

Report – Policy and Resources Committee

Electronic Voting

To be presented on Thursday 9th March 2023

*To the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons of the
City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

This report presents a recommendation from your Policy and Resources Committee to purchase a portable hardware solution, at a cost of no more than £10,000 (to be met from the 2022/23 Policy Contingency Fund), that will enable an electronic voting system to be adopted by the Court of Common Council for use during Divisions.

Subject to approval, it is proposed that the electronic voting system be tested in training sessions with Members through March and April and a proposal to amend Standing Order 14 be presented at your April meeting. This would allow for e-voting for Divisions to take effect as of the May Court of Common Council meeting.

MAIN REPORT

Background

On the 8th December 2023, this Honourable Court passed a motion instructing the Policy and Resources Committee to investigate the viability of introducing an electronic voting system, capable of recording individual votes, that would replace the current voting procedure as laid out in paragraph 4 of Standing Order No.14 — and to return to Court no later than April 2023 with its recommendations.

Current Position

At its meeting on 23rd February, your Policy and Resources Committee considered a series of options, including fixed units, a software only solution and a portable hardware solution.

Upon review, the Committee agreed to support proposals for a portable hardware solution. These systems are comprised of portable electronic devices (clickers) for making votes, and software that needs installing on one device to collate and display these votes.

This option has low purchase and ongoing support costs. The identified system under this option, produced by Meridia, would cost around £6,020 (\$7,415USD) to purchase with 12-months of support and training; annual support costs, an optional addition, are around £400 (\$495USD). These costs are to be met by the Policy Contingency Fund. The purchase of new display screens is not included in these costs.

The Meridia system uses a radio receiver that connects with portable electronic voting

devices (clickers). The devices' use of radio frequency means that the system does not require an internet connection to be operable. The clickers have a green 'Yes' button, a red 'No' button and a yellow 'Abs' button. Once a button has been clicked, it is immediately communicated to the receiver; Members will have the option to change their vote by clicking another button until voting on an item has closed.

Accessibility has been considered, with some Members having been provided access to the example handsets provided as part of early user testing. Clickers would include braille on the "Yes" "No" and "Abstain" buttons to assist those with any visual impairment.

Meridia's software allows for visual vote confirmation, which will allow Members in the room to review and confirm the votes cast once voting is closed. This will require screens to be present during Court meetings.

While the specific Court instruction was to explore the introduction of e-voting to support Divisions, it would be pragmatic to also consider its broader extension to all voting matters should the technology prove efficient and easy-to-use. It is your Committee's intentions, therefore, to keep the matter under review.

Subject to this Honourable Court's instruction, it is proposed that the electronic voting system be tested in training sessions with Members through March and April and, subject to satisfactory performance, a proposal to amend Standing Order 14 will be presented at your 27 April meeting.

The revised Standing Order proposals will retain the existing non-electronic Divisions mechanism, which can be used in the event that the e-voting system is not functioning. The revised Standing Order will also provide for Members the ability to contest the vote recorded in their name.

Should the Court approve its adoption and Standing Order changes, e-voting for Divisions would take effect as of the May Court

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Court:-

- consider and agree the purchase of a portable hardware solution to enable the electronic voting at the Court of Common Council;
- note that subject to successful testing in coming months, changes to the Standing Orders will be brought forward in April 2023, with formal adoption of the new procedures to take effect from May 2023.

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 23rd Day of February 2023

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Christopher Michael Hayward
Chairman, Policy & Resources Committee