

	<b>LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC &amp; GOVERNANCE PORTFOLIO</b>  <b>23 DECEMBER 2019</b>	
	<b>Key Decision</b> <b>NO</b>	
	<b>Cabinet Portfolio Holder</b> <b>Cllr Tony Randerson</b>	
	<b>Date of Decision/ Referral to O&amp;S</b>	<b>23 December 2019</b>
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>  <b>All</b>	<b>Deadline for call-in 5pm</b>	<b>30 December 2019</b>
	<b>Implementation Date (if no call-in)</b>	<b>31 December 2019</b>

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (LD) – 19/240

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

### **SUBJECT: REVIEW OF WEBCASTING**

#### **RECOMMENDATION (S):**

- (i) to approve the recommended changes to webcasting provision of meetings in the Council Chamber, which comprises meetings of the Council, the Cabinet, Planning and Development Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Board, and other formal committee meetings held in the Council Chamber;
- (ii) to approve that the current contract with Public-i not be renewed when it expires in May 2020;
- (iii) to approve the capital investment required to purchase the necessary equipment for the recommended provision after May 2020; and
- (iv) to approve the new Protocol on Webcasting, Reporting on and Filming Meetings attached as Appendix 3 to the report.

#### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):**

- To build on the existing promotion of local democracy, and the transparency and community engagement in the democratic process achieved through

webcasting meetings of the Cabinet, Council and Planning and Development Committee by extending webcasting to all formal committee meetings in the Council Chamber.

- To create significant savings for the Council moving forwards, and improve the support to webcasting via internal ICT services.

## **HIGHLIGHTED RISKS:**

See Risk Matrix

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Council recognises that accountability, openness and transparency are critical to gaining public trust in the authority's decision making.
- 1.2 Using a range of different methods, an increasing number of local authorities are webcasting ('web broadcasting') their formal committee meetings, enabling access to the Council's proceedings by residents and others who would otherwise not attend meetings.
- 1.3 Webcasting uses streaming technology to distribute video and audio coverage of a meeting/event. By using webcasting, Council meetings can be accessed live or subsequently by anyone with a computer and internet access, anywhere in the world. Broadcasting meetings in this way encourages engagement and feedback, and overcomes exclusion: transcriptions can be made available to the hard of hearing, translations to minority groups, and residents with reading difficulties can see and hear a streamed video.
- 1.4 Webcasting puts everything on record, it is easy to check exactly what was said and ensures minute taking is more efficient and reliable whilst discouraging inaccurate reporting. It is a cost effective way to reach a large audience on key issues.
- 1.5 In 2014, the Council entered into a contract with an external provider, Public-i, to webcast Cabinet and Council meetings (see Cabinet Report 14/175 – Webcasting Council Meetings, 20 May 2014). After installation of the equipment, extensive testing and training of staff and councillors, the first meeting to be webcast publicly was the Cabinet meeting held on 17 February 2015. The service was extended to meetings of the Planning and Development Committee in autumn 2017. It was also used on an ad hoc basis in September 2018 to webcast two scrutiny task group meetings on the Cinder Track review in which there was much public interest. In May 2019, the contract with Public-i was renewed for a further year until the end of May 2020. This has enabled the Council to review the service and undertake an options appraisal.

- 1.6 As technology has advanced and webcasting has grown in popularity since the commencement of the Public-i contract, officers have considered whether the existing contract gives value for money, and whether alternative delivery methods and options could be more cost effective. The recommended alternative needs to be approved early enough for procurement, installation and testing of new kit and process ahead of May 2020.

## 2. CORPORATE AIMS

- 2.1 The proposed decision supports all of the Council's Corporate Aims by improving the organisation. Webcasting of Council meetings can contribute to promoting local democracy and increasing community engagement by increasing citizens' awareness of the democratic process.

