

North Yorkshire County Council
Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

28 April 2014

Video Conferencing Covering Report

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report asks the Committee to:

- a. Note the information in this report.
- b. Note the information in the attached final report on Video Conferencing attached as Appendix 1
- c. Consider the Recommendations to the Executive set out in section 9 of the report on Video Conferencing

2.0 Background

County Councillor Tim Swales has been working with officers since November 2013 to look at an appropriate communications solution for the County Council. This has led to an in depth look at video conferencing.

3.0 Draft final report on Video Conferencing

The draft final report from Cllr Swales is attached at Appendix 1 for your consideration. Cllr Swales asks that you consider the information in the report and the recommendations for the Executive set out at section 9.

4.0 Executive Report

The Executive will consider this final report on Tuesday 29th April 2014. Due to the deadline for reports this will mean that the Executive will see this report before it has been formally agreed by this Committee. All comments and any amendments from this Committee will be presented to the Executive at their meeting.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 The Committee is asked to:

- a. Note the information in this report.
- b. Note the information in the attached final report on Video Conferencing attached as Appendix 1
- c. Agree or amend the Recommendations to the Executive set out in section 9 of the report on Video Conferencing

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Background Documents:	None
Annex:	Appendix 1 – Final Report on Video Conferencing



North

Yorkshire County Council

Corporate & Partnerships
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Video Conferencing Solutions
Draft Final Report



April 2014

Video Conferencing Solutions

Draft Final Report

1.0 Background

The County Council has had video conferencing units installed in offices around the county since 2007. However, the units had not been heavily used and due to various reasons they were not reliable so they were removed.

At the Corporate & Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 1st November 2013 Members agreed that the Chairman County Councillor Tim Swales should work with officers to look at the options around communication solutions. This is an innovative approach to a scrutiny review task group which provided a sounding board for officers and allowed for the Members' perspective to be included in all considerations.

The focus of the review has been to look at a solution that would promote communication, increase productivity, save money and reduce the need to travel (and reduce associated carbon emissions) as much as possible. Video conferencing is a solution that can address all of these areas.

2.0 Why a video conferencing solution?

What are the benefits of video conferencing?

There are many benefits associated with the use of a video conferencing solution including that it;

- Reduces travel costs
- Increases productivity
- Provides an intermediate step between a phone call and a face-to-face visit.
- Can involve multiple sites simultaneously
- Allows many people to interactively participate immediately
- Responds to immediate communication needs
- Provides a focused, precise, and concise communications tool;
- Simplifies access to either mandatory or optional training
- Projects an up-to-date, new image for the organisation
- Allows meetings to be recorded and archived easily
- Accelerates decision making
- Allows the transmission of graphic, written or computer-generated material
- Future proofs the communication needs of the Authority with the capability to provide video link communications with external partners and the public

What are the drawbacks of video conferencing?

- Gaining cultural acceptance of its use; both Members and officers willingness and discipline to make it work
- Challenges around chairing a meeting

Whilst accepting that there are challenges to implementing a video conferencing solution it would seem the positives far outweigh the negatives. I am not advocating using video conferencing for all meetings. It has to be used when appropriate

3.0 What do we want from a video conferencing solution?

If we accept that a video conferencing solution is the way forward in order to achieve the benefits outlined in section 2.0 above we have to be clear about what we want it to do.

- One to One Video
- One to Many Video (for example this could be used for training)
- Many to Many
- Across all sites on the NYCC network
- Conference Room functionality
- Secure meetings
- Ease of Use, pre book and auto set-up
- Ability to share documents during video conference/desktop sharing
- Facility to record video conferences
- High Definition Quality
- Remote set-up
- Easy to use
- Reliable
- Tamper proof set-up
- Ability to link up to others outside of the NYCC network

4.0 What do our partners think?

I sought the views of the County Council's Head of ICT Architecture and the Emergency Planning Manager as well as from Health, North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and District and Borough Councils. There was a general consensus that it would be helpful to be able to join up easily and quickly via video conferencing, that of course it could not replace all meetings but that used appropriately it could benefit all partners.

