
Meeting: Council
Date: 11 September 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.

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 in democratic processes. Central Bedfordshire is committed to community and public engagement and the broadcasting of its meetings 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 at an annual estimated cost of £21,000. Year one costs are expected to be higher (at £27,000) to cover set up costs. An earmarked reserve has been agreed to initiate the system but on going costs will represent a budget pressure.

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. This year Central Government has also published regulations; Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, which 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.
4. Whilst webcast recording will be publically available the minutes will continue to be the formal record of the meeting.

5. Protocols have also been developed 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 for implementing webcasting;**
- 2. approve the provisions suggested to prepare Members and Officers for the implementation of webcasting**
- 3. approve the approach to review 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 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 in the context of the new regulations 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. The working group have explored the feasibility of using the current audio visual equipment for webcasting. The current provider of the equipment is not able to deliver webcasting themselves.
22. It is, therefore proposed, that the Council contracts with an expert third party supplier and explore the possibility of using our existing equipment. There are several such companies currently working with local authorities. A provider will be selected following a robust procurement exercise. Whilst value for money will be important in the evaluation of potential providers so too will experience and successful delivery of similar services elsewhere.
23. It is proposed that we enable webcasting from both the Priory House Council Chamber and Watling House Committee Room 1.

24. Occasionally we may hold a public meeting in a community venue. If we want these meetings to be filmed we will commission a local filming professional to film the meeting and make the film available online for public viewing within 24 hours of the meeting. The Council has used this approach successfully before and it offers the best value for money option.
25. It is proposed to implement webcasting from December 2014 for the following meetings:
- Full Council
 - Executive
 - Development Management Committee.
26. Although other meetings are not proposed for webcasting in the first instance, should the Chairman decide that an agenda item is likely to attract public interest, the relevant meeting could be webcast.
27. The technical, operational and procedural implications of the system will be closely monitored.
28. Feedback from a range of stakeholders will inform a formal review, which is envisaged following the first six months of operation and then on an annual basis thereafter.
29. 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.

New Protocol

30. Approval is also sought for the draft protocol (attached at Appendix A) 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 Arrangements

31. 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.

Proposed timetable

32. Commission a provider by end of September 2014.
33. Preparation phase for Members and Officers during October– November 2014.
34. Implementation of system in December 2014.
35. Six monthly review report prepared and presented to General Purposes Committee July 2015.

Appendices:

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

Background Papers:

None