

Collaborative Working

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” Henry Ford

Collaborative working, the act of two or more individuals or organisations working together for a particular purpose, is crucial for councils now more than ever. Used well, IT can help harness the cloud, moving towards a paperless administration, bringing efficiencies, cost savings and better collaboration.

Using a combination of cloud office software such as Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace, together with cloud administration software like AdvantEDGE and Epitaph, enables effective collaboration between officers, councillors, suppliers, and external organisations. This enables work from the office, home or on the move using a mobile, tablet or laptop.

Online Meetings

Traditionally face to face meetings allow all parties to collaborate. Meetings are more effective than conference phone calls partly because body language and facial expressions matter. However, during the pandemic meetings are held online, using a variety of video conferencing products and sometimes using mobile phones. Online meetings are becoming easier to master with better features, allowing more regular, effective collaboration without travel time and associated costs. As a result, post pandemic, we will almost certainly continue to use online meetings, also having the benefit of reducing carbon footprints.

Which Video Conferencing Tool?

Do not pay extra for 3rd party video conferencing products if the upgrade to your existing office software meets your needs. If you use Microsoft Office or 365, use Microsoft Teams by upgrading to Microsoft 365 Business Standard or Premium. Alternatively, if you use Google Workspace, formerly G Suite, use Google Meet.

Shared Online Documents

By utilising the correct tools, people working together can share required documents and even work together on them simultaneously. What is the best way of distributing documents and simplifying GDPR compliance?

- (1) Store documents online.
- (2) Email links to online documents rather than printing/posting or emailing copies of documents.
- (3) Ideally provide a council email address for each councillor e.g. use Microsoft 365 Business Basic.
- (4) Consider providing tablets for councillors to access documents during face to face meetings.

Using your website to publish public documents is necessary, but care is needed when publishing internal documents for meetings unless you have invested in a secure, document management system for your website. Instead, this is where Microsoft 365 comes in.

Microsoft 365 Business

All documents can be stored online using SharePoint, and meeting documents can be grouped in a folder, which is then shared by creating links. These (hyper) links work when clicked in an email, PDF or via a website. Go even further by using the Teams software to coordinate all online collaboration with a “team” for each committee and a “channel” for each working group. The members of each team and channel can attend online scheduled or ad hoc meetings, share documents without having to email links and participate in online discussions using “chat”.

TIP to publish a link in a printed document, use the free version of **www.bitly.com** to create a short link that is easily typed into a web browser.

Private Online Documents

Consider providing a private, online area for each councillor to store files and documents which avoids the security issues of councillors using private accounts and devices. For instance, by using Microsoft 365 Business Basic, a councillor’s private OneDrive area would be owned by your council and it will assist with GDPR compliance, especially when the councillor leaves the council.

Although we are not able to meet in the same space today, we can do so much more by using IT creatively.

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”
Helen Keller

EDGE are ready to help your council collaborate more efficiently by leveraging our 29 years of experience supplying IT solutions to Local Councils including our comprehensive range of 11 software modules and Microsoft 365.