Discussions have also taken place with those District and Borough Councils whose Members use a 'tablet' device to see if they would be able to use this for video conferencing with NYCC. Those Districts and Boroughs that have supplied 'tablet' devices to their members are happy for them to use them to connect to the NYCC for video conferences

5.0 Demonstration & Pilot

It was important to see first-hand how a video conferencing solution could work for the County Council when the previous system had failed to achieve benefits. First impressions were very good and I could see how progress had been made in the accessibility of the new system. It addressed our needs outlined in section 2.0 above and also made me think again about its possible uses. This was a system that could not only be used for internal meetings and briefings but there is potential in the future to use it for other communication needs for example in emergency planning incidents, or for highways and property inspections, for linking up social workers and service users with officers in County Hall, for encouraging the involvement of young people in their own Youth Council and Young

People's Council meetings and of course for linking up with other Local Authorities across the country to learn from best practise in a variety of areas.

To test the feasibility of the solution further a discreet pilot was undertaken. County Councillors Val Arnold and Carl Les and myself, linked up with officers for the mid cycle briefing of the Corporate & Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It highlighted some areas for further work such as ensuring that meetings were secure, the accessibility to view documents simultaneously and the need for protocols to ensure the smooth running of the meeting but with these matters addressed it reaffirmed my belief that video conferencing is the way forward.

A further test of the system was used for the mid cycle briefing of the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillors Elizabeth Shields and Tony Hall and officers from County Hall with Councillors Joe Plant and John Ritchie joining the meeting from the East Coast on their tablet devices. The meeting worked well and allowed a meeting to take place that might otherwise have had to be cancelled as well as saving the Councillors three hours of travelling each!

6.0 What could a solution look like?

Imagine a video conferencing solution that could be accessed via any computer with internet access and a webcam or even through your smart phone or your tablet device. With the flexibility to be used informally or to have a screen and meeting space arranged for a productive meeting. An easily accessible and usable system that is simple to arrange and intuitive to use. One that provides flexibility and goes some way to future proof our communication needs and allows us to invite anyone to participate in meetings not just those who are part of the County Council. That is the solution that can be offered.

7.0 Indicative savings and costs

Indicative Savings

Whatever solution is agreed it has to provide savings to our current practice of travelling to meetings. It has to provide savings of time and money as well as supporting the County Council's determination to reduce our carbon footprint. I have undertaken some preliminary work on what these savings could be and they are attached to this report at Annex A. These are of course an example of indicative savings but in looking at using video conferencing for the mid cycle briefings and task group meetings of Overview and Scrutiny it may be possible to achieve savings in the region of nearly £6,000 in mileage claims (based on a total of 40 meetings/briefings), a total of nearly two weeks on the road and just over 5 tonnes of carbon emissions. These figures are looking from a Members perspective the savings of officer time and travel would also need to be taken into account and this increases the potential savings still further.

A report has been run from the Resourcelink system for the period 1st January to 31st December 2013 which shows that there had been over 23,000 mileages claims for a total in excess of 1 million miles at the mileage rate of 40p per mile this is an annual cost of £415,000. Whilst it is clear that not all essential travel can be replaced with video conferencing if we took a conservative estimate that 10% of this mileage could be replaced with video conferencing it would provide an annual saving of over £40,000 per annum and save a significant amount of member and officer time.

In order to drive the use of video conferencing and realise the savings outlined above the County Council would need to consider the policy we currently have for paying mileage. There needs to be a commitment from all officers and members to use video conferencing where possible and not to arrange meetings where travel is required. Overview and Scrutiny should also consider that mid cycle briefings will automatically use video conferencing unless there is a good reason for not doing so. The Scrutiny Board should monitor and encourage the use of video conferencing for all briefings.

Indicative Costs

Of course any savings that are made have to be balanced against the cost of introducing and maintaining the solution.

The costs are made up of two components, the first is the infrastructure to join up all parties attending the video conference, the second is the boardroom video conferencing equipment (screen, camera, microphone). Previously the infrastructure to join everyone up has been bought and installed onsite in the councils Data Centre, this presents a significant cost in the region of £70,000. However, it is proposed to use an externally hosted offering which will cost £4,440 for a year which offers far more flexibility.

