

Report of Chief Officer Democratic and Central Services

Report to Member Management Committee

Date: 4th June 2013

Subject: Webcasting of Council Meetings

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

Summary of main issues

At the meeting of 30th August 2012 General Purposes Committee considered a report on the potential for webcasting Council meetings. The report provided an overview of webcasting, outlined the potential benefits, provided information on the experience of other authorities, and outlined options for the introduction of webcasting for Council meetings.

Committee agreed to a trial webcast of the State of the City Council meeting held on 28th November 2011. The meeting was in two parts with workshops in between and not suitable for live webcasting but it was made available the following day. The general view of Members and Officers is that the webcast worked well and that the quality of the end product was good. The archive coverage has been viewed 872 times.

The Council meeting of 8th May 2013 was webcast live and accessed live 588 times. In its archive form it has been viewed 454 times. The viewing numbers for both events were achieved with very little publicity or promotion. The technology worked well with no difficulties in the live environment.

The two trials demonstrated that it is possible to provide good quality live webcasts of Council and provided the opportunity to see the potential for improving public awareness, participation and engagement with the Council and local democracy. Estimated costs are in the region of £16k for a managed service covering Council meetings for a municipal year and this can be funded in the 2013/14 budget.

Recommendations

Member Management Committee views are requested prior to General Purposes Committee considering whether Council meetings should be webcast over the next municipal year.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the background and provides information on the proposal to webcast Council meetings and provides information on two trial webcasts which have taken place.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to seek Member Management Committee comments and views prior to referring the matter to General Purposes Committee for a decision on whether Council meetings should be webcast on a more regular basis.

2 Background information

- 2.1 At its meeting of 30th August 2012 General Purposes Committee considered a report on the potential for webcasting Council meetings. The report provided an overview of webcasting, outlined the potential benefits, provided information on the experience of other authorities, and outlined options for the introduction of webcasting for Council meetings.
- 2.2 The Committee resolved to agree to a trial webcasting of the State of the City Council meeting to be held on 28th November 2012 subject to appropriate protocols concerning the application and use of the system being drawn up. They also determined that any consideration of extending the webcasting in to the 2013/14 Municipal Year should be referred back to General Purposes Committee.
- 2.3 Member Management Committee approved a protocol for webcasting Council meetings at its meeting of 23rd October 2012.
- 2.4 The State of the City meeting on 28th November 2012 was webcast with coverage being available on the internet the following day. Although the webcast was well received there were a number of technical issues which suggested that a live webcast might give more difficulties. It was agreed that a further trial was required to test a live Council Webcast.
- 2.5 At the meeting of 22nd January 2013 Member Management Committee agreed that a further webcast trial be undertaken at the Council meeting planned for 17th April 2013. This meeting was subsequently rearranged to 8th May 2013 and this meeting was webcast live.

3 Main issues

- 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 sound and voting system. The system allows access to the public agenda papers and reports alongside the video screen.

3.2 The State of the City Council meeting held on 28th November 2012 was recorded and webcast by Public-i. The meeting itself was in two parts with workshops taking place in between. As a consequence it was decided that it would not be appropriate to provide a live broadcast of the event. The webcast of the meeting was provided after the event and is still available to view at:

http://www.leeds.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/91902

3.3 The general view expressed by Members and Officers is that the webcast worked well and the quality of the end product was good. The webcast has been accessed 874 times since its recording.

3.4 The Council Meeting held on 8th May 2013 was recorded and webcast live by Public-i. It is now available in archive form to view at:

http://www.leeds.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/103346

3.5 The technology worked well and there were no particular issues or difficulties in setting up and webcasting the live meeting. Very little promotion or publicity was issued about the webcast. The live webcast was viewed by 588 viewers and has been viewed in the archive by 454 viewers. Analysis of number of viewers shows that 29 out of 735, only 4%, were from internal LCC IP addresses.

3.6 The webcast did lead to significant interest and discussion on Twitter and Facebook where contributors generally welcomed the initiative and suggested that it should be a regular feature with some requests that it should cover more of the decision making meetings.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 There have been a number of discussions at Member Management Committee and Whips meetings about the webcasting of meetings. This report seeks Member Management Committee views and comments prior to General Purposes Committee consideration on whether Council meetings should be webcast on a more regular basis.

4.1.2 There has been no public consultation about the proposals to date. The project has concentrated on whether the technical solutions are suitable, providing an opportunity for Members to trial the system, and looking at the resource requirements. If webcasting was to progress on a more frequent basis it would make sense to publicise and promote the facility and include arrangements to consult and collect views and comments.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening assessment has been completed. 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 The City Priority Plan 2011-15 refers to the aim to be “Fair, open and welcoming”. The Council Business Plan 2011-15 vision to be Best City Council mentions the need for “clear accountable Civic Leadership” and refers to the values which include “Open, honest and trusted”. Providing access to live council meetings over the internet will contribute to achieving these aims.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The previous report 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 would typically include leased hardware, software, project and account management support, and full hosting of all content. Budget provision is available in the 2013/14 budget.

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 reduced through the two webcast meetings. We have seen the technology in action and it is likely that a more permanent installation will improve the reliability and quality of the webcast.
- 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.
- 4.6.3 There could be risks associated with the public perception and media response to the webcasts but this likely to be outweighed by improved public access and awareness, and greater transparency of decision making.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The two webcast Council meetings have demonstrated that it is possible to provide live public access to Council meetings over the internet. The trials have 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 Without any significant promotion or publicity both meetings were viewed by a large number of people (874 for the November meeting and 1042 for the May meeting). This gives a reasonable indication that there is public interest in what happens in the Council Chamber.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Member Management Committee views and comments are requested prior to General Purposes Committee considering whether Council meetings should be webcast over the next municipal year.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ 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.