

Central Bedfordshire Council

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Date: 07 December 2017

Update on Webcasting and recording of meetings

Report of: Cllr R D Wenham, Corporate Resources - Executive Member and Deputy Leader of the Council, (richard.wenham@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Charles Warboys, Director of Resources, (charles.warboys@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

To update Members on user satisfaction with the existing webcasting platform and to update on changes to recording meetings from 01 January 2018 onwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee: -

- 1. Note the current satisfaction with webcasting; and**
- 2. Consider and comment on the future approach to recording meetings outlined at paragraphs 17 to 23 and the subsequent amendments to the appendices.**

Background

1. In 2015 the Council commenced the webcasting of Council, Executive and Development Management Committee meetings via a website provided by the company Public-i. The Council agreed a set of principles for the delivery of these webcasts that included the following: -
 - Provision for live streaming;
 - The capacity to terminate or suspend the webcast if necessary; and
 - The online storage of webcasts for a period of 6 months, but that they would not be available for download
2. During 2016 the Council also started to live-stream meetings of the overview and scrutiny committees.
3. In February 2017, the Council agreed not to renew the contract with Public-i from 01 February 2018 onwards in order to achieve an efficiency in the MTFP. This has led to the Council reviewing the most effective approach to continue producing a video record of meetings in the future.

- Throughout the duration of this contract there have been several problems with regard to reliability resulting in the need for regular maintenance. This has led to an increase in the level of resource required to attend and support meetings.

Webcast views

- Webcasts are currently available to view on the Council's website for a period of 6-months after a meeting. The webcast views for the period 01 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 were as follows: -

Committee	Total views	% of total	Live views	Archive views
Development Management Committee	2,047	49%	34%	66%
Council	687	16%	33%	67%
Executive	584	14%	21%	79%
Children's Services OSC*	288	7%	35%	65%
Sustainable Communities OSC*	245	6%	27%	73%
Corporate Resources OSC*	148	4%	27%	73%
Social Care, Health & Housing OSC*	173	4%	38%	62%
Total:	4,172	100%	31%	69%

* Webcasts commenced in August 2016

- For the majority of these meetings the average numbers of views of the live webcast was small, ranging from 8 live views on average for a Corporate Resources OSC meeting to 53 live views on average for a DMC meeting. Numbers of archive views were significantly higher, ranging from an average of 18 views (SCHHOSC) to 104 views (DMC) per meeting.

User satisfaction: viewers of recordings

- During November 2017 Members and staff were asked to provide some insight on their experience of webcast meetings. Residents were also asked to provide their views via social media. A total of 93 responses were received from officers, Members and residents who had attended numerous meetings. Most of the respondents had attended more than 10 webcast meetings and responses covered those who had attended meetings as a Chairman, a committee member, a ward member and a presenter.

Q1. Have you ever watched a webcast of a CBC meeting?

