

**Report To:** Council

**Date of Meeting:** 4 June 2013

**Lead Member / Officer:** Head of Legal and Democratic Services

**Report Author:** Head of Legal and Democratic Services

**Title:** Electronic Voting System

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**1. What is the report about?**

1.1 The operation of the electronic voting system in the Council Chamber and the constitutional implications of changing the way in which it is used.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1 To provide information regarding the operation of the electronic voting system, requests that have been made for information from the system and the implications of changing the way in which the system is used.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

3.1 That Council decides as to the future operation of the electronic voting system in the Council Chamber, on access to the voting records produced and any necessary amendments to the Council's standing orders.

**4. Report details.**

4.1 The Council's Standing Orders set out the way in which voting takes place at meetings of the Council or its committees. The Standing Orders provide for voting to take place by way of a show of hands or affirmation of the meeting. The majority of meetings are held in meeting rooms other than the Council Chamber in County Hall where there are no electronic voting facilities. Only Full Council and Planning Committee regularly meet in the Council Chamber.

4.2. The electronic voting system in County Hall's Chamber is used to produce quick, accurate numbers of members voting for, against or abstaining on a motion. The system also records the way that each member casts their vote and those records are occasionally requested by councillors, the press and members of the public. Owing to the use made of the voting system, the Council is currently unlikely to release information of individual votes cast (even following a Freedom of Information Act request) because the Council cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information.

4.3 Because the electronic voting system is only used to record the number of votes cast for, against or to abstain in respect of any matter to be decided at a

meeting extra precautions would have to be in place to guarantee the accuracy of the record of votes allocated to named councillors. These would include procedures to ensure that members never moved from an allocated seat (or that their voting card always moved with them) and thorough checks being made on the issuing of voting cards to eliminate any possibility of errors. Councillors might also have to assume responsibility for ensuring they have been allocated the correct voting card. As these measures are not needed to allow the voting system to accurately count the number of votes cast they have not been introduced and the electronic record of individual votes cast is viewed as a by-product of the system; not a guaranteed record. It should be noted that the additional precautions could be introduced if public access to the named voting records is agreed by Council, but this should not be retrospective i.e. for any meetings held prior to the extra measures.

4.4 There is already a procedure in the Standing Orders for recording the way votes are cast, which involves each councillor declaring how they are voting. This is called a recorded vote. A recorded vote will be taken where one sixth of the members present demand it. The results of a recorded vote will be set out in the minutes of the relevant meeting.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

This decision does not impact directly on the corporate priorities.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

There are no additional costs directly associated with this report.

## **7. What consultations have been carried out and has an Equality Impact Assessment Screening been undertaken?**

### Consultations

7.1 The electronic voting records and procedures have been considered by the Corporate Governance Committee on the 10 April 2013 and the group leaders on the 3 May 2013. The Committee and group leaders were in favour of allowing public access to the electronic records of how members voted as it supported openness and transparency, but also wanted all members to be aware of the issues involved.

### Equality Impact Assessment

7.2 An equality impact assessment assesses the likely impact of decisions on people who share protected characteristics. The issues covered in this report are not considered to have any impact and a formal assessment has therefore not been undertaken.

## **8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

There are no obvious financial implications arising from this report.

## **9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

This report outlines the risks attached to making the electronic voting records available to the public. The report also highlights the measures that would be needed if the Council decides to make the records available in the future.

## **10. Power to make the Decision**

### **10.1 Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) Regulations 2006**