

## DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	19 MARCH 2018	6
<b>WEB CONFERENCING TECHNOLOGY</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

### SUMMARY

The report provides details of the on-going work undertaken by the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) on the trialling 'Google hangouts'. Google Hangouts is one of many communication platforms/tools that are available on the market for web conferencing. This particular product which was tested by the MDSG includes instant messaging, video chat, SMS (Short Message Service) and VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) features. The report also makes reference to opportunities to explore other web conferencing technology generally available.

For the past 8 months, the 'video chat' element of 'Google Hangouts' has been tested/trialled by Councillor Mark Bamforth in conjunction with the Member Development Steering Group at informal office meetings; meetings of the MDSG and at the monthly briefing sessions for members in the Reception Room and Porritt Room at the Town Hall. In view of the fact that the trial has been tested for an 8 month period, it is considered appropriate to present an interim report to the Finance and Democracy Committee.

The MDSG are scheduled to meet on 9 March to give further consideration to the trial and the way forward. Some of the considerations to date are summarised in the report. A verbal update on the outcome of the 9 March meeting will be given by the Chairman of the MDSG, Councillor Ed Nash, to the Committee.

Of relevance to this matter, on 19 June 2017, the Finance and Democracy Committee extended the remit of the Member Development Steering Group to include 'member wellbeing'. The 'Working with Councillors with Disabilities' document (previously approved) was subsequently retitled and updated by the MDSG on 1 Dec 2017 to reflect how the Council will recognise and support member wellbeing. The updated document is also presented to the Finance and Democracy Committee for approval at Appendix 1 of the report.

There is an ongoing commitment to optimise the most appropriate technical solutions to enable members to participate as fully as possible in meetings, taking into account the legislation and the practical constraints involved in running meetings.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To consider the recommendations of the MDSG held on 9 March with a view to determining the most appropriate method of extending web conferencing technology to other meetings as appropriate.
2. To approve the updated version of the Working with Councillors with Disabilities and Welfare Document.

### SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

**Full Council – 3 April 2017** - To request that the Member Development Steering Group consider extending its remit to include member wellbeing.

**Finance and Democracy Committee – 19 June 2017** - Agreed to extend the remit of the Member Development Steering Group to include 'member wellbeing and to update the 'Working with Councillors with Disability Policy Document' as deemed appropriate and to support the on-going work of the MDSG

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services ( <b>Value for Money</b> )	√
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council ( <b>Clean and Green</b> )	√
Working with all partners ( <b>Vibrant Economy</b> )	
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live ( <b>A Great Place to Live</b> )	
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit ( <b>A Great Place to Visit</b> )	

## REPORT

- Over the last 8 months, the Member Development Steering Group has been trialling the 'video chat' element of 'google hangouts' with Councillor Mark Bamforth. 'Google Hangouts' is one of many communication platforms/tools that are available on the market for web conferencing which allows individuals have a group conversation online in an informal or formal meeting setting. In view of the fact that the trial has been tested for an 8 month period, it is considered appropriate to present an interim report to the Finance and Democracy Committee.
- The trial has taken place in the Reception Room or in the Porritt Room at meetings of the Member Development Steering Group and the monthly Briefing sessions for members. It has also been tested in an informal office meeting setting. The MDSG were conscious that the right environment for testing any web conferencing product would be the new Council Chamber but at the time of the trial, this meeting room was not available. The testing in the Council Chamber will provide the MDSG with an opportunity to draw on experiences/challenges to date.
- Separate to the above but of relevance, on 19 June 2017, the Finance and Democracy Committee extended the remit of the Member Development Steering Group to include 'member wellbeing'. The 'Working with Councillor with Disabilities' document (previously approved) was subsequently retitled 'Working with Councillor with Disabilities and Councillor Welfare' and updated by the MDSG on 1 Dec 2017 to reflect how the Council will recognise and support member wellbeing. The policy on members with disabilities sets out the arrangements that are in place to assist with the particular needs of councillors who have a disability with the aim of complying with the duties in the Equality Act 2010. A copy of the updated document is also presented to the Finance and Democracy Committee for approval at Appendix 1.
- An extract from the updated 'Working with Councillors with Disabilities and Welfare Policy' documents is set out below:  

