. A screen that could also be used to display proposals and amendments.”</i></p> <p>3.2 The Committee agreed that a report be produced examining the possibility of introducing such a system.</p> <p>3.3 The proposal which was made by Councillor Corr-Johnston referred to the introduction of such a system instead of the process currently employed when recorded votes are requested. Currently, the Council’s Standing Orders provide that any Member can request that any vote is taken by way of a recorded vote and the request alone is sufficient for that process to be employed. In a recorded vote, the division bell is sounded for 1 minute to allow any Member not present in the Council Chamber to return for the vote. At the expiration of the minute, the Chief Executive reads out the motion or amendment to be put to the vote. Then each Member’s name is called out and they respond with ‘for, ‘against’ or ‘no vote’. The votes are then counted and checked and the Chief Executive reads out the result. The names of the Members and how they voted are subsequently recorded in the minutes of the meeting.</p>

3.4	Typically, each recorded vote takes about 7 or 8 minutes to complete. Over the year from June 2017 till May 2018, a recorded vote was requested on 33 occasions, averaging 3 per meeting.
3.5	<p>In deciding whether to introduce a system of electronic voting, the Committee might wish to consider the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="320 510 1479 801">• The time taken for recorded votes at Council meetings (based upon the last Council year) is approximately 20 to 25 minutes on average. Using any electronic voting system will also take some time. For example, the ringing of a division bell to alert Members that a vote to be taken would still need to continue. The Committee might wish to consider if the time saved by using an electronic system is worth the cost of its purchase/installation.<li data-bbox="320 813 1479 1451">• If the Committee was to decide to introduce the system described in option 1 below then there would not be any way of verifying that the votes cast were by Members present. There would not be a systemic way of requiring a Member to log in to the system before registering a vote. It is not anticipated that any Member would seek to record a vote for another Member who was not present, however it is not possible for the system to verify this and it is always possible that the results of votes could be called into question. Also, the existing system does not provide an instant record of how each individual Member voted, therefore Members, the public and the Press present at the Council meeting would not know how any individual Member voted on a matter. The system software does provide a means of analysing the vote after the meeting to ascertain how each individual seat in the Chamber voted so it would be able to produce information to allow the minute to record he vote in the same way as is done currently.<li data-bbox="320 1462 1479 1664">• The introduction of an electronic voting system would be disruptive in that a degree of work would need to be undertaken to the fabric of the Council Chamber. Any changes to the fabric of the Chamber would need the approval of the Department for Communities, Historic Environment Division.
3.6	If the Committee is minded to support the introduction of an electronic voting system, then the following two options have been identified:

Option 1 - Install previously purchased voting panels

3.7 The Council already owns a very basic system which would provide for a form of electronic voting which was purchased at the time of the refurbishment of the City Hall which was completed in 2009. Obviously, this is a relatively old system which would not incorporate the most modern electronics and, as it has been in storage since it was purchased, there is no guarantee that the units would all be in working order.

Functions

3.8 Basic voting control for parliamentary voting procedure. Members can register:

- 'Present', 'Yes', 'No' and 'Abstain'.
- A separate Chairperson/Clerk unit can start, stop and suspend the voting.
- A page function which activates a voting tone. With this tone the Chairperson can indicate that a voting round is about to start
- The result will only provide the numbers who voted 'Yes', 'No' and 'Abstain' but will not indicate how each individual Member voted

Display

3.9 The existing voting panels can display six lines of text on display screens around the chamber when the vote has concluded:

Voting timer

Number of Members present

Number of Members who voted 'Yes'

Number of Members who voted 'No'.

Number of Members who voted 'Abstain'.

Number of Members who did not vote.

3.10 **Costs**

Costs for using this system will include purchasing display screens (c. £2,000 each) and installation of the panels (work could be done in-house).

3.11 **Restrictions**

- No user verification
- No ability to display the text of the vote
- No graphical display of the results of the vote
- Display screens must be mobile and cannot be fixed to the walls in the Chamber

<p>3.12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No graphical display as to how each individual Member voted <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installing the voting panel into each existing mic panel in the Chamber • Replacing the Lord Mayor’s mic unit completely • Placing a screen in the chamber with associated cabling
<p>3.13</p>	<p><u>Option2 - Purchase new voting system</u></p> <p>Property maintenance have suggested the Bosch Dicientis Conference range which is currently used at the Scottish Parliament and the European Commission. This system, at the top end of the range, provides units with a 7” touch screen and would replace both the current microphone unit and its wooden mount at each bench. A new platform would be made for each bench to hold the new units, with space for the Councillors’ table PCs.</p>
<p>3.14</p>	<p>Functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated mic, voting and display unit • ‘Present’, ‘Yes’, ‘No’ and ‘Abstain’ voting options • A separate Chairperson/Clerk unit can start, stop and suspend the voting. Councillors can change their vote until the voting session has closed • Text of vote can be displayed on screens around the chamber • User verification via NFC swipe card for each vote
<p>3.15</p>	<p>Display</p> <p>Graphical displays can be presented at the conclusion of the voting session displaying the results by party/group, total, Yes/No/Abstain – as a list, bar chart, pie chart or seating plan. This could be displayed on screens around the chamber and on the screens built into the voting units, if the top of the range units are bought. The voting unit screens could also be used to show presentations, agenda items, text or video. However, if the less expensive units are purchased which don’t have a screen on each unit then the results would only be displayed on the large screens in the Chamber. It might be very difficult for Members, the public and the Press present to clearly see how each individual Member voted on a particular matter.</p>
<p>3.16</p>	<p>Cost</p> <p>May cost between £103,000 and £120,000 depending on which version of the Bosch system is purchased (Multimedia 7” touchscreen, touchscreen or voting only)</p>

3.17	<p>Restrictions</p> <p>Display screens must be mobile and cannot be fixed to the walls in the Chamber.</p>
3.18	<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing mic units and mounts would be removed and replaced with a flat platform to hold the new mic/voting units with space for the Councillors' tablet PCs • A new PC installed at the Clerks' desk to control the voting system, input text, call/suspend/close voting session and tally results. This could potentially have the added benefit of the existing sound system in the VIP gallery being removed and the Webcasting system moving into that corner to make more space. • New mic/voting units would be collected after each meeting to charge/for safe storage – would need an extra half hour of officer's time before and after each meeting • Placing a screen in the chamber with associated cabling
3.19	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The cost of option 1 would be approximately £4,000 for 2 display screens plus the in-house costs of carrying out the work to the benches at each Member's seat. This cost could be met from within existing budgets.</p> <p>The cost of option 2 is estimated to be between £103,000 and £120,000. There is not any budget set aside for this and if this option is preferred then the costs would need to be included in the estimates for 2019/20.</p>
3.20	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Document Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>