"Project Mandate"

Agenda item number:
Date of issue:

Meeting:	Project Management Board		
Date:	March 2014		
Report by:	Sarah Evans	Job title:	Senior Democracy Officer
Service :	Communications		
Status:	New		
Subject:	Recording Council and Committee meetings		

1 Purpose of report

1.1 Further to the Full Council minute of 11 December 2013 (set out at paragraph 3.1), this report aims to provide options for Members' to consider with regard to recording, filming and webcasting Council and Committee meetings.

1.2 Whilst considering enhanced transparency at meetings, the Committee is also asked to approve a policy for public recording of meetings in accordance with the DCLG Guidance.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members to consider the options (as set out below) for audio or visual recording of meetings at PFA on 16 April 2014 and any recommendations be considered at Full Council on 30 April 2014. The Committee to also consider guidance documents on recording meetings should any of the following (a) to (d) be approved.

(a) A six month trial of audio recordings be taken of Full Council meetings and these be uploaded to the website within 48 hours of the meeting and at the end of the trial, feedback on quality and public interest be reported to the next available Policy, Finance and Administration Committee. There are no capital or revenue costs associated with this option.

(b) A one-off trial by Company A be arranged to video and webcast the July or October Full Council Meeting at a cost of approximately £2,500 and feedback be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee.

(c) Company A be appointed to video and webcast all meetings of the Full Council and Committees at a one-off non-recurring charge to

the revenue account and an annual revenue cost as detailed in appendix G (exempt) to include 24 months archive. Discount is available for a 2-5 year contract.

(d) **Company B be appointed to video and webcast all meetings of the Full Council and Committees at a one-off capital cost and an annual revenue cost as detailed in Appendix G (exempt).**

(e) **Further to the reasoning in paragraph 3.7 the project is taken into the Transformational Change Programme to align this initiative to our wider digital offering and directly understand what customers would like to see and shape the solution around this need.**

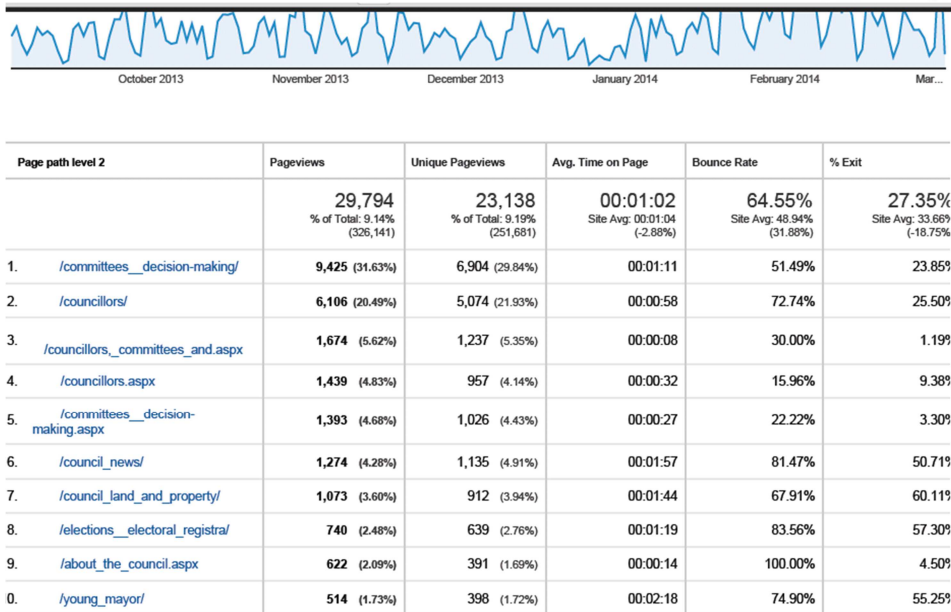**(f)** **There be no change to the current arrangements.**

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3 Background

3.1 The Council's resolutions below set the scene for investigating options for audio or visual recording of Council and Committee meetings as detailed in this report.

