

AGENDA ITEM 8(3)

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

16 APRIL 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

RECORDING OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

1.0 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.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To select a preferred option(s) from those set out in the report at paragraph 3.2 and refer the same to the Council for approval and to approve the necessary finances to support the option selected, via a supplementary estimate from the Corporate Priorities Reserve.**
- 2.2 **Should any of the options at 3.2(a) to (d) be approved, then a Protocol for Audio Recording of Meetings and other documentation be developed for reference in future and for training.**
- 2.3 **The Project Mandate and Business Case be approved as set out at Appendices B and C respectively and included in the Capital Programme, if appropriate, based on the option selected.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 At the Council Meeting held on 11 December 2013, the following resolutions were made and set the scene for providing options for members to consider that would enable the recording of meetings, as set out within this report (Minute CO50/13 refers) :-

- (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 to visual access, there is a choice as to broadcast live or allow delayed broadcast and the options are set out below at (a) to (e) and the detail around each option is explained in the remainder of the key issues. Option (f) offers no change to the current arrangements. The financial details are available in Appendix D (exempt) of the report. There is also a summary of advantages and disadvantages of audio and webcasting available at Appendix A :-

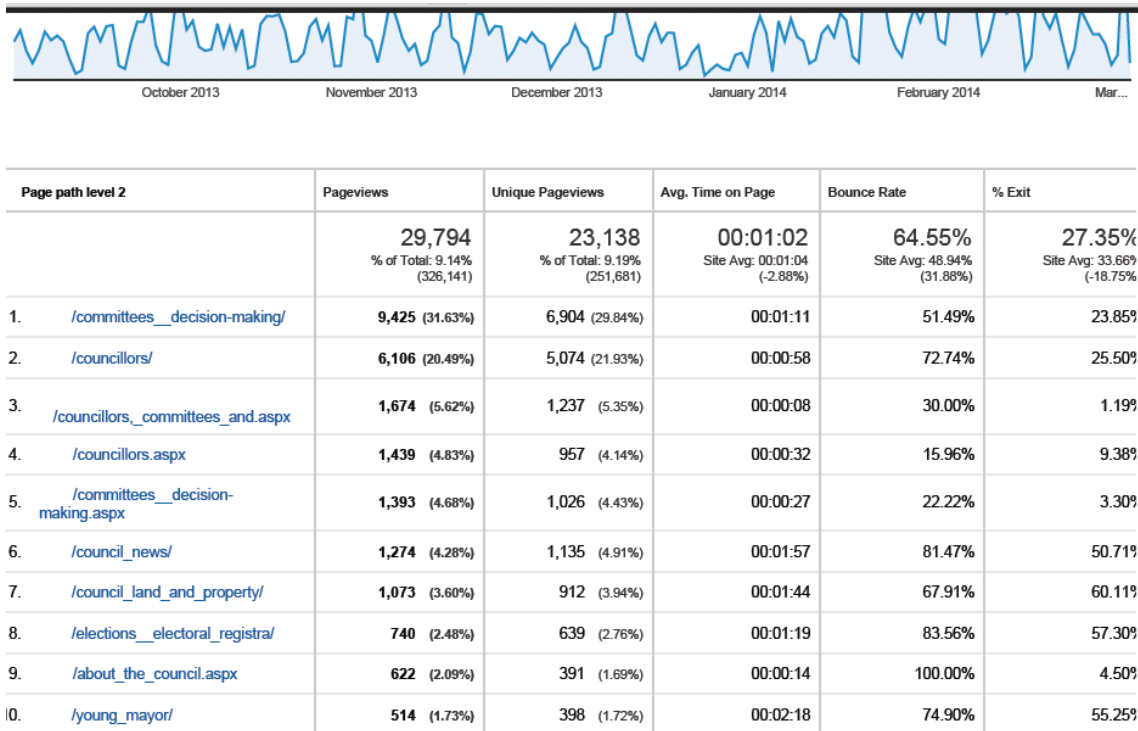
- (a) **A six month trial of audio recordings be taken of Full Council meetings and these be uploaded to the website within 48 hours of the meeting and at the end of the trial, feedback on quality and public interest be reported to the next available Policy, Finance and Administration Committee. There 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 of £620 and an annual revenue cost of £16,930 to include 24 months archive. Discount is available for longer contracts.**
- (d) **Company B be appointed to video and webcast all meetings of the Full Council and Committees at a one-off capital cost of £25,670 and an annual revenue cost of £7,830 per year.**
- (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.**

3.3 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 Committees	2 hrs each	8 hrs x 5 cycles	40
Planning Committees	1.5 hrs each	17	25.5
Licensing & Regulatory Committee	1 hour	5 cycles	5
Ad hoc Committees & Sub Committees	1 hour	5 per year	5
Total			89.5

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- 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 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.



