

Report of City Solicitor

Report to General Purposes Committee

Date: 28th May 2014

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 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 report presents feedback from the first twelve months of webcasting full Council meetings, including viewing data and anecdotal feedback from Members.

Recommendations

General Purposes Committee is asked to consider whether Council meetings should continue to be webcast and, if so, approve the Officer recommendation of an extension of a 12 month period

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 seek Member's views on whether Council meetings should continue to be webcast and, if so, asks Members to determine the period of time by which the existing contract should be extended.

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.
- 2.2 Member Management Committee approved a protocol for webcasting Council meetings at its meeting of 23rd October 2012.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 So, including the initial trial meetings, 7 meetings of full Council have been 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 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 14,000 unique viewing ‘instances’ across each all of the meetings. What has become 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 Webcast Viewing Data

		Activity ID	Title	Live date	Hits	Live	Archive	Category
1		112883	<u>Council</u>	11 Sep 2013	3378	456	2922	Full Council
2		103346	<u>Leeds City Council - Meeting of Full Council</u>	08 May 2013	3291	588	2703	Amenities
3		118578	<u>Council</u>	13 Nov 2013	2172	319	1853	Full Council
4		128687	<u>Council</u>	26 Feb 2014	1594	567	1027	Full Council
5		124062	<u>Council</u>	15 Jan 2014	992	193	799	Full Council
6		91902	<u>State of the City Debate</u>	28 Nov 2012	918	0	917	Amenities
7		131849	<u>Council</u>	26 Mar 2014	848	329	519	Full Council
8		112882	<u>Council</u>	11 Sep 2013	810	54	756	Full Council
Total					14003	2506	11496	

3.4 The webcasting provider has 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).

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 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.

4.1.3 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.

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 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 (based on a maximum of 60 hours webcasting) range from £ 16,369 for a one-year extension, to £ 13,258 per annum if extended for 4 years.

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 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.
- 4.6.3 There could be risks associated with the public perception and media response to particular meetings that are webcast but this is likely to be outweighed by improved public access and awareness, and greater transparency of decision making.

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. A decision is now required about whether the Council wishes to continue to webcast its meetings and, if so what contract extension would be reasonable in the circumstances. Officer's view is that a further extension of 12 months would be reasonable.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 General Purposes Committee is asked to consider whether Council meetings should continue to be webcast and, if so, approve the Officer recommendation of an extension of a 12 month period.

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.