

**Report of the City Solicitor**

**Report to General Purposes Committee**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

**Subject: Extension of Webcasting**

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

**1.0 Purpose of this report**

1.1 This report provides an update on the outcome of two trial webcasts in the newly refurbished committee room and seeks General Purposes Committee's agreement to extend live webcasting to meetings of the Executive Board.

**2 Background information**

2.1 At the meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015 General Purposes Committee agreed that two trial webcasts be undertaken from Committee 6&7; one of a meeting of City Plans Panel and one of Executive Board.

**3 Main issues**

3.1 In November a webcast trial was undertaken of a meeting of City Plans Panel – this webcast was not broadcast live and was undertaken, in order to test the market, by a different provider to that operating from the Council Chamber.

3.2 Unfortunately the webcast encountered some technical difficulties. The support facilities available from this provider did not enable the recording to be recovered quickly which resulted in a segment of the meeting being missed.

- 3.3 In addition Members and planning officers have expressed some concerns about the practicalities of webcasting Plans Panel meetings – the concerns being that;
- The proceedings of Panels allow for members of the public to present and answer panel questions and that reasonably permission would need to be sought in advance to broadcast. If permission was not given then the webcast would have to be paused;
  - Where exempt information is considered at a Plans Panel this is considered at each relevant agenda point (unlike Executive Board where Exempt information is considered at the end of each meeting) – this would significantly disrupt the webcast and be to the detriment of the recording.
- 3.4 On the basis of this feedback it is not proposed to extend webcasting to City Plans Panel and nor is it recommended to further explore the market at this time.
- 3.5 A further trial webcast, of Executive Board, was carried out in December. This webcast was undertaken by Public-I; the provider of webcasting services in the Council Chamber.
- 3.6 This webcast was successfully recorded, enabled the synching of meeting agendas and benefitted from on-line and real time back-office support from the companies head office. One observation made by Public-I was that the quality of the council's internet connection in the new room necessitated a reduced bandwidth being used (which in turn had an impact on video quality). This is something which ICT are currently looking to address.
- 3.7 The feedback from this trial indicates that the format of Executive Board does lend itself well to the webcasting format and, if webcasting were to be extended to this meeting, this would further enhance public access to the council's decision making processes; strengthen democratic accountability and allow for more open transparent decision making.
- 3.8 The facility will enable Executive Board meetings to be viewed 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.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 The issues around webcasting have been discussed both formally and informally with Members through Member Management Committee, Whips meetings and through this committee.
- 4.1.2 There has been no public consultation about whether webcasting should continue – however the increasing viewing figures previously reported to committee continue to give a 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 meetings live over the internet helps to contribute to achieving our values. The proposals contained in this report are to extend webcasting to meetings of Executive Board – this 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 60 hours for council meetings per annum. In July 2013 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 up to a further period of 4 years – in effect providing a framework with the existing provider until July 2018.
- 4.4.2 Full Council, on average, utilises around two thirds of the available webcast hours. The proposal to extend webcasting to the Executive Board will use a further 20-25 webcasting hours per annum. Public-I has confirmed that whilst this would marginally exceed the contracted 60 hours this will not attract any further costs to the council under the terms of the existing agreement.
- 4.4.3 However, a small additional cost will be incurred to purchase a further annual license (at a cost of £1,925) and a one-off fee of approximately £2k will be incurred to purchase a webcasting encoder for the new committee room. Both these costs can be funded from efficiencies achieved in the use of existing resources.
- 4.4.4 It is on the basis of the above that the officer recommendation is, subject to the agreement of General Purposes Committee to extend webcasting to meetings of the Executive Board, to appoint Public-I to provide webcast services to the new committee facility (under the existing agreement which expires in July 2018).

## **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 A contract already exists with Public-I for webcast services. The procurement of an additional license and encoder will be made in accordance with Contracts Procedure Rule 7.1.
- 4.5.2 A protocol for the use of webcasting was approved by Member Management Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> 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. ICT are in the process of installing dedicated broadband connections to both the new committee room and the Council Chamber for broadband, this will provide greater resilience to the arrangements for webcasting.
- 4.6.2 Virgin Media have a lead time of 65 working days to install the dedicated line from date of order (which was just prior to Christmas). If the 65 days were taken then Virgin would be obliged to have the line installed by the 5th April at the latest. To manage the risk the existing tactical solution within Committee Room 6-7 can be used, although, as described in paragraph 3.6, this would be via an internet connection with reduced bandwidth which reduces the quality of the video stream.
- 4.6.3 The adoption of a full-managed service will reduce any risks relating to equipment and limit the requirement for an initial large investment. It also provides the opportunity to continue to regularly review the webcast service and take account of public comment and views.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 Webcasting meetings has demonstrated that there is an interest in accessing live feeds from meetings over the internet and 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. The two trial webcasts have enabled an assessment of the suitability of the meeting formats of our two principle decision making meetings for webcasting.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 General Purposes Committee is asked to agree that;
- Webcasting facilities be extended to the new committee room facility as set out in paragraph 4.4;
  - The Chief Information Technology Officer ensures that enhanced Internet access is installed into the new committee room;
  - Meetings of Executive Board are webcast as soon as is possible and by no later than the meeting of the Board in April 2016.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> 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.