

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

13 APRIL 2016

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

AUDIO RECORDING OF MEETINGS – REPORT BACK ON PUBLIC INTEREST

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 As requested at the July 2015 meeting of the Committee, to provide feedback on public interest of audio recordings at Full Council Meetings.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To consider whether to continue to audio record full Council meetings given the public interest data collected and if to continue, whether to use the externally hosted software package at £3,900 per annum (para 3.10 refers).**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 At its meeting on 7 July 2015, the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee resolved that :-
'the continuation of Full Council Audio Recordings and uploading these audio files to the Council's website by 5 working days following the meeting be approved and a further report be brought back later in the year following further investigation into the use of the recording through the website.'
- 3.2 The July PFA report is attached at Appendix A to give background to the issues raised and to avoid repetition in this report. The appendices relating to the July report are not attached as these have been approved and included in the Council's Constitution.
- 3.3 With regard to collecting public interest data, there have been investigations into how this can be achieved and the Engage tool from Google Analytics has been applied to the IDOX Committee pages. This now enables us to collect data on how many times a document has been downloaded from all the Council and Committee pages on the website.
- 3.4 Since the July meeting, the following Full Council meetings have been recorded and the audio recorded documents placed on the website. The third column reflects that the number of downloads of at least one audio file from a meeting.

Meeting Date	Type of Meeting	Recording downloaded
22 July 2015	Full Council	2
24 September 2015	Extraordinary Full Council	
14 October 2015	Full Council	
8 December 2015	Extraordinary Full Council	2
16 December 2015	Full Council	
10 February 2016	Full Council	2
24 February 2016	Full Council	

- 3.5 Following the Full Council meetings in December 2015 and February 2016, press releases have been issued followed up by tweeting. This promotion seems to have had little impact on the public interest levels of the audio recordings and there is no significant activity around the audio files from the 2 x December and 2 x February meetings. Therefore there is little evidence to suggest that there is any public appetite for listening to Full Council meetings after the event.

The low public interest may be due to the legislation being in place for people to be able to make their own recording at the meeting and those involved in this type of activity may also tweet to others during the meeting thereby the information is being passed on almost as it happens. This makes the audio recording provided by the Council up to 5 days after the meeting too late to be of interest.

- 3.6 However there is public interest activity evidenced in the Google Analytics data in other Full Council meeting documents such as agendas, reports, powerpoint presentations and the recorded vote.
- 3.7 Audio recordings can assist in minute writing for clarification on a particular point after the meeting. However they are not regularly used to provide transcripts in minute writing and to do so would considerably increase the workload of the staff involved. Also others who may have a professional interest or need to report on Council matters may find the recording helpful including the media. It may be useful to note that the minutes are the official record of the meeting.
- 3.8 The audio recorded files are in small size documents and are multiple for each meeting, therefore for one meeting, there can be up to 7 documents for the customer to sift through on the website to find the part of the recording needed. This is not convenient to the customer and could make any statistics unrepresentative of how many times one meeting's recordings have been opened by different people. However if each audio file is opened for a meeting, it is assumed this is the same person.
- 3.9 The administrative time taken for the tasks involved to download the recording from the Televic system, compress the files, edit asides as required, format for the website and upload can take up to 3 hours. This can be considerably less and is dependent on how much editing of Member asides and unrelated background voices is required. The 5 working days deadline for making the audio recording publicly available is still considered achievable with the commitment and prioritisation of this task by the staff involved.
- 3.10 An alternative method of audio recording a meeting has been trialled at a Governance Committee and this resulted in a one document recording which is available on the company's cloud-based server. This was a free trial facilitated by a company called 'AudioMinutes' which provides an audio recording service for all Full Council and Committee meetings at a cost of £3,900 per annum plus a one-off cost of £300 for a dedicated Nexus 9 android tablet.

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.

- 4.2 To provide audio recordings of Full Council meetings shows a commitment to the Council's decision-making and sharing this with the public meets the priority of being an 'Agile Council'.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The existing audio and microphone equipment and staffing arrangements are able to manage the current audio recording service. However the administrative time taken for the tasks involved can take up to 3 hours per meeting.
- 5.2 Using the existing method of uploading audio files to the website, to increase capacity for another 5 audio files at a time to be downloaded from the website would be a one-off cost of between £7,000 – £10,000. This may only be required should the Council consider expanding the service to all Committees and the public becoming heavily engaged in downloading the recordings. As there has been little public feedback or interest shown to date on this service, it is unlikely that this extra resource would be required should the Committee decide to continue to audio record Full Council Meetings.
- 5.3 The revenue cost of a professional, externally hosted software package called 'AudioMinutes' is £3,900 per annum plus a one-off cost of £300 for a dedicated Nexus 9 android tablet.