## 3. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 3.1 The introduction of webcasting opened up the Council's democratic and decision making process, providing transparency to the public and others unable to attend Council meetings. It was unknown at the time what the demand would be. Public-i provide continuously updated figures of the number of views (both live and archive) of the Council's webcasts. Views are the number of times a webcast has been played. The view must be for a minimum of one minute. A visit is recognised as each time someone lands on a webcast player page. Webcasts are available for view on the Council's website for a period of six months.
- 3.2 As at the end of October 2019, there have been 16,516 views of the Council's webcasts amounting to a total length of viewing of 5478.9 hours. The total number of visits for the same period was 30,941. Of this total about 32% (9900 views) were internal. The meeting with highest number of views (more than three times the second highest) was the full Council meeting held on 9 January 2017 when Members considered the proposed demolition of the Futurist Theatre and adjoining buildings and stabilisation of the cliff. This meeting attracted a total of 1545 views (1018 live and 527 archive), and 5018 visits. The total length of viewing for this meeting was 965 hours, 33 minutes. About 13% of the views of that webcast were internal.
- 3.3 Each month, Public-i provide a webcast report update. For example, for the month of September 2019, there were three webcast meetings. As at 31 October 2019, the figures read:

Meeting	Total number of views	Total length of viewing
Cabinet, 3 September Duration: 47 mins	62 (16 live + 46 archive)	13 hours 58 mins
Planning & Development, 5 September Duration: 45 mins	47 (7 live + 40 archive)	8 hours 38 mins
Council, 16 September Duration: 1 hour 30 mins	224 (35 live + 189 archive)	96 hours 42 mins

- 3.4 The existing contract is limited to 50 hours of broadcasting time per year, which has been more than sufficient for webcasting meetings of Full Council, Cabinet and the Planning & Development Committee. There is a clear appetite among councillors for more formal, public meetings to be webcast as evidenced by a recent discussion at full Council when the Portfolio Holder for Legal, Democratic and Governance undertook to look into the matter.
- 3.5 The current one-year contract with Public-i costs £15,874. A contract for a longer term would cost less per annum, but the value would increase in proportion to the maximum number of webcasting hours to accommodate more committee meetings.
- 3.6 Public-i, as part of their contract, offer support for technical issues. Unfortunately, these have been frequent over the last five years with repeated problems with the broadband connection (which have now been resolved), occasional issues with software updates, but ongoing difficulties with camera automation to the microphones and the webcast of corresponding plans at meetings of the Planning and Development Committee. Remote testing of each webcast is carried out by Public-i usually an hour before the meeting, but resolution of problems such as camera automation can be very time-consuming, taking up much Democratic Officer time, both before and after the meeting. As internal ICT services were not the support contact for the software or hardware, their ability to help or intervene has remained limited.

## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Discussion has taken place with the Portfolio Holder about the options appraisal and best way forward.

## **5. ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 Over recent years the streaming and storing of videos on the internet has grown in popularity among individuals and organisations alike. This has been made possible through social media and platforms such as YouTube, whilst the kit required to achieve such streaming has become more affordable and accessible to the average user.
- 5.2 Democratic Services have been working with ICT in recent months to explore other councils' approaches, including alternative in-house delivery models. Some authorities are using Public-i (paying similar rates), others are using competitor providers, whilst others have moved to internal provision – some video and audio, and others just audio. Based on that research and further consideration of viable alternatives, an options appraisal has been prepared at Appendix 2.
- 5.3 The options, in brief comprise the following:
- Option 1 - stop webcasting altogether, both audio and visual