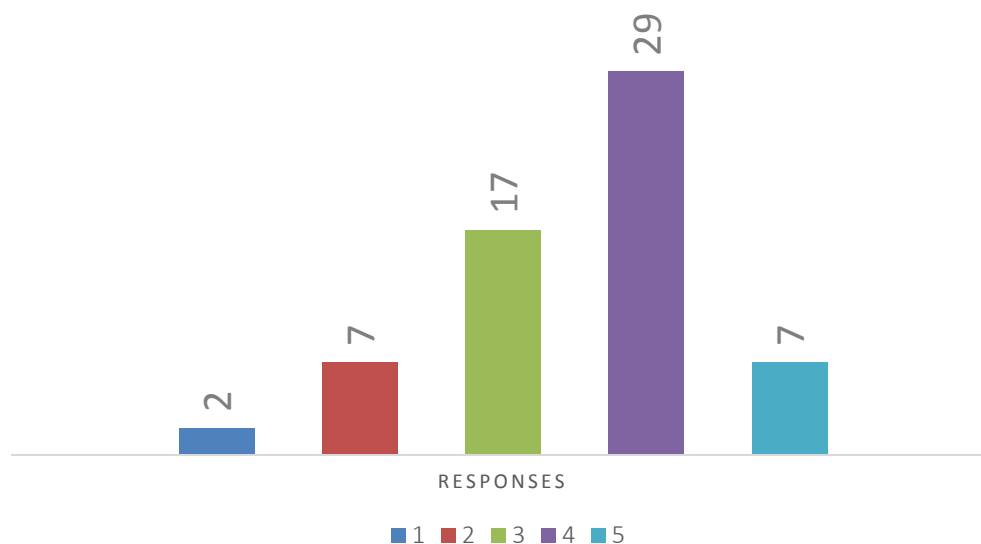


Q2. If not, were you aware that CBC meetings were webcast?



8. Questions 1-2 were addressed only to residents (see above). This feedback highlights that most of those residents who responded to the social media survey had not watched a webcast and many were not aware that webcasts were even available.

Q3. Overall satisfaction, for those watching webcast meetings remotely, on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being excellent and 1 being very disappointed.



9. On the whole, the feedback was positive (see above), 86% of respondents were not dissatisfied with the quality of the recordings when watching online, albeit several respondents commented that there was insufficient notice of the meetings or recordings provided in advance. Overwhelming feedback was provided that recordings of meetings needed to continue to be provided.
10. In addition, respondents commented that when functioning properly, the use of webcasting enhanced council openness and transparency, many also felt that it compared very well to similar solutions in other local authorities. Respondents felt that the recording provided an accurate and informative record of a meeting that conveyed the atmosphere of the meeting that would not necessarily be included in the written notes. It also meant you could watch the proceedings without necessarily needing to be physically present, for example if you are an officer with an interest in one of the items on the agenda.
11. In summary, detailed comments were provided with regards to improvements that could be made for viewers of recordings as follows: -
 - 11.1 Greater and more consistent reliability
 - 11.2 Quality of both sound and video
 - 11.3 Ensuring that speakers were always visible
 - 11.4 Reducing the likelihood of video buffering
 - 11.5 Widen the view to be able to see the reactions of listeners

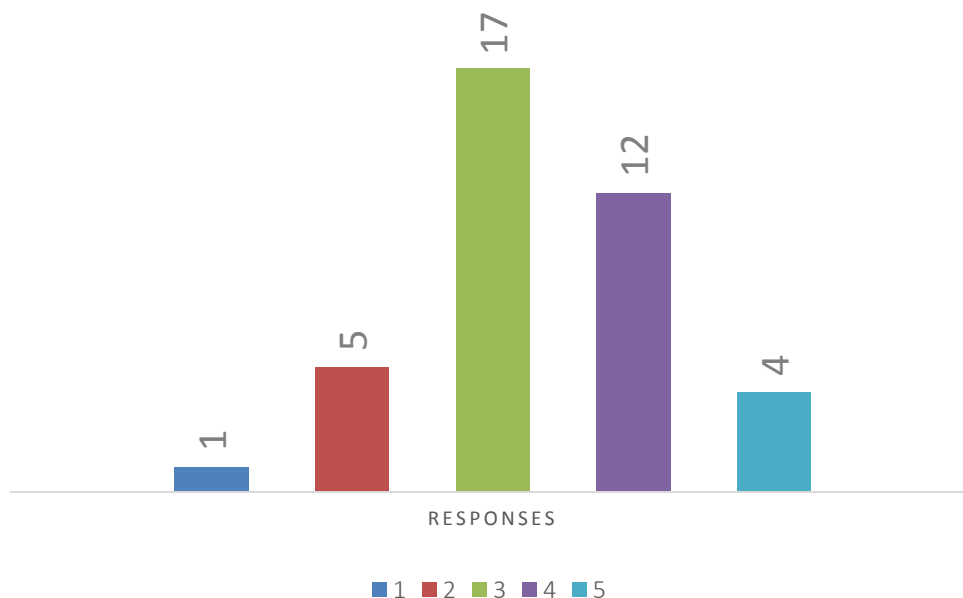
- 11.6 Ensure names printed on screen match the speaker
- 11.7 Improve accessibility to webcasts via the Council's website
- 11.8 Better publicity of the availability of video recordings and calendar of meetings in order to increase viewer numbers to ensure it is value for money.
- 11.9 Being able to view useful materials in split screen, for example PowerPoint presentations, websites, etc...
- 11.10 Investigate whether subtitles could be provided
- 11.11 Extend the number of meetings for which a video recording is provided
- 11.12 Enhance the duration for which recordings are available to the public
- 11.13 Provide ability to show webcasts via television
- 11.14 Better explanation when recordings are not made available publically.