3.6 However the primary measure of viability for extending the digital offering to an audio or 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)

3.7 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 could 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.

3.8 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 meetings are held in Melton during the early evening to maximise opportunities for the public and Councillors to attend. 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 availability of audio or video recorded meetings would certainly contribute towards ensuring the Council operates in as open and transparent manner as possible.

3.9 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. 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. Others have shown an interest in our investigations and have requested feedback on this report.

3.10 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.

3.11 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 provided the filming service.

3.12 Audio Recording

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.

3.13 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.

3.14 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 Caretakers have a good working knowledge of this system.

3.15 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 and it is suggested that a 6 month trial of audio recording Full Council Meetings could easily be arranged.

3.16 Video Recording

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.

3.17 Webcasting

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 £64,800 over 5 years.

- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 Two leading companies in webcasting, being Company A and Company B, have provided quotations for webcasting. Both companies have quoted on the basis of using the Televic microphone system that is already in place.
- 3.20 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 two rooms are open.
- 3.21 Company A is a slightly more cost effective service over a 5 year period than Company B but 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.
- 3.22 A local District Council used Company A to provide a one-off transmission of their Council Meeting when the Core Strategy was considered. The cost was £2,000 plus expenses and it is suggested that a recording and webcast of a one-off meeting could provide helpful 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.
- 3.23 The LCC website offers a webcast archive of LCC Meetings going back to Full County Council meetings of 2006.
- 3.24 There are other benefits to the installation of such equipment besides webcasting meetings which include unlimited internal sharing of briefings and training etc which are not transmitted live and this type of usage does not affect the annual broadcasting fee.
- 3.25 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 will be needed at each meeting and this is included in the costings in Appendix D (exempt)
- 3.26 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.
- 3.27 Information received from Steria is that the only additional item needed for webcasting 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 at Appendix D (exempt)

3.28 You Tube

Derbyshire County Council has trialled using a creative arts company to provide a filming service and then uploading the meeting recording to You Tube and are now pursuing an in-house way forward involving young people so that they can get real life experience in recording meetings.

3.29 Public Recording of Council Meetings

The Secretary of State has issued guidance to executive style local authorities (ie. those with Leader and Cabinet) that certain public meetings should permit members of the public and press the opportunity to audio visually record proceedings. This guidance does not apply to Fourth Option local authorities that have retained committee-style governance; Melton falls into this category.

3.30 The DCLG guidance sets out how the public can report on and record Council meetings using social media and recording devices. This is to introduce greater transparency into decision-making meetings and data protection does not apply in such recordings. There is provision within the guidance for Councils to deal with certain matters in private.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Strong Corporate Governance is important in order to ensure high standards of conduct are maintained. To improve the openness and transparency of Council meetings enables more local residents to hear their elected representatives and brings wider awareness of the Council's decision-making arrangements.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table attached as Exempt item Appendix D shows potential costs involved for webcasting by two companies.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 The exempt table (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.

5.5 Resources

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.

6.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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 into place.

7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no specific community safety implications in this report.

8.0 **EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is under consideration by the Check and Challenge Group. Digital access to recorded meetings relies on individuals having computer access. The proposal does not negate the availability of hard copy decision-making information if required.
- 8.2 Webcasting or audio transmission 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. It 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.
- 8.3 Either audio or visual recording of meetings that are available on the Council's website, would help those in remote areas, those who work shifts or are

housebound to experience democracy in their own homes at a time to fit in with their personal commitments.

9.0 RISKS

- 9.1 The risks associated with audio/visual recordings or webcasting being available on the website are mainly reputational and arise from the conduct of the meeting or of individual Members.
- 9.2 Recordings/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. Recordings/webcasting do 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.
- 9.3 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
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 Equipment failure/untrained staff could lead to lack of continuity in service and loss of public confidence. To help mitigate this, the companies approached offer 24 hour helpdesk support with webcasting and as these sites are externally hosted, they are on hand to assist with any broadcasting difficulties.
- 9.6 There is no legal risk should the Council wish to remain with the current arrangements.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 10.1 Providing electronic and digital access to the Council's decision-making meetings provides opportunities for saving on Council resources such as paper. However the greater savings are to the public in time, money and effort in reducing the need to travel to the Council Offices to attend a meeting and such savings add up to meet the Council's green targets.

11.0 CONSULTATION

- 11.1 There has been no external consultation although there is an opportunity through the Transformational Change Programme to engage customers.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

- 12.1 All indirectly.

Contact Officer: Sarah Evans, Senior Democracy Officer

Date: March 2014
Appendix A Advantages & Disadvantages
Appendix B Project Mandate
Appendix C Business Case
Appendix D (exempt) Price Evaluations

Background Papers: Council Minute C50/13

Reference: Cttees, Council & Sub-Cttees/PFA/2013-14/160414/Recording and Webcasting of Council and Committee meetings