
Response to the Motion that the Council Investigates Webcasting - Summary Report

Committee considering report:	Council on 19 September 2016 Governance and Ethics Committee on 5 September 2016
Portfolio Member:	Councillor James Fredrickson
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	
Report Author:	Jo Reeves
Forward Plan Ref:	C3065

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present the response of the Webcasting Task and Finish Group to Councillor Alan Macro's motion that 'The Council investigates the cost and practicality of webcasting all Council, Executive and Committee meetings' which was put to the Council on 2 July 2015.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council is asked to note that the Webcasting Task and Finish Group (WTFG) recommends:
- (1) The Council should webcast meetings of particular public interest.
 - (2) A project board of officers from Property, IT and Strategic Support should make arrangements to complete the repairs and acquire the equipment it needs to webcast meetings in the Council Chamber and at other locations.
 - (3) The Governance and Ethics Committee should develop a Webcasting Policy, to include a procedure for identifying meetings to be webcast and guidance for Members.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:**
- Capital: If Members chose to follow the WTFG's recommendations there would be a capital cost of around £70k to buy microphones and upgrade the Council Chamber.
- Revenue: If Members chose to follow the WTFG's recommendations there would be minimal revenue implications for the Council but there would be an impact on staffing with Strategic Support who will be responsible for managing the webcasting. This would need to be kept under review to ensure that any webcasting was done as professionally and efficiently as possible.

- 3.2 **Policy:** The WTFG recommends a Webcasting Policy is developed to include a procedure for identifying meetings to be webcast and guidance for Members.
- 3.3 **Personnel:** None
- 3.4 **Legal:** None
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** Access to webcasted material might change in the event that Youtube's Terms and Conditions change, including monetisation (advertising or access to content) and ownership of content. To mitigate that risk, it is proposed to download all the streamed videos, or record them locally at the time.
- 3.6 **Property:** The WTFG recommends that the Council Chamber needs upgrades to support its normal multi-purpose use and webcasting.
- 3.7 **Other:** None

4. Other options considered

- 4.1 To enter into a contract with a company which offers a range of digital services to public sector organisations, to provide software licences, hosting, streaming and support. This option was dismissed by the WTFG as it would cost approximately £15-£18k per annum.
- 4.2 To do nothing. This option was dismissed because trials of webcasting produced 'in-house' had been met with positive feedback from Members, Officers and the public.

5. Introduction

5.1 To present the response of the Webcasting Task and Finish Group (WTFG) to the motion that the Council considers the cost and practicality of webcasting, this report will:

- (1) Explain what a webcast is and why the Council might choose to do it
- (2) Describe the options the WTFG considered
- (3) Discuss the cost implications of their chosen option
- (4) Discuss the practical implications of their chosen option
- (5) Present the WTFG's recommendations

6. Background

6.1 At the meeting of Council on 2nd July 2015, Councillor Alan Macro proposed a Notice of Motion that the Council "investigates the cost and practicality of webcasting all Council, Executive and Committee meetings". The Council agreed to create a Webcasting Task and Finish Group to respond to the Motion.

6.2 The WTFG met three times and included:

- (1) Conservative Members: Councillors Pamela Bale, Jeanette Clifford, James Fredrickson. Councillors Rick Jones and Quentin Webb joined the Group for its last meeting.
- (2) Liberal Democrat Member: Councillor Lee Dillon

6.3 A webcast is a sound or video broadcast over the Internet. Some Councils choose to webcast to promote the work they do and to be transparent about how they do it. Lots of councils are already webcasting by either contracting a provider to webcast for them or doing it themselves.

6.4 Prior to the Motion submitted by Councillor Macro, Officers had already started to look at the possibility of webcasting meetings as the sound/projection facilities in the Council Chamber were becoming out of date and unreliable.

7. Options for Consideration

7.1 The WTFG considered the following options:

- (1) Do nothing
- (2) Webcast with a provider
- (3) Do our own webcasting

7.2 The WTFG dismissed the option to do nothing because when the Council webcast the Special Council meeting in November 2015 (which agreed the Development Plan Document) it had been well received by Councillors and members of the public.

- 7.3 The WTFG dismissed the option to webcast with a provider. Officers contacted three companies to find out what a contract would cost and the WTFG decided that the revenue costs would be too high given the Council's financial position.
- 7.4 The WTFG concluded that the Council should do its own webcasting by buying equipment and asking officers to webcast meetings.