The boardroom equipment ranges in price depending on the requirements, £11,000 to £25,000 per unit.

8.0 Next steps

The next step for Jon Learoyd the County Council's Head of ICT Architecture (as the County Councils officer with delegated responsibility) is to procure an externally hosted video conferencing solution. This will be for an initial period of one year to provide more opportunity to embed its use across the authority and with partners. A review of the required boardroom equipment will be required and a small number of key locations identified. There will be a standard format for the system but with the flexibility to adapt to meet any increased demand.

Further thought is also needed in (in no particular order) :

- Leadership – a mandate that video conferencing will be used for all appropriate meetings / briefings
- Instruction on how to use the system
- Protocols when to use the system – before booking a pool car – before booking a room – the question to be asked whether video conferencing can be used
- Ensuring the security of meetings
- Protocols for chairing a meeting
- Communications to encourage a culture change with both Members and officers
- further work on looking at the opportunities for its wider use (more than just for briefings)
- Equipment; consideration for some officers to have a web cam with their office computer, when considering replacements for equipment that is due to be renewed, for both officers and Members, video conferencing should be included when looking at what that replacement should be.

- Monitoring and review – we need to ensure that the equipment is being used and that officers and Members are accountable. To facilitate this a review of the current mileage policy and consideration of reporting its usage. It would also be helpful to look at a sample of meetings taking place and the question asked whether video conferencing would have been appropriate.

The Corporate & Partnerships O&SC would welcome the opportunity to review the use of the video conferencing solution and progress on the areas outlined above.

9.0 Recommendations

The Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee make the following recommendations to the Executive:

- 1. note the information in this report**
- 2. note the intention of the Head of ICT Architecture to secure a video conferencing solution for an initial period of one year**
- 3. agree the further work to be undertaken outlined at section 8 above including a review of the policy for paying mileage to attend meetings**

County Councillor Tim Swales

Chairman Corporate & Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

ANNEX A - Video Conferencing – Indicative Savings

Table 1 Examples of Overview and Scrutiny Meetings that could be done through video conferencing

Meeting	Number of meetings per year	Number of Members involved at each meeting	Comment
O&S Mid Cycle Briefing	20	5/6	There are 5 Committees each holding a mid cycle briefing 4 times per year
O&S Task Group Meeting	20	4	On average each Committee undertakes 1 review per year. Each review has about 4 meetings

Table 2 Examples (totals for 4 meetings)

Meeting	Members at each meeting	Total mileage ¹	Total Travel time	carbon emissions ²	mileage claim at 40p per mile
Example O&SC Mid cycle ³	6	1,438	36 hours 24 mins travelling	0.51 tonnes	£575.20
Example O&S Task Group ⁴	5	1,524	39 hours 36 mins travelling	0.54 tonnes	£609.60

These are indicative amounts and would vary for each Committee depending on the home location of each Member and the number of Members involved. These figures do not take into account officers' time.

Table 3 Based on the indicative figures above the savings that might be achieved through video conferencing per year

Meeting	Number of meetings	Total mileage	Total Travel time	carbon emissions	mileage claim at 40p per mile
O&S Mid cycle briefing	20	7,190	182 hours	2.55	£2,876
Task Group	20	7,620	198 hours	2.7	£3,048
Totals	40	14,810	380 hours (over 2 weeks on the road!)	5.25	£5,924

This paper shows examples of two types of O&S meeting that could use video conferencing. There are other formal and informal O&S meetings where video conferencing might also be used so the savings are potentially greater than suggested here.

There are also other benefits to consider:

- Potential for reduced cancellation of meetings due to adverse weather conditions
- Increased availability of Members if travel time does not have to be factored in
- Reduction in risks associated with driving
- More Inclusive - Larger Participation

¹ Mileage and travel times calculated using Google maps

² <http://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>

³ Based on mid cycle briefings of Corporate & Partnerships O&SC

⁴ Based on Task Group meetings of Young People O&SC