Council Minute CO50 of 11 December 2013 resolved :-

(1) This Council supports the principles of openness and transparency in its workings;

(2) To improve the openness and transparency of Council meetings and to enable more local residents to hear their elected representatives, officers look into the feasibility of recording and publishing audio recordings of full Council meetings and other meetings of the Council and its committees on the website on a trial basis and bring a report containing the costings and other implications to the next meeting of the Council after the Budget meeting in February;

(3) That officers compile a report, also to be brought to the next meeting of the Council after the budget meeting or the next convenient meeting after that, setting out the feasibility and costings of videoing and webcasting council and committee meetings

3.2 There are two main recording options being audio only or audio visual recording. In addition, it can consider to broadcast live or allow delayed broadcast.

3.3 Some indicative quotations from two companies to provide webcasting have been requested and the costs are detailed in Section 4. From the information received to date, the budgetary implications vary from nil to £70,250 over 5 years.

3.4	The population of the Borough is almost a 50/50 split between the town and the rural areas. This means that for half of the Borough's people, they would have to make arrangements to travel to Melton Mowbray to attend a Council or Committee meeting. Also there are those that are housebound or the timing of meetings does not suit their lifestyle or availability due to other commitments. There are proposals in this report that will help those that wish to have first-hand feedback of a Council or Committee meeting that would not ordinarily be able to, to listen or see the debate themselves in the comfort of their own home.

3.5	With regard to broadband requirements for a reliable viewing experience of a webcasted meeting at medium quality it is recommended a downstream connection speed of at least 700Kbps. Viewers can select a higher (up to 2Mbps for HD) or lower (198Kbps for low) video quality on the player depending on the connection speed. Broadband speeds differ from different providers and the technology they use at the exchange. Service is also influenced by the distance between the household contracting the service and the location of the exchange providing the service. Also it must also be taken into account that the Broadband width available in the rural areas is not as fast or efficient as that in the town. 19.5% of the Borough do not currently have such a fast or efficient service although funding has recently been allocated to help lower this figure to 13.3% and there are county-wide intentions to assist to lower this percentage further.

3.6	Although decision-making meetings of the Council are open to the public, attendance tends to be limited to interest in individual planning applications and matters that directly affect people's lives such as the Local Plan or closure of a public facility such as the local swimming pool. However there are statistics available on the public's usage of the Democracy webpages and it is understood that these pages have some of the highest hits of all those on the Council's website and the Committees and Decision-making pages have the highest page-views of all the headings under 'Council & Democracy' as shown below. This reinforces the case for looking into making digitally available recordings of decision-making meetings.

Page path level 2	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate	% Exit
	29,794 % of Total: 9.14% (326,141)	23,138 % of Total: 9.19% (251,681)	00:01:02 Site Avg: 00:01:04 (-2.88%)	64.55% Site Avg: 48.94% (31.88%)	27.35% Site Avg: 33.66% (-18.75%)
1. /committees__decision-making/	9,425 (31.63%)	6,904 (29.84%)	00:01:11	51.49%	23.85%
2. /councillors/	6,106 (20.49%)	5,074 (21.93%)	00:00:58	72.74%	25.50%
3. /councillors,_committees_and.aspx	1,674 (5.62%)	1,237 (5.35%)	00:00:08	30.00%	1.19%
4. /councillors.aspx	1,439 (4.83%)	957 (4.14%)	00:00:32	15.96%	9.38%
5. /committees__decision-making.aspx	1,393 (4.68%)	1,026 (4.43%)	00:00:27	22.22%	3.30%
6. /council_news/	1,274 (4.28%)	1,135 (4.91%)	00:01:57	81.47%	50.71%
7. /council_land_and_property/	1,073 (3.60%)	912 (3.94%)	00:01:44	67.91%	60.11%
8. /elections__electoral_registra/	740 (2.48%)	639 (2.76%)	00:01:19	83.56%	57.30%
9. /about_the_council.aspx	622 (2.09%)	391 (1.69%)	00:00:14	100.00%	4.50%
0. /young_mayor/	514 (1.73%)	398 (1.72%)	00:02:18	74.90%	55.25%

3.7 However the primary measure of viability for extending the digital offering to a webcasting system is the number of people who are likely to make use of it. With that in mind and to gauge public interest in online availability of a Council meeting, viewing statistics for the Leicestershire County Council's Full Council meeting of 19 March 2014 are as follows :-

Total live webcast viewers: 42
Total archived webcast viewers: 24*
(*LCC advises that some of these could be included in the 42)

3.8 The viewing statistics are certainly in excess of the usual public attendance at Melton. In considering these figures, it is noted that the total possible audience for Leicestershire will be significantly higher than for Melton alone, potentially meaning that any audience for Melton's meetings would be a fraction of the above. This said as we engage customers in the roll out of a core digital offering, including transactional services, there will be opportunities to directly understand what customers would like to see and shape the solution around this need. This engagement alongside a link into the wider promotion of digital services may enlist a higher take up to the service than as a stand-alone initiative. There would also be opportunities in the future to use social media more proactively to promote webcast services and this could also start to have an impact on viewing figures.

