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**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, recording and use of social media in council meetings.

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**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, as approved by the Executive 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.

3. More recently (30 June 2014) Central Government has published new draft regulations; Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014. If approved, the Regulations will strengthen the rights of the public and press to film, audio record, photograph, blog, tweet or use any other type of social media to report any public meetings of their councils, including committees, sub-committees and joint committees. Although these Regulations do not require Councils to webcast meetings it may be beneficial for the Council to have and make available one audio visual recording of some public meetings through webcasting.
4. The minutes will continue to be the formal record of the meeting.
5. 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:**

6. 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):**

7. Not applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

8. 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.
9. This proposal is likely to increase access to and awareness of our democratic processes to all members of our community.

**Public Health**

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

**Community Safety:**

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

**Sustainability:**

12. Not Applicable.

**Procurement:**

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **The Committee is asked to:**

- 1. review and agree the proposed approach set out in the report to implement webcasting for certain meetings of the Council when held in the Council Chamber;**
- 2. approve the provisions suggested to prepare Members and Officers for the implementation of webcasting;**
- 3. approve the approach to review of the new system, to assess the extent to which the equipment, procedures and officer support are meeting operational requirements;**
- 4. review and agree the new draft protocol for webcasting, recording and using social media in council meetings.**

## **Introduction**

14. Webcasting is a process that allows anyone to view democratic processes online, either through live transmission or watching later after the event.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. The Government's proposed Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 give the public and press rights to film or use any type of social media to report any public meetings of their Councils. Although these Regulations do not require Councils to webcast meetings it may be beneficial for the Council to have and make available one complete true record of meetings via a webcast.

## **Proposed approach**

20. A cross Council officer working group has been considering the technological and operational implications of introducing webcasting. A procurement expert has also supported the group.
21. 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.

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.

22. 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 in specific circumstances such as when exempt information was under consideration.
  - Ensure that the Council complies with its own constitutional and wider statutory requirements.

## **Preparation and Review Arrangements**

23. In order to address the technical and operational challenges of deploying webcasting in Central Bedfordshire Council, it is proposed that the Council contracts with an expert third party supplier. There are several such companies currently working with local authorities across the Council.
24. In advance of the implementation of the webcasting service, work on operational preparedness will include:
  - Extensive briefing and training sessions for both officers and Members who will be affected by the new model.
  - Such training will include exposure to the experience of a webcast meeting, ahead of the launch of the public facing service.
  - Engagement with the in house IT team to ensure compatibility with the Council's IT systems and particularly its web presence.

## **Review Mechanisms**

25. The cross Council task group that has researched and prepared this proposal will continue to operate throughout the implementation phase of the project. Specifically, the group will monitor the technical, operational, procedural and reputational implications of the system.

26. Feedback from a range of stakeholders will inform the reviews, which are envisaged following the first six months of operation and on an annual basis thereafter.
27. The review reports and any recommendations for change/amendment will be presented to the General Purposes Committee in the first instance and, if necessary, to future Full Council meetings.

### **Proposed timetable**

28. Formal consideration through General Purposes Committee in July and, subject to the decisions of that Committee, recommendations to Full Council in September 2014.
29. Initiation of procurement in October 2014.
30. Preparation phase for Members and Officers through briefing sessions and notes – November 2014.
31. Implementation of system by December 2014.
32. Six monthly review report prepared and presented to General Purposes Committee.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Open and Accountable Local Government (Draft DCLG Guide)

Appendix B – Draft protocol for webcasting, recording and using social media in council meetings.

### **Background Papers:**

None