



**Report of Trading and Operational Support Manager**

**Report to Chief Officer Parks and Countryside**

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020**

**Subject: Live Webcasting of Funeral Services**

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open 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: 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary**

**1. Main issues**

- Up until March this year, the Council were offering the live webcast of funeral chapel services. However, the Council's provider, Wesley Media were unable to guarantee their service due to increasing demands placed on the company due to the covid flu pandemic.
- The Council's expectation was that this would soon be resolved however, subsequent discussions with Wesley Media have confirmed that the hardware they installed no longer supports their own software.
- In order to re-commence the live webcast of funeral chapel services, there is now an urgent need to upgrade or replace the audio and visual system across all three of the Council's Crematoria.

**2. Best Council Plan implications** (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- The procurement of a new audio and visual system draws attention to co-ordinated working that demonstrates a contribution towards the following priorities contained in the Best Council Plan 2020 to 2025 as follows:
- Age-Friendly Leeds - Developing and providing more accessible services, helping older people participate in the city.

- An Efficient and Enterprising Healthy Organisation – Delivering high quality integrated services, making the best use of our digital capabilities.

### **3. Resource implications**

- A number of cost analysis options have been considered to either upgrade the system or replace it or seek an alternative service provider. The details of which are set out within the confidential appendix 1 and is attached to this report.
- Funding for a new system can be met by prudential borrowing and can be paid back within the first year.

### **Recommendations**

- a) To request the Chief Officer of Parks and Countryside to note the contents of this report and to approve the waiver contracts procedure rule 8.1 and 8.2 - Intermediate Value Procurement – to enter into a contract to purchase a new audio and visual system for the Council's crematoria direct from Obitus Ltd.

#### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To request the Chief Officer of Parks and Countryside to note the contents of this report and to approve the waiver of contracts procedure rule 8.1 and 8.2 - Intermediate Value Procurement – to enter into a contract to purchase a new audio and visual system for the Council's crematoria direct from Obitus Ltd.

#### **2. Background information**

- 2.1 Leeds City Council is one of the busiest crematoria authorities outside of London dealing with over 5,500 cremations per year and in relation to funeral services, the Council recognises the importance to offer relatives of the deceased a wider selection of music and choice of funeral service options.
- 2.2 The audio and visual systems that are currently in place across the Council's three crematoria is supplied by Wesley Media and their systems have been for many years the leading audio visual system within the bespoke Bereavement Service industry.
- 2.3 When the Wesley Media system was first installed in 2012, it offered the bereaved the following options:
  - Live webcasting of a funeral chapel service
  - Any music that is commercially available
  - Visual tributes – slide shows that are set to music
  - DVD /USB recordings of a service
- 2.4 Each broadcast allowed viewing, over a suitable internet connection, and be allocated a unique web address, username and password for a specific funeral service. Only those who have been invited to view are able to gain access, and operating in this way, services remain a 'private function'.
- 2.5 There was also the option for relatives to give a pre-recorded message and or display a series of photographs, celebrating the journey of life of the ones who they have lost.

- 2.6 At the start of the covid-19 pandemic, Wesley Media put out a statement informing the Council and service users that they were facing increased demand on their services and had many staff members working from home and were therefore unable to guarantee to offer a live webcasting option to the bereaved. This was very disappointing and the service felt let down.
- 2.7 The result of which has meant that since March the Council have not been able to offer the live webcast of funeral services, but instead through Wesley Media, could only offer a pre-recorded copy of the funeral service, that the bereaved could then download the day after the event.
- 2.8 Around the same time, the Council was also receiving complaints from Funeral Directors as to the poor quality of the photos and videos received. Given that the Council's supplier could no longer guarantee the quality of their services, the Council offered the Wesley service free of charge.
- 2.9 Technologies are always improving and products are being developed and back in 2012, Wesley Media were the leading supplier for the webcasting of funeral services. However, since then the company do not appear to have re-invested or kept a breast with these new technologies. As such, the Wesley system is now regarded as being an antiquated system that is now in urgent need of being upgraded and or replaced.
- 2.10 Wesley Media are able to upgrade their equipment, but concerns have been raised as to the quality of the service that they are providing and the feedback that we have received from the customer is a general perception of the lack of customer care and support.