3.9 Also as a County Council covering a large geographical area and holding its meetings during office hours there is perhaps greater justification for Leicestershire County Council in meeting the costs of webcasting than for a district Council such as Melton. The majority of Melton's meeting are held in Melton during the early evening to maximise opportunities for the public and Councillors to attend. However public attendance for most meetings can be counted in single figures, therefore it is unclear whether there is an appetite to view webcasts of Council and Committee meetings. However, subject to cost,

the online broadcasting of audio or visual and audio meetings would certainly contribute towards ensuring the Council operates in as open and transparent manner as possible.

3.10   The motion referred to providing a recording/webcasting service for all Council and Committee meetings. The number of hours involved for Full Council and all Committees in a full year cycle is approximately as follows :-

Meeting name	Hrs per mtg	No. of mtgs	Total for year
Council Meetings	2 hrs each	7	14
4 x Policy Cttees	2 hrs each	8 hrs x 5 cycles	40
Planning Cttees	1.5 hrs each	17	25.5
Licensing & Regulatory	1 hour	5 cycles	5
Ad hoc Committees & Sub Committees	1 hour	5 per year	5
Total			**89.5**

3.11   It is helpful to understand how other authorities are dealing with this issue and therefore comparative data has been collected on audio and visual recordings of meetings. From this research, it shows that most District Councils have some type of audio recording arrangements but most of these are for internal use. Of the Leicestershire districts, only Harborough is actively publishing audio recordings to its website.

3.12   Some District Councils have shown an interest in webcasting and reported to Members who have decided that the cost cannot be justified for the time being.

3.13   It is mainly the County, City and Unitary Councils that have made the commitment to webcasting and this is the case in the Midlands at Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire. The nearest districts with a webcasting facility are Stratford on Avon and West Lindsey District Council.

3.14   The research has also found some innovative methods of visually recording meetings including a fixed video camera at Corby Borough Council for uploading post meeting and uploading to YouTube (Derbyshire County) via a creative arts company which provides the filming service.

Audio Recording

3.15   As part of a local trial and to inform this report, two audio recordings of Council Meetings held on 11 December 2013 and 20 February 2014 have been made. These recordings have been downloaded and assessed for

clarity, quality and content. Some learning has been identified from listening to these recordings and a hints and tips document has been drafted which is designed to assist Members in helping to ensure a good recording. It may be helpful to note that the same hints and tips would be applicable to a visual recording too as the same sound system would be used.

3.16 Harborough has previously carried out an audio recording trial and now has audio recordings of all public meetings available on its website although there has been some delay in rolling this out during the building renovations. There is also an audio protocol in place similar to the one drafted for Melton. It may be helpful to note that this document could be easily modified to suit webcasting arrangements.

3.17 Caretaker assistance/support is needed for this facility as the Televic microphone system is core to audio and the other methods of recording including video and webcasting and the Caretaker has a good working knowledge of this system.

3.18 It is anticipated that no extra staffing or equipment would be needed for audio recording other than uploading the recording to the website following the meeting. Therefore there are no additional cost implications for audio recording.

Video Recording

3.19 With regard to video recording, Corby Borough Council has installed a fixed long-shot video camera for meetings which they intended to start using in January 2014 and this has resulted in a comparatively low one-off cost with an annual licence fee. Feedback on progress has been requested but not yet received.

Webcasting

3.20 Two leading companies in webcasting, being Company A and Company B, have provided quotations for webcasting. Company B provides a webcasting service to the LCC and British parliaments. Company A has many Councils on its list including Leicester City, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire and have provided a one-off broadcasting service for important Council meetings such as the Core Strategy at Rushcliffe and Blaby. A detailed site survey has carried out by Company A. Both companies would use the Televic microphone system already in place.

3.21 Quotations have been requested to install webcasting equipment in CC1 only however we are advised that the cameras would be able to cover activity in CC2 when the rooms are open.