8. Cost

- 8.1 If the Council chose to webcast it would need to spend some money on getting the right equipment. Officers have already bought cameras, a laptop and software for about £1k. The Council will also need to buy some microphones so that viewers can hear the webcasts.
- 8.2 Microphones were hired for the trial meeting at a cost of £1600 per meeting. Quotes obtained by officers suggest that the expected cost of purchasing a microphone system would be around £35k. The WTFG suggest that the Council buys microphones instead of hiring them, because they will help to amplify the sound at all meetings, not just the meetings that are webcast.
- 8.3 To make sure the microphones would work properly officers have asked engineers to evaluate the existing equipment in the Council Chamber. They found that the induction loop was not working properly, the projector screens were not descending and the speakers were not working well. To fix these issues, the Council would need to spend about £45k.
- 8.4 There would also be a cost in terms of officer time to set up the equipment and monitor the webcasting for each meeting.

9. Practicality

- 9.1 If the Council chose to webcast it would need to decide what meetings were important or interesting enough to be webcast.
- 9.2 Officers presented the WTFG with data on current level of public interest in Council and Committee meetings. The WTFG concluded that there was not a sufficient level of interest in all Council, Executive and committee meetings to justify webcasting all of them. If any meetings were to be webcast it would only be justifiable to webcast meetings of particular public interest.
- 9.3 The WTFG suggested that there should be a procedure to help decide what meetings were important enough to webcast. They thought that a councillor or officer should be required to gain support to webcast the meeting from the Leader of the Council, the Leader of the Opposition, the Committee Chairman and the Head of Strategic Support. The procedure would also set out how any disagreement between the relevant parties would be solved.
- 9.4 The WTFG also discussed that there should be guidance for Councillors on webcasting so that meetings could be conducted in a way which preserved the integrity and reputation of the Council and Councillors.
- 9.5 The WTFG considered that there should be a way to webcast meetings held at different venues and suggested that a mobile audio-visual solution should be bought.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 10.1 In conclusion the WTFG have considered the cost and practicality of webcasting and propose that webcasting is something that the Council should do.
- 10.2 The WTFG recommend:
- (1) The Council should webcast meetings of particular public interest.
 - (2) A project board of officers from Property, IT and Strategic Support should make arrangements to complete the repairs and acquire the equipment it needs to webcast meetings in the Council Chamber and at other locations.
 - (3) The Governance and Ethics Committee should develop a Webcasting Policy, to include a procedure for identifying meetings to be webcast and guidance for Members.

11. Consultation and Engagement

- 11.1 Members of the WTFG Group consulted the Conservative Group and Liberal Democrat Group.
- 11.2 Officers have consulted with ICT Programme Board.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix A – Membership and Terms of Reference for the Webcasting Task and Finish Group

Background Papers: Minutes from the meeting of the Council on 2 July 2015, Additional documentation considered by the WTFG is available on request.

Wards affected: All

Strategic Aims and Priorities Supported:

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy aim and priority:

MEC – Become an even more effective Council

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy aims and priorities by improving transparency and engagement with decision making processes.

Officer details:

Name: Jo Reeves
Job Title: Policy Officer (Executive Support)
Tel No: (01635) 519486
E-mail Address: Joanna.Reeves@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix A

Webcasting Task and Finish Group

Statement of Purpose and Terms of Reference

Objective(s):

The purpose of the Webcasting Task and Finish Group is to make a recommendation to the Governance and Ethics Committee regarding whether the Council should webcast its meetings and if so to consider which meetings should be webcast, what the implications on resources and staff might be and establish a timescale for implementation of webcasting, if approved.

Membership:

Councillor Pamela Bale
Councillor Jeanette Clifford
Councillor James Fredrickson
Councillor Lee Dillon

Officers:

Phil Rumens, Digital Services Manager
Jo Reeves, Policy Officer (Executive Support)
Moirra Fraser, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

Terms of Reference:

The Webcasting Task and Finish Group will:

- Gain an understanding of how local authorities use webcasting and other broadcast techniques
- Assess what resources are available within the Council to accommodate webcasting etc.
- Consider which meetings should be broadcast (ie. whether all public meetings should be broadcast, all meetings of particular committees etc)
- Present a report to the Governance and Ethics Committee making clear recommendations