
Meeting: General Purposes Committee
Date: 17 July 2014
Subject: Webcasting
Report of: Cllr Maurice Jones , Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: This report proposes an approach for implementing webcasting in key council meetings, and includes new draft protocols on filming and use of social media in council meetings.

Advising Officer: Deb Clarke, Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Contact Officer: Georgina Stanton, Chief Communication Officer
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Webcasting has been introduced in many authorities to demonstrate openness and transparency. Central Bedfordshire is committed to community and public engagement and the broadcasting of its democratic processes will enable both residents and organisations to connect with these.

Financial:

1. It is envisaged that the webcasting services will be procured from a specialist third party supplier. Subject to Member agreement a soft market testing and tender exercise will be conducted. From research with others it is anticipated that annual revenue costs of approximately £50,000pa will be required which will represent a budget pressure from 2015/16 onwards. Start up costs for the first year of use will be higher and the financial requirements for this phase of execution can be met from earmarked reserves, subject to Executive approval on 15 July 2014.

Legal:

2. Whilst there is no statutory requirement to webcast Council meetings it is recommended best practice by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Constitutionally, the minutes of meetings will continue to be the formal record the meeting.
3. Protocols are also envisaged that will protect the Council from potential legal challenges relating to the Human Rights Act and/or Data Protection requirements.

Risk Management:

4. As with all technologies, there are risks for potential failure. These would be mitigated through contract arrangements with the third party supplier which would address contingency and recovery arrangements.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
7. This proposal is likely to increase access to and awareness of our democratic processes to all members of our community.

Public Health

8. This proposal is likely to increase access to and awareness of our democratic processes in relation to public health decisions.

Community Safety:

9. This proposal is likely to increase access to and awareness of our democratic processes in relation to community safety decisions.

Sustainability:

10. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

11. A procurement exercise will be undertaken before commissioning a provider.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**The Committee is asked to:**

1. **Review and agree the proposed approach to implement webcasting;**
2. **Review and agree the new draft protocol for filming council meetings;**
3. **Review and agree the new draft protocol for using social media in council meetings.**

Introduction

12. Webcasting is a process that allows anyone to view democratic processes online, either through live transmission or watching later after the event.

13. A number of other councils have been webcasting meetings for some fifteen years and BBC Parliament broadcasts continued, unedited live webcasts of national democratic processes.
14. The reach of webcasts is dependent upon the nature of debates, promotional activity and the amount of time that the system has been in operation. Bristol City Council has been webcasting meetings for many years and their meetings are viewed on line approximately 22,000 times per year.
15. Evidence suggests that the uptake of video is only likely to increase. Film is increasingly popular as a communication method, as shown by the growth in online video websites such YouTube, which is now the third most viewed website after Google and Facebook.
16. As a council we frequently use video to communicate with residents about our services, consultations and policies. To date, more than 26,000 people have viewed the Council's videos online.

Proposed approach

17. It is proposed that Central Bedfordshire Council installs and operates webcasting equipment in the Council Chamber at Priory House.

This would enable residents to view the following regular meetings:

- Full Council
- Executive
- Development Management Committee
- Traffic Management Meetings

Although Overview and Scrutiny meetings are not routinely held in the Chamber, should the Chairman decide that an agenda item is likely to attract public interest, if the relevant meeting were relocated to the Chamber it could be webcast.

18. Approval is also sought for new protocols which will:
 - Allow external participants in the meetings to be given sufficient information about the webcasting process.
 - Empower the Chairman of any meeting that is being webcast to suspend the process should it be necessary.
 - Ensure that the Council complies with its own constitutional and wider statutory requirements.

Proposed timetable

19. Formal consideration through General Purposes Committee in July and, subject to the decisions of that Committee, recommendations to Full Council in September 2014.
20. Initiation of procurement in October 2014.

21. Preparation phase for Members and Officers through briefing sessions and notes – November 2014.
22. Implementation of system by December 2014.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft protocol for use of social media and recording of Central Bedfordshire Council meetings.

Appendix B – Draft protocol for webcasting Central Bedfordshire Council meetings.

Background Papers:

None.