3.22   Company A is more expensive over a 5 year period than Company B and has less flexibility in that broadcasting is limited to 30 hours per year and will include 2 years of archive for the price quoted. Further prices could be requested for more broadcasting as required. Whereas Company B provide unlimited broadcasting time as well as will meet our requirements for archiving, whatever these are, within the price supplied.

3.23   A local District Council used Company A to provide one off transmission of their Council Meeting. The cost was £2,000 plus expenses and it is suggested that a recording and webcast of a one off meeting could be anhelpful insight and learning to assist Members in deciding as to whether such a long term financial commitment provides value for money and the public involvement expected and desired.

3.24   The LCC website offers a webcast archive of LCC Meetings going back to Full County Council meetings of 2006 and as mentioned above this is provided by Company B.

3.25.   To make webcasting work in the Civic Rooms, a dedicated internet cable would be required and there are costs involved for the installation and licence of this as set out in section 4 of this report.

3.26   There are other benefits to the installation of such equipment besides webcasting meeting which include unlimited internal sharing of briefings, training etc which are not transmitted live and this type of usage does not affect the annual broadcasting fee.

3.27   Initial investigations indicate that ICT technical support is not needed for live webcasting as online support would be provided by the company. It is understood that an operator of the terminal/camera etc will be needed at each meeting.

3.28   As well as live broadcast, there is an option for delayed broadcast to enable any editing of the webcast. Also recording can be stopped should a resolution be passed to go into private session.

You Tube

3.29   Derbyshire County Council has implemented this via a creative arts company which provides the filming service. There is no report available on this but it is advised that Members requested this service. However they are now providing this service in-house and are involving young people.

Summary of advantages and disadvantages

3.30   From the above options, it appears that the most reliable and tested solutions are either to audio record meetings or to install a webcasting system for recording and broadcasting meetings. Therefore a summary of advantages

and disadvantages of audio recording and live webcasting is as follows :-

Audio Recordings and uploaded to website following the meeting	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Helps to go some way to meet public expectations of Council transparency	To be a user must have computer and internet availability and it is probably the older generations who may not have this access
Provides potential for increased public understanding of decision-making	Recording quality can be affected by low bandwidth from the user's internet connection. Many rural parts of the Borough do not get high speed broadband
Allows people to listen to proceedings from a wide range of locations rather than having to attend the meeting – this is a benefit given the geographic spread of the Borough	Uploaded recording needs to be accompanied by linked agenda, reports etc to help people understand what they are listening to and the procedures being followed. This is an extra administrative workload as well as queries that may follow from it
Provides an audio record of meeting for a wide range of subsequent purposes including evidence	Cost for public speaking/media training for Members and Officers involved at recorded meetings
Delayed public availability of recording allows for editing if required	Equipment will only cover meetings in CC1 and CC2 (individually or as one)
Low cost option as mainly uses equipment and resources already available	

Webcasting system for live broadcasting meetings	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Helps to meet public expectations of Council transparency	There is no budgetary provision for webcasting and due to the current pressure on budgets, other activities may have to be reduced to accommodate this new service
Provides potential for increased	To be a user must have computer

public understanding of decision-making	and internet availability and it is probably the older generations who may not have this access
Allows people to view proceedings from a wide range of locations rather than having to attend the meeting – this is a benefit given the geographic spread of the Borough	Webcast video quality can be affected by low bandwidth either from the broadcast venue or the user's internet connection. Many rural parts of the Borough do not get high speed broadband
High quality visual record of meeting showing individual speakers from best angle using different camera positions. Can be used for a wide range of subsequent purposes including evidence	Webcasting needs to be accompanied by linked agenda, reports etc to help people understand what they are watching and the procedures being followed. This is an extra workload as well as queries that may follow from it.
Equipment can be used for other unlimited internal purposes such as sharing training, briefings at no extra cost	Additional staff member needed at meetings to operate equipment
Delayed webcasting available if preferred or required at a particular meeting	Cost for public speaking/media training for Members and Officers involved at recorded meetings
Real time remote support provided by both webcasting companies during live broadcasting	Potentially low levels of 'live' viewing for most meetings based on experience at other Councils and level of public attendance at meetings generally
	Equipment will only cover meetings in CC1 (and CC2 when screen is open)
	Staff training on use of equipment

4   Legal, financial and IT implications

Legal

4.1   It should be noted that the Council is under no legal obligation to record or broadcast its meetings. It also should be noted that the approved minutes are the statutory record of the meeting and would have precedence of any audio/visual recording made.