### **3. Main issues**

- 3.1 Without further investment, the Council is unable to offer the live webcasting of funeral services and to complicate matters further, Wesley Media have been going through a management restructure.
- 3.2 The playing of music for the most part has been straight forward and usually problem free, the problems arise when additional services are required, such as the web casting, recording and visual tributes.
- 3.3 A more recent concern has also come to light when the wrong music was played at a funeral service, where music not from the Wesley media system nor planned for any funeral service, played through the system. Wesley did not offer an explanation for this at the time and they therefore cannot guarantee this will not happen again.
- 3.4 In June this year, the Bereavement Service Manager had to insist that an engineer visit the site at Cottingley as the whole system had crashed. The faulty part was replaced with a re-conditioned unit.
- 3.5 Over the last 12 months, the service have had to have an engineer come to site on 7 separate occasions incurring additional costs.
- 3.6 It is not a sustainable or acceptable position for the Council not to be able to offer the live webcasting of funeral services, especially at a time when there is an increasing demand for this service during the covid flu pandemic.
- 3.7 There are only two companies who specialise in this bespoke service. Wesley Media and Obitus.

- 3.8 Both companies have been approached so that the Council is able to consider the various options. The details of which are set out within the confidential appendix to this report.
- 3.9 There will always be the potential for errors where software and an internet connection is required and there is a reasonable if not good internet connection across all of the three Council's Crematoria.
- 3.10 It is also of note that the webcasting of funeral services were still going ahead prior to March this year.

## **4. Corporate considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 The feedback from the many Funeral Directors who we work with is that the Wesley Media system is unreliable and no longer fit for purpose and that there is an expectation that the Council needs to upgrade or replace the whole system across all three sites.
- 4.1.2 Concerns have also been raised as to the poor level and quality of the customer care.
- 4.1.3 The Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles has been consulted.
- 4.1.4 Consultation has also taken place with colleagues within the Council's DIS Strategic Resourcing team.

### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

- 4.2.1 The outcome of this process will mean that the Council will be able to offer friends and relatives of the bereaved live webcast funeral services. It will also improve the audio and visual sound systems for those who are hard of hearing and provide a facility to broadcast the funeral service to those who may not be able to physically attend the Crematorium on the day of the funeral.

### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The waiver of the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules in relation to the procurement of a new audio and visual system draws attention to co-ordinated working that demonstrates a contribution towards the following priorities contained in the Best Council Plan 2020 to 2025:
- Age-Friendly Leeds - Developing and providing more accessible services, helping older people participate in the city.
  - An Efficient and Enterprising Healthy Organisation – Delivering high quality integrated services, making the best use of our digital capabilities.
  - Vision for Leeds 2011 – 2030 -

#### Climate Emergency

- 4.3.2 Helping to reduce the Council's carbon footprint by offering the live webcast of funeral services for those who are unable to travel, especially for those who may live or work overseas.

#### **4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money**

- 4.4.1 It is clear that the Council will need to re-invest in an audio and visual system and as such, a number of cost analysis options have been considered to either upgrade the system or replace it or seek an alternative service provider. The details of which are set out within the confidential appendix attached to this report.
- 4.4.2 Given the sensitive and emotive nature of the service, there is an expectancy from those who have been bereaved, for the Council to act quickly so that the live webcasting of funeral services can recommence without further delay.
- 4.4.3 Funding for a new system can be met by prudential borrowing and paid back within the first year.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

- 4.5.1 This is an intermediate value procurement and is a significant operational decision which is not subject to call-in.
- 4.5.2 The Appendix to the report is Exempt/Confidential under Access to Information Procedure Rules 10.4(3). The public interest in maintaining the exemption in relation to the confidential Appendix outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information and financial details which, if disclosed would adversely affect the business of the Council and the business affairs of other individual companies.
- 4.5.3 Although there is no overriding legal obstacle preventing the waiver of CPR 8.1 and 8.2 the content of the report should be noted. In making their final decision, the Chief Officer of Parks Countryside should be satisfied that the approved course of action represents best value for the council.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

- 4.7 The risk associated with this waiver is thought to be low given the specialist nature and quality of the service required for the bespoke audio and visual systems for live webcasting funeral services.
- 4.8 There is a reputational risk to the Council by not being able to offer the live webcast of funeral services especially being one of the busiest cremation authorities outside of London.
- 4.9 An IT penetration test (PEN test) has been carried out and some minor work will need to be undertaken as part of this contract before the system can go live in Leeds. It is acknowledged that other authorities such as Bradford, Kirklees and York to name but a few, are all currently using the Obitus system and risks associated with this new system are expected to be low.

#### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 In order for the Council to offer the live webcasting of funeral services, a significant investment is required as the audio and visual system is in urgent need of replacement across all three of the Council's Crematoria.

#### **6. Recommendations**

6.1 To request the Chief Officer of Parks and Countryside to note the contents of this report and to approve the waiver contracts procedure rule 8.1 and 8.2 - Intermediate Value Procurement – to enter into a contract to purchase a new audio and visual system for the Council's crematoria direct from Obitus Ltd.

**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.