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 and that the approved written 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 leave and re-enter the meeting.
- 6.3 A Protocol for Audio Recording of Meetings as well as a Hints and Tips document for Members have been adopted by the Council and are available in the Council's Constitution.
- 6.4 The public are legally permitted to record Council or Committee meetings using social media or other means. This could mean there is less pressure on the Council to provide recordings of meetings.

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. Digital access to recorded meetings relies on individuals having computer access. The proposal does not

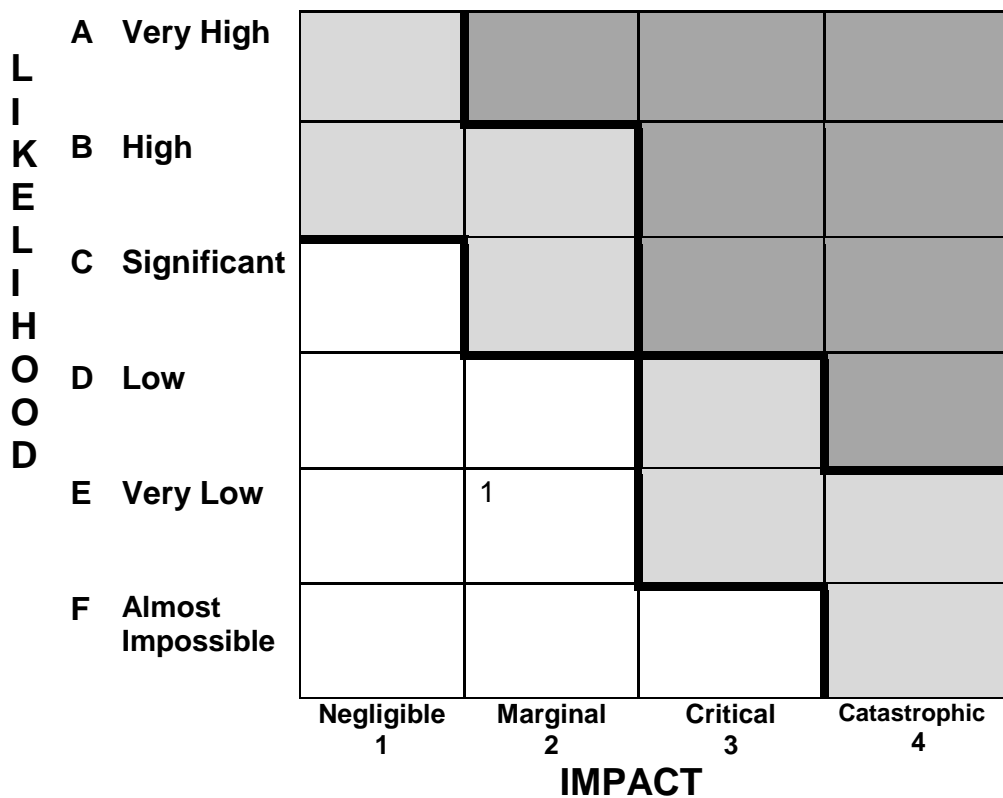
negate the availability of hard copy decision-making information if required.

8.2 Audio transmission of meetings is generally seen as improving equality and social inclusion as it provides the opportunity for anyone to 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 their elected representatives making decisions that affect their lives.

8.3 Audio recording of meetings that are available on the Council’s website, helps those in remote areas, those who work shifts or are housebound to experience democracy in their own homes at a time and place to fit in with their personal commitments.

9.0 RISKS

9.1 The risks associated with audio recordings being available on the website are mainly reputational and arise from the conduct of the meeting or of individual Members.



Risk No	Risk Description
1	Reputational damage to the Council on decision-making process and Member conduct

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 Providing electronic and digital access to the Council’s decision-making meetings presents 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 to help the environment.

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 There has been no consultation on this report and although some public interest data has been collected, no public comments are known to have been received on the audio recording service.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All indirectly.

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Date: March 2016
Appendices: Appendix A - PFA Report – Recording Council Meetings – Way Forward – 7 July 2015
Background Papers: Council Minute C50/13
PFA Minute P90/13
PFA Minute P52/14 – 27 January 2015
PFA Minute P10/15 – 7 July 2015
AudioMinutes website

Reference: /PFA/2015-16/130416/Recording Council meetings – Report back