4.2   Exclusion of the press and public will continue to be permitted under the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) where confidential or exempt matters are to be discussed. Coverage of such items will be in such a way that recordings are able to be stopped/restricted when these matters are discussed. From a practical point of view, it is suggested that all exempt items should be at the end of the agenda. This is then easier to manage not only from a recording point of view, but also less disruptive for the public and the press as they do not have to go out and then come back in again.

4.3   There is a need to consider the increased risk of audio/visual recordings being used as evidence against the benefits of greater public engagement which the technology delivers. If it is decided to proceed with publishing recordings then further advice may be needed.

4.4   Should a recording proposal be approved the procedure rules in the Constitution may need to be reviewed and it is proposed that a Recording Protocol be put in place..

Information Technology (IT)

4.5   Information received from Steria is that the only additional item needed is a wired internet connection. It is suggested that a dedicated connection for this purpose would be £40 per month with a £120 one-off installation. They also advise that structured cabling to wherever the equipment is sited in the Civic Room would be needed and further details would be provided after confirmation of the webcasting solution approved by Members. As a guide this could cost up to £500 should a new cable be needed. Steria has a test line that could be assigned for the purpose of a test or one-off arrangement. These IT figures are included in the financial details below.

Financial

4.6   The table in Appendix D Exempt shows potential costs involved for webcasting by two companies being Company A and Company B and their quotations are available. Corby Borough Council's costs are also shown for the fixed video camera alternative.

4.7   With regard to the audio recording option, the current equipment and staffing arrangements would be able to manage this service. The main additional requirement would be for Committee Administrative staff to upload the recording to the website following the meeting.

4.8   There is no funding available at present for visual recording/webcasting and so any recommendation to adopt such a service will require the identification of funding.

4.9   Appendix D shows that over a 5 year period, the annual cost of a fixed video camera is by far the cheapest option and Company A provides a slightly more competitively priced webcasting service than Company B.

4.10   The figures relating to a fixed video camera option are attributable to a report by Corby Borough Council on this issue.

5   Initial Assessment of risk

5.1   The risks associated with webcasting are mainly reputational and arise from the conduct of the meeting or of individual Members. The risk can take two main forms :-

- Webcasting of quasi-judicial proceedings such as Planning and Licensing & Regulatory Committees and the consequences of having a 'recording' of proceedings should a decision be questioned by a member of the public. Webcasting does not make a meeting any more 'public' than it already is, but it does provide a transcript which could allow for a greater level of challenge.

- The risk in live transmission that inappropriate words or gestures are broadcast, some of which could breach legislation. For live webcasting this can be overcome by inclusion of a time delay of a few seconds before transmission to ensure that appropriate editing takes place. This requires someone to monitor the meeting to ensure that intervention takes place when needed. The risk of the need to intervene in this way is generally considered low and this could be assisted by training for Members and staff as well as having a protocol in place.

5.2   The risk of not moving to either live or on demand webcasting is that it may be required by future legislation and the opportunity of wider public access to the statements made at the meeting may be lost.

5.3   Equipment failure/untrained staff could lead to lack of continuity in service and loss of public confidence. To help mitigate this, the companies offer 24 hour helpdesk support with webcasting and as these sites are externally hosted, they are on hand to assist with any broadcasting difficulties.

5.4   There is no legal risk should the Council wish to remain with the current arrangements.

6   Equalities and diversity and staffing implications

6.1   Webcasting of meetings is generally seen as improving equality and social inclusion as it provides the opportunity for anyone to watch or listen at any location or time. It also makes information accessible to residents who are not confident with the written word.

6.2   Improves the openness and transparency of the Council's meetings and enables more local residents to hear/see their elected representatives making decisions that affect their lives.

6.3   Helps those in remote areas, those who work shifts or are housebound to experience democracy in their own homes at a time to suit their personal commitments.

6.4   There will be a need to train the staff involved in managing and supporting audio, video or webcasting equipment at the meeting. Also an additional member of staff will be needed for webcasting to control the camera position in accordance with debate. Caretaker attendance will be needed for the existing Televic microphone system as this is essential to facilitate all types of recording detailed in this report.