

Report of the Assistant Director Information Services to the meeting of Council to be held on 22nd March 2016

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Subject:

Proposal to implement the video broadcasting on the internet (webcasting) of key Council meetings.

Summary statement:

This report recommends the implementation of technology in the Council Chamber and in Committee Room 1 to allow key Council meetings to be broadcast over the internet. There are many benefits to the webcasting of Council meetings but the overall aim is to improve public engagement in the Council's democratic process.

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Portfolio:

Leader of Council

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Corporate



1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to introduce the broadcasting of key Council meetings over the internet (webcasting).

2. REPORT

Background

A motion was passed at Council on 27 March 2012: "The Council agrees to consider webcasting full council meetings in order to enable more Bradford residents to engage with the Council's deliberations on behalf of the district. Council therefore requests that the Chief Executive (a) investigates the options for doing so, drawing on the experience of other local authorities including Kirklees (b) evaluates the costs and benefits (c) consults all Bradford councillors and (d) reports back to Council early in the new municipal year."

At the time a brief investigation into the costs of webcasting concluded that value for money would be difficult to achieve due to high equipment costs and that public usage would be limited. We have now re-evaluated the market and believe that a cost effective solution is available. The public environment has also changed with social media having a more significant impact and high quality video streamed to a wide range of devices being more prevalent.

Introduction

Across the United Kingdom, over 70 local authorities have invested in webcasting technology. It gives people who may not be able to attend Council meetings the ability to view democratic proceedings on the internet, making public access easier and decision-making more transparent.

Webcasting requires a number of cameras to be installed in the chamber or meeting room. They are linked to the audio microphones and the webcasting system automatically points the appropriate camera at the speaker.

Webcasting allows meetings to be streamed live over the internet via the Council website with relevant contextual information (agendas, reports, presentations, speakers' names, etc.) also being displayed. Any meetings that are streamed live are also archived to allow the proceedings to be viewed after the event.

Webcasting can be procured as a managed service, meaning that an external supplier manages the equipment installation and the technical elements of broadcasting the meeting allowing Council officers to focus on running effective meetings.

Potential Benefits

Webcasting of meetings encourages engagement and helps to address issues of exclusion. It is a cost effective way to reach a large audience on key issues. It is widely accessible via a range of electronic devices, such as desktop and laptop computers, tablets and smartphones.

Webcasting would potentially enable website visitors to:

- View meetings live, which may be helpful for people who have difficulty travelling to attend the meeting, who may find attendance at a formal meeting intimidating or who may otherwise prefer to watch from another location.
- Replay meetings after they have taken place, which may be helpful when the meeting time or location is inconvenient.
- Search for, and view, particular speakers or agenda items.
- Re-view points which may not be immediately clear to them as a result of the necessary procedures to a formal meeting appearing alien to the observer.
- Hear meetings (for people with visual impairments or basic skills needs).
- Gain additional contextual information from e.g. speakers' names, agenda documents, PowerPoint presentations etc. appearing with the webcast.

In addition:

- Members not able to participate and travel to City Hall would be able to view meetings live.
- Members would be able to draw on webcasts as a resource for the purposes of tracking debate on particular issues or for the purposes of drawing constituents' attention to relevant parts of a Council meeting.
- It could provide a learning resource (e.g. in relation to citizenship lessons in schools or induction training for both officers and Members).
- Local media could more readily access and report information regarding council meetings.

In turn webcasting could potentially:

- Strengthen the Council's democratic accountability to the local public both directly and via the local media
- Increase public understanding of the workings of local government both directly and via local media, schools etc.
- Improve public participation in the political process.
- Ensure greater equality of access to council information.

Webcasting is not limited to Council meetings and can also be used as another communications channel with the public and officers. This could include internal training material, senior management briefings and Leader of the Council messages.

3. OPTIONS

Several options have been considered when investigating webcasting solutions. An in-house solution was considered; but the specialist skills and equipment required make it more suitable to be procured as a managed service.

We looked at the possibility of working with local organisations but none had the experience or offered the value required for an effective implementation.

During market research we found that the clear market leader in public sector webcasting is Public-I (<http://www.public-i.info/>) who manage the majority of the 70 Councils already delivering this service.

The proposal is to install equipment in the Council Chamber and Committee Room 1.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The estimated cost of providing a webcasting managed service in the main Council Chamber and Committee Room 1 will be around £25,000 per year. This will be funded using the IT Services digital transformation budget as part of the programme of work to create a digitally enabled Council. It is recommended to enter into a one year agreement and then review the successes and benefits after 12 months.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Based on the discussions that have taken place with officers from other authorities where webcasting has been introduced, subject to the Council approval of webcasting, it will be necessary to develop a protocol as well as training on participation in a webcast environment.

The protocol will clearly define the webcasting policy including when items are exempt from webcasting.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

N/A

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

N/A

8. RECOMMENDATION

That a webcasting solution be implemented and a review of the process be undertaken following 12 months of operation.