"As a council, we will look to:

  - Remove or minimise any disadvantages members may have because of their disability.
  - Take steps to meet the needs of people with disabilities that are different to needs of people who don't.
  - Take steps to encourage people with disabilities to get involved in public life or any activity in which their participation is disproportionately low".
- Amongst other things, at the meeting of the MDSG in December the Group recommended the following:
  - To endeavour to advise the Council on supporting and enabling members to participate fully in the business of the council.
  - To look at ways in which the new Council Chamber and current committee rooms will cater for those with disabilities.
  - To undertake an ongoing review the 'Working with Councillor with Disabilities' document as appropriate with a view to identifying how the Council will recognise and support member wellbeing.
- There is an ongoing commitment to optimise the most appropriate technical solutions to enable members to participate as fully as possible in meetings, taking into account the legislation and the practical constraints involved in running meetings. The testing of the product in other meeting rooms in the Town Hall was not ideal and the long term vision was to use the most appropriate web conferencing technology (whatever that may be) in the new Council Chamber.

7. The new Council Chamber has the facility for the webcasting of Council meetings live but for legislative reasons does not allow remote voting. In addition, there is a facility to use web conferencing technology. Google Hangouts and other web conferencing platforms will be further tested/explored in the Council Chamber for the first time by the MDSG at its meeting on 9 March/future meetings.
8. The evaluation of the initiative is to try to understand what technology offers the best pathway to achieving that objective. Google Hangouts was one of the web conferencing options used. Whilst the experience was not seamless, it was acknowledged that we are not bound to specific solutions and it would be prudent to explore other options that are fit for purpose in the new Council Chamber. Whatever method is chosen for formal meetings, it must not interfere in any material way with the proper conduct of the meeting.
9. Given that the new Council Chamber is now officially in use, it would seem appropriate to ask the MDSG to continue with the trial of web conferencing in the Chamber with a view to providing feedback generally and suggestions regarding the introduction of a formal/informal set of procedures for web conferencing for consideration by the Finance and Democracy Committee.
10. Members are reminded that Standing Order 22 (a) of the Rules of Procedure of the Constitution states that:  
*"Members of the Council may attend any Committee or Sub-committee even if they are not a member of it and may address the committee once on each item being considered by the committee, but must not otherwise take part in the proceedings without the consent of the Chairman, and must not vote"*  
 The above Standing Order would give a member the ability be involved in the meeting remotely and to address the committee with the consent of the Chairman. But the relevant legislation would not allow such involvement to be formally counted as attendance and would not allow a member not physically present in the meeting room to vote.
11. In light of the above, members of the MDSG, at their meeting on 9 March, are invited to consider if it would now be timely to extend this opportunity via the web conferencing facility to the various committees of the Council. Councillor Nash will update members on the deliberations of the MDSG verbally at the Finance and Democracy Committee.
12. In the interests of inclusivity, the MDSG will continue to work on alternative solutions which might arise to ensure all members are able to participate as fully as possible in meetings of the Council.
13. The issue of attendance at full Council meetings in this manner would require further consideration to consider if any adjustment was necessary, or otherwise, to the Council's Standing Orders.

IMPLICATIONS		
Finance	The Council has an open source software platform so no ongoing costs such as licensing etc. In terms of hardware these costs are covered within the existing "Purchase of computer equipment" and are not specific to members or staff.	
Legal	None arising directly from the report	
Community Safety	None arising directly from the report.	
Human Rights and Equalities	None arising directly from the report	
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None arising directly from the report.	
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None arising directly from the report.	
LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
Lyndsey Lacey- Simone	01253 658504	Feb 2018
BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Council Minutes	3/04/17	<a href="https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/Committees.aspx">https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/Committees.aspx</a>
MDSG notes	19/05/17	Democratic Services Section

#### **Appendix 1: Working with Councillors with Disabilities and Councillor Welfare**