EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 NOVEMBER 2013

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

7.   WEBCASTING OF FUTURE COUNCIL MEETINGS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: NONE

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To outline the options for future webcasting of Council meetings in order that Committee can determine which option(s) should be explored further.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: That:	
(A)	The Executive be advised which webcasting option(s) should be explored further.

1.0   Background

1.1   Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee requested that Officers bring forward a discussion paper around webcasting as part of their 13/14 work programme.

1.2   Webcasting of some Council meetings was introduced in 2010. This was introduced as part of the Accommodation Theme of C3W and delivered as part of the Council Chamber enhancements installation.

1.3   Since its inception the use of electronic communication by the public has developed. Also, the Council has gained experience from using the current webcasting system.

1.4   The current webcasting contract terminates on 12 December 2013, although the company, Public-i, has indicated that the Council can extend this contract on a short-term basis and this contract has, to date, been renewed on an annual basis.

2.0　Report

2.1　Current webcasting service provided.

2.1.1　Currently the following Committee meetings are webcasted:

- Full Council
- Executive
- District Planning Executive
- Development Management Committee

2.1.2　The current service enables the public, Officers and Members to view these meetings live or from the archive. The recordings of meetings are archived for a period of 12 months to enable people to view meetings, in whole or part, at their leisure. This archive period has recently been increased from 6 to 12 months.

2.1.3　The webcasts are undertaken by a small pool of staff who have been recruited from existing East Herts' staff or from our shared services.

2.1.4　The Chairs of Scrutiny Committees have indicated to date that they do not wish their meetings to be webcast.

2.1.5　The ownership of webcasting is split between various parts of the Council:

- ICT is responsible for the IT elements;
- Facilities and Property Management are responsible for arranging the webcasts.

2.1.6　It may support increased reliability and resilience of webcasting if there was a single person who has ownership for webcasting.

2.1.7　Democratic Services, responsible for meeting arrangements, provides information to enable agendas on the committee management system (Modern.gov) to be synchronised with web casts.

2.2　Cost of the current service

2.2.1　The cost of the current service in the table below is based on the current level of 60 hours of webcasting and the current contract terms.

2013/14 Budget estimate	£
Staff costs	1,800
System support and licence	11,000
Total	12,800 [a]

Note (a): The total excludes equipment depreciation and VAT.

2.2.2   The Council own the webcasting equipment. At some time in the future it may become technically obsolescent and need to be replaced.

2.2.3   Based on the viewing data provided by Public-i for the period March to September 2013, inclusive, and the pro-rata costs of the service, the cost per person per webcast viewing was approximately £0.30

2.3   Webcast viewings

2.3.1   It should be noted that the only data that we can capture is how many views of each webcast there are and not who, or for what purpose they are using the system.

2.3.2   The webcast viewing data for the period March to September 2013 is shown in **Essential Reference Paper B.**

2.3.3   A brief summary of salient features includes:

- The number of people viewing a particular meeting, both live and archived, ranges from a maximum of 918 to minimum of 0.
- The March 2013 Full Council was the most viewed meeting over the period March to September 2013.
- Live viewings are relatively rare, maximum 94 but most frequently zero. Live viewings generally appear to be related to planning issues.
- Development Management Committee meetings were the most viewed live meetings.

2.4   What other local authorities are doing in respect of webcasting

2.4.1 A survey has been sent out to a number of the local councils. 11 responses were received. Only one council was considering undertaking webcasting of council meetings.

2.4.2 The responses from the authorities are set out in **Essential Reference Paper C.**

2.5 Context

2.5.1 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 (the 2012 Regulations) came into force on 10 September 2012. DCLG stated this will make it easier for new 'social media' reporting of council executive meetings thereby opening proceedings up to internet bloggers, tweeting and hyperlocal news forums.

2.5.2 The reason for introducing this new regulation has been stated as the following by DCLG. "Council meetings are public meetings. Elected representatives and council officers acting in the public sphere should expect to be held to account for their comments and votes in such meetings. The rules require councils to provide reasonable facilities for any member of the public to report on meetings. Councils should thus allow the filming of councillors and officers at meetings that are open to the public."

2.5.3 East Herts Council already enables attendees at Council meetings to record the proceedings and use social media during the meetings.

2.5.4 Whether the Council decides to continue, increase, decrease or cease webcasting of Council meetings, it will not be contrary to the expectation for Councils as set out by DCLG.

2.6 Options

2.6.1 There are 4 options for webcasting:

1. Continue as now with webcasting
2. Do more webcasting
2.1. Webcast more meetings
2.2. Add additional functionality
3. Do less webcasting – webcast fewer meetings
4. Stop all webcasting

2.6.2 Whichever of options 1 to 3, inclusive, are undertaken it is

important that a reliable and resilient webcasting service should be provided.

2.6.3   The Council's webcasting functionality includes:

- Audio/visual recording and archiving of meetings;
- Access to documents associated with the agenda items; and
- A feedback function where people can message the Council and receive responses some time later.

2.6.4   The current webcasting system can provide the following additional functionality without increasing the cost of the system. However, there will be a staff resource implication if additional functionality is implemented:

- Live Twitter, Facebook, etc. feedback;
- Links to maps that indicate where items relate to;
- Links from a map to items that relate to a particular location (as denoted by a pin);
- Speaker profiles linked to EHDC's web pages;
- Meeting presentation slides, if and when these are used;
- Facility for Councillors to share a link that relates to their meeting contribution with their followers on Twitter, Facebook, etc.
- E-petitions; and
- Leader's (or anyone else's) message to the public, about general or specific issues.

2.6.5   **Essential Reference Paper D** summarises the benefits, issues and comments associated with each option.

2.7   Summary

2.7.1   The Council's current webcasting provides transparency and accountability in respect of the specific meetings webcast.

2.7.2   The current webcast system has additional functionality that could support increased engagement between the Council and the residents.

2.7.3   There are 4 principle options for future of the Council's webcasting: continue as now; do more; do less; and stop webcasting.

3.0 **Implications/Consultations**

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers
None.

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