Option 2 - continue with current arrangements

Option 3 - use alternative method of webcasting via internal ICT Services

Option 4 - move to audio only webcasting

**of which the recommended option is Option 3.**

- 5.4 The pros and cons of Option 3 are set out in Appendix 2. In summary, this option delivers a high quality streaming service of council meetings with unlimited storage at a fraction of the cost of the current service, with less testing and preparation required for each meeting, and internal ICT support on hand should any technical issues arise.
- 5.5 The only downside is that Option 3 does not offer as sophisticated functionality as Public-i. Public-i enables the cameras to track the microphones so that when the microphone is activated, the camera focuses on the speaker and the screen displays their name. Option 3 works on the basis of two largely static camera positions, thereby reducing the number of possible camera angles. Through Public-i viewers can refer to the corresponding report or presentation whilst watching the video for that item, and they can also click on agenda items and skip to the relevant part of the video to watch. The ability to maintain some of this functionality through the recommended option is possible, by 'time stamping' a video with agenda items allowing a user still to click to the part they want to watch. Although the ability to view reports and presentations in separate screens will be lost, the proposed option does allow multi-screen projection into one screen (the one the viewers would watch) where both the camera footage and the presentation can be seen.
- 5.6 However, the recommended Option 3 still delivers on the Council's aspiration to be open, transparent and accountable, by both improving the quality of the video, and significantly increasing the number of meetings webcast.
- 5.7 Introduction of a new in-house method of webcasting also provides an opportunity to review the current webcasting protocol ensuring the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Data Protection Act/GDPR and the Human Rights Act 1998, whilst explaining the rights of the press and public to report on or record meetings of the Council, including through the use of social media. The new, revised Protocol on Webcasting, Reporting on and Filming Meetings is attached at Appendix 3.
- 5.8 Currently, meeting webcasts are available on the Council's website for a period of six months, after which they are archived. Since webcasting and the retention of film do not replace the formal record of the meeting and the decisions made, it is proposed under the new protocol that instead webcasts are made available on the Council's website for a period of 12 months, after which they are destroyed. 12 months provides a reasonable time for the public to access historical material on the website, whilst removing the archive step and making webcasts easier to access for a longer period than at present.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

### Policy

- 6.1 See below

### Legal

- 6.2 The new revised protocol reflects the need for the Council to take account of any Data Protection and Human Rights implications.

### Financial

- 6.3 The recommended Option 3 (a £6,530 one-off capital investment) delivers a significant saving on the current cost of the service of £15,874 p.a.

### Equalities and Diversity

- 6.4 Webcasting can benefit people with disabilities and other sections of the community who may be unable to attend meetings, but who, through this medium, may be able to access the proceedings.

### Planning

- 6.5 The proposed Action Plan provides adequate time for ICT officers to agree with the Local Planning Authority a solution which is acceptable in planning terms in the setting of a Grade II listed building.

### Other

- 6.6 I have considered whether Staffing Implications, Crime and Disorder Implications, Health and Safety implications, or Environmental implications arise from this report and am satisfied that there is no identified implication that will arise from this decision.

## 7. ACTION PLAN

- 7.1 The following plan is proposed:

Stage	Timescale
Cabinet Member approves new in house webcasting service	December 2019
ICT Services procure, test and install new ICT equipment	January - March 2020

Staff training	April/May 2020
Introduction of in house webcasting service	1 June 2020



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**Background Papers:**

None

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES ABOUT THIS REPORT OR WISH TO INSPECT ANY OF THE BACKGROUND PAPERS, PLEASE CONTACT ST JOHN HARRIS, CONTACT DETAILS ABOVE.

Risk Matrix

Risk Ref	Date	Risk	Consequences	Mitigation	Current Risk Score	Target Score	Service Unit Manager/ Responsible Officer	Action Plan
1	Dec 2019	Cease webcasting	<p>Lost opportunity to enhance public access to local democracy, at a time when other authorities are moving forward, thereby affecting the reputation of the Council</p> <p>Exclude citizens who rely on sub-titles</p>	Adoption of Option 3 in the report	C3	B2	S Harris	As in report
2	Dec 2019	Inadequate in house resources to support webcasting and provide timely and efficient technical support	Technical problems which end up consuming valuable Democratic Officer time and which may damage the Council's reputation	Adoption of Option 3 in the report	D3	B2	S Harris	As in report



**Glossary of Terms**

Risk	An event which may prevent the Council achieving its objectives
Consequences	The outcome if the risk materialised
Mitigation	The processes and procedures that are in place to reduce the risk
Current Risk Score	The likelihood and impact score with the current mitigation measures in place
Corporate Objectives	An assessment of the Corporate Objectives that are affected by the risk identified.
Target Risk Score	The likelihood and impact score that the Council is aiming to achieve
Service Unit Manager	The Service Unit or Officer responsible for managing the risk
Action Plan	The proposed actions to be implemented in order to reduce the risk to the target score

*Risk Scoring*

Impact	5					
	4					
	3					
	2					
	1					
		A	B	C	D	E
	Likelihood					

Likelihood:

- A = Very Low
- B = Not Likely
- C = Likely
- D = Very Likely
- E = Almost Certain

Impact

- 1 = Low
- 2 = Minor
- 3 = Medium
- 4 = Major
- 5 = Disaster