

Council Procedure Rules and Electronic Voting

21 June 2023

Report of the Monitoring Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek a decision regarding the use of the electronic voting system now available in the Council Chamber.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That Council approves the use of electronic voting for public meetings held in the Council Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall and agrees the draft protocol for the use of e-voting appended to this report.**
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend the Constitution as set out in paragraph (2.4) of the report.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council recently acquired professional livestreaming system, new microphones and four large screens in the Council Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall. The system is equipped with an electronic voting function which could replace the traditional show of hands.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed to introduce electronic voting at the meetings of the City Council held in the Council Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall. E-voting can be used without livestreaming although, subject to future decisions and the success of livestreaming Council meetings, livestreaming could be widened to all public meetings of Council Committees held in the Council Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall. The equipment is static and only available in the Council Chamber, not any other rooms at Morecambe Town Hall or at Lancaster Town Hall.
- 2.2 It should be noted that it may not be appropriate to livestream one or two Committees which mostly receive exempt items (such as the People and Organisational Development and the Standards Committees) however these meetings currently meet at Lancaster Town Hall anyway.
- 2.3 The voting buttons are on the screen of the new microphone units. There is one microphone between two Councillors according to the seating plan with voting on each side of the unit. Councillors will use their ID badges to log in for each meeting and this will record how they vote. If the meeting is livestreamed, then the camera will move to the Councillor speaking as soon as they switch on their

microphone and the name of the Councillor logged in and speaking will come up on the screen for the viewers.

- 2.4 Rules 19.3 and 19.4 of the Council Procedure Rules state:

19.3 Show of Hands

Unless a recorded vote is demanded under Rule 19.4, the Chair will take the vote by show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.

19.4 Recorded Vote

If 10 Councillors present at the meeting or in the case of a Committee one sixth of those present, rounded up if necessary with a minimum number of three, indicate their support for a recorded vote by standing (or if unable to stand, by otherwise indicating), the Proper Officer shall take the vote by calling the names of Councillors and recording whether they vote for or against the motion or amendment or abstain from voting in writing and this shall be entered into the Minutes.

- 2.4 If Council is minded to use e-voting where the option is available, then the Monitoring Officer could be authorised to amend Rules 19.3 and 19.4 above, to read:

19.3 Electronic Voting and Show of Hands

Unless a recorded vote is demanded under Rule 19.4, electronic voting will be the method used where available and at the discretion of the Chair. If electronic voting is not used, the Chair will take the vote by show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.

19.4 Recorded Vote

If 10 Councillors present at the meeting or in the case of a Committee one sixth of those present, rounded up if necessary with a minimum number of three, indicate their support for a recorded vote by standing (or if unable to stand, by otherwise indicating), the clerk shall record in writing whether each Councillor votes electronically for or against the motion or abstains from voting and this shall be entered into the minutes.

If the facility for electronic voting is not available, the Proper Officer shall take the vote by calling the names of Councillors and recording whether they vote for or against the motion or amendment or abstain from voting in writing and this shall be entered into the Minutes.

A draft protocol for inclusion in the Constitution is also appended for Council to consider.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Council is asked to make a decision regarding moving towards electronic voting for meetings held in the Council chamber at Morecambe Town Hall.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing): Forward thinking Councils now livestream their meetings if they are able. This aids transparency and accessibility to the public who, if they have access to the online livestream, no longer have to be present in the room to hear and see proceedings.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

As set out in the report, the current Constitution does not allow for e-voting and would need to be amended if Council is minded to use the new e-voting facility.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: None identified, there is no extra charge for using e-voting, it comes with the package that has already been purchased.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces: None identified

DEPUTY SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Council's Constitution, published on the website www.lancaster.gov.uk

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APPENDIX

Draft Protocol on E-Voting in the Council Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall

1. Each Member will have a desk unit (one unit between two Councillors at Council meetings held in the Chamber at Morecambe Town Hall) and will use their Council issued identity pass to login in and register their attendance at the start of the meeting. Councillors must log out and in again should they need to leave the room for any reason and return.
2. Each unit houses a microphone, an LCD screen and buttons on each side of the screen to allow up to two Councillors sitting either side of the unit to vote for a motion, against a motion, or abstain from voting.
3. To ensure there is a consistent approach for the operation of electronic voting, it is recommended that the following procedure will be followed:
 - a. The Mayor/Chair will confirm that all are clear about the motion to be voted upon and declare when the vote is open.
 - b. The vote will be open for 20 seconds and Members must cast their vote in this time. Members can change their vote while the vote is open. However, their vote cannot be altered once the vote has been closed.
 - c. The Mayor/Chair will announce that the vote is closing and confirm the vote is closed after 20 seconds have passed.
 - d. The outcome of the vote will be displayed on television screens in the Chamber. The clerk will check the number of votes cast does not exceed the number of Members in attendance and then the Mayor/Chair will announce the outcome of the vote.
 - e. The vote will only take effect once the outcome is confirmed by the Mayor/Chair.
4. The Mayor/Chair may decide at any time to discontinue use of the electronic voting system if satisfied that it is not working correctly. If the Mayor/Chair considers that there has been any malfunction of the equipment or any incorrect use of it, s/he may require or allow the vote to be retaken, either electronically or by show of hands.
5. If the vote is tied and the Mayor/Chair needs to make a casting vote, the casting vote shall be made verbally.