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Report of the City Solicitor

Report to General Purposes Committee

Date: 12th May 2015

Subject: Webcasting of Council and Committee Meetings

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	☐	Yes	☒	No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☐	Yes	☒	No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	☐	Yes	☒	No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	☐	Yes	☒	No

1.0   Purpose of this report

1.1   This report sets out background and provides information on the webcasting of Council meetings during the last Municipal Year.

1.2   The purpose of the report is to:

1.2.1   Seek approval to continue with webcasting for Council meetings for a further 12 months by way of an extension to the existing contract with Public-i. and, if so, asks Members to determine the period of time by which the existing contract should be extended.

1.2.2   Seek approval for the trialling of webcasting technologies (for Executive Board and Plans Panels) within the new committee facilities on the west wing of the Civic Hall – with a view for a proposal being brought back to this committee in due course.

2   Background information

2.1   At the meeting of 18th June 2013 General Purposes Committee agreed to proposals to introduce webcasting for the 2013-14 municipal year. In July the Chief Officer Elections, Licensing and Registration entered into a contract for the supply of webcasting services for a period of 12 months with an option to extend for a further maximum period of 4 years. This committee agreed in May 2014 to Webcasting arrangements being further 12 month period.

2.2 Member Management Committee approved a protocol for webcasting Council meetings at its meeting of 23rd October 2012.

3 Main issues

Full Council

3.1 The original report to General Purposes Committee gave information about webcasting and explained how the technique could give live access to view Council meetings over the internet using a small number of fixed cameras linked to the Council Chamber conference management system. The technology allows access to the public agenda papers and reports alongside the video screen.

3.2 The report outlined some of the potential benefits including: increasing public awareness of local democracy; strengthening democratic accountability; more open transparent decision making; and encouraging public involvement. The facility would also provide the ability to view Council meetings live from another location, use the archive to replay meetings, or parts of the meeting, at a later date, search for and view particular speakers or agenda items.

3.3 The viewing data from the meetings webcast to date are set out below in table one. This shows a total over 25,000 viewing 'instances' across each all of the meetings – over 10,000 more than when reported to Members in May last year. What continues to be apparent is that the archived material remains relevant for the public after the 'Live' council event, with viewing figures continuing to rise a number of months after a meeting has taken place.

Table 1 Webcasting data from Full Council

Date of meeting	Live Viewings	Archive Viewing	Total
28th November 2012	0	918	918
8th May 2013	588	2703	3291
11th September 2013[1]	54	756	810
	456	2922	3378
13th November 2013	319	1854	2173
15th January 2014	193	1097	1290

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[1] Honorary Alderman and Ordinary Meeting

Date of meeting	Live Viewings	Archive Viewing	Total
26th February 2014	567	1443	2010
26th March 2014	329	1449	1778
9th June 2014	21	690	711
2nd July 2014[2]	86	438	524
	173	1880	2053
10th September 2014[3]	49	333	382
	95	591	686
12th November 2014[4]	17	241	258
	249	1116	1365
14th January 2015	492	1018	1510
25th February 2015	555	643	1198
1st April 2015	433	427	860
Total	4676	20519	25195

3.4 Last year the webcasting provider commented that the viewing figures, whilst very good (given the small amount of promotion), could be further enhanced by the use of social media during the meeting – for example placing live notifications of particular items in the meeting with a link to the webcast player (which is hosted on Leeds.gov.uk).

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[2] Extraordinary meeting of Council to welcome Tour de France and Ordinary meeting
[3] Admittance of name of Beryl Burton OBE as Honorary Freeman of City of Leeds and Ordinary meeting
[4] Admittance of Honorary Freeman and Ordinary meeting

3.5   Our Communications team have, over recent meetings, facilitated further promotion of the Council Meeting, with the items under debate, and the availability of viewing via the webcast, being promoted through social media channels. This has significantly contributed to the increased number of live viewings of the meetings. For future meetings the Communications Team also intend to tag tweets during the Council meeting with #LeedsCouncil – in order to further extend reach and engagement.

3.6   Members are asked to consider the data presented in table 1 and agree that present webcasting arrangements for full Council be extended for a further period of 12 months.

        New Civic Hall Committee Facilities

3.7   In July 2014 Executive Board approved a scheme for the redevelopment of committee facilities within the Civic Hall. Part of the scheme includes new audio visual equipment which is capable of recording meetings and supporting the expansion of webcasting capability into the Council's principle committee room.

3.8   Member's views are sought on whether, in the first instance, and subject ultimately to affordability, live webcast coverage be extended to include meetings of the Executive Board and the City Plans Panel.

3.9   If Members are supportive of such an approach officers recommend that a range of solutions be trialled/examined and that these be tested in advance of a further report being provided to this committee (setting out the webcasting costs and the officer and other internal resources required to support the extension of webcasting to the new committee room).

4   Corporate Considerations

4.1   Consultation and Engagement

4.1.3   The issues around webcasting have been discussed both formally and informally with Members through Member Management Committee, Whips meetings and through this committee.

4.1.4   Group Leaders have been canvassed for their views on whether webcasting should continue. The unanimous view by those that have responded (and expressed a view at the time of writing this report) is that Webcasting should continue.

4.1.5   There has been no public consultation about whether webcasting should continue – however the viewing figures give a reasonable proxy indicator of interest in accessing the Council meeting via webcast technology.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening assessment was originally completed and reported to Members in June 2013. This showed that webcasting can provide an alternative method to access Council meetings for people with disabilities and has the potential to give wider access to all citizens and communities to local democracy.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Providing access to live council meetings over the internet helps to contribute to achieving our values. The proposals contained in this report to explore opportunities to extend webcasting to meetings of both Executive Board and City Plans, will help contribute to our Best Council Plan commitments to better engage and better connect with the public.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 Previous reports to General Purposes Committee established that the costs of a managed service such as that used for the two trial meetings would be in the region of £16k for coverage of Council meetings for a municipal year. This includes leased hardware, software, project and account management support, and full hosting of all content.

4.4.2 The costs of extending the existing contract for one year (based on a maximum of 60 hours webcasting) are £ 16,369.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 A protocol for the use of webcasting was approved by Member Management Committee on 23rd October 2012 and has been used for the two trial webcasts.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 The technical risks associated with this project have been managed between ICT, Democratic Services and Facilities Management.

4.6.2 The adoption of a full-managed service on an annual basis will reduce any risks relating to equipment and limit the requirement for an initial large investment. It also provides the opportunity to review the webcast service to take account of public comment and views following a period of operation.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Webcasting Council meetings has demonstrated that there is an interest in accessing live feeds from Council meetings over the internet. The last twelve months has provided the opportunity to see the potential for improving public awareness, participation and engagement with the Council as an important part of local democracy.

5.2   A decision is now required about whether the Council wishes to continue to webcast its Council meetings and also if there is in principle support to expand webcasting to meetings of the Executive Board and City Plans Panels.

6   Recommendations

6.1   General Purposes Committee is asked to;

a) Consider whether Council meetings should continue to be webcast and, if so, approve the Officer recommendation for an extension for a further 12 month period to 1st September 2016.

b) Consider whether an expansion to, in the first instance, and subject ultimately to affordability, live webcast coverage being extended to meetings of the Executive Board and City Plans Panel is supported and if so;

a. Agree that a trial of webcast solutions for the new committee facility be undertaken and;

b. Request a further report, following the completion of the trials, setting out costed options for the expansion of webcasting to the new committee facility.

7   Background documents[5]

7.1   None

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[5] The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.