User satisfaction: participants in meetings

12. In addition to the above, participants (39) at meetings were asked to provide their views on those things they felt could be improved for attendees at meetings. In total 67% of respondents (see below) were not dissatisfied with the current experience at meetings.

13. Reliability was raised as an issue by several respondents but it should be noted that during the duration of the contract with Public-i from 2015 there have only been 3-4 occasions on which a webcast has failed to be recorded adequately. These failures have not always been created by Public-i, some have been as a result of Council technology.

Q4. Overall satisfaction with the webcast as a participant on a scale of one to five, with five being excellent and one being very disappointed.



14. Several Members also referred to the Chairman having the ability to select speakers and to create a speakers list during the meeting. This software is available for use in meetings but it will require the presence of an additional officer to manage the video recording of the meeting. Whilst two officers are currently present in relevant meetings, one of whom manages the webcast, this is an additional cost to the service. It had been hoped to revert back to one officer only being present at meetings where a video recording is being produced. Furthermore, as it has previously been agreed that the Minutes of meetings ought to provide more detail on the discussion at the meeting there is a need to reduce the pressure on the number of meetings attended by officers.
15. In addition to improving microphone usage and providing the ability for the Chairman to manage speakers and microphones it was also suggested that improved training be provided for those users likely to be on camera.
16. Depending upon the views of Members it will be possible to improve several of these aspects utilising the new camera control software. For example. In light of the feedback received various improvements are proposed below in relation to our future approach.

Future approach

17. In light of the decision not to renew the Public-i contract an alternative solution has been sought that will enable us to produce a video recording of meetings at nil cost. It is proposed that these video recordings be made available via the Council's online YouTube Channel. Using YouTube will also enable viewers to watch webcasts directly on some televisions.
18. This future approach solution will enable us to further widen the shots of the meeting in order to show other attendees and hopefully will improve reliability as a result of the implementation of simpler solution. Both of which directly respond to comments from the user survey. In addition, we will continue to monitor video and sound quality and consider how access to recordings can be enhanced.
19. As a result of sharing recordings via YouTube it will mean that recordings can be made available for a much longer period of time and will not have to be deleted after a period of 6 months as at present. Members are asked to provide a view on the duration for which video recordings should be made available following the meeting.
20. Whilst the Council is restricted under the current arrangement to the number of meetings that can be broadcast, under the new approach from 01 January 2018 the Council will be able to produce a recording of additional meetings that may be of interest to residents or partners on request.
21. The Council has previously required that recordings should not be available for download and that they can be removed from the website if

necessary. To facilitate this, recordings are not immediately archived after the meeting. This provides the opportunity to reflect on whether any information needs to be removed from the recording. Recordings typically need to be amended because all or part of the content of the webcast is or is likely to be in breach of a statutory provision, for example Data Protection and Human Rights legislation or provisions relating to confidential or exempt information. In these circumstances, the recording is not archived until the section in breach of a statutory provision is removed following which the rest of the recording can be archived.

22. Should recordings be streamed live via YouTube any recordings would immediately be archived, limiting the opportunity to reflect on the content of the video. Whilst videos can be removed it is proposed that, in order to preserve the opportunity to remove inappropriate content that may breach any provisions, meetings no longer be live-streamed from 01 January 2018 onwards. As the numbers of live viewers are relatively small across the year (a maximum of 53 on average) it is suggested that this would not result in a significant impact to the numbers of viewers.
23. In summary, in light of the feedback from the survey and subject to any comments that Members might have, the following changes will result from changing our approach from 01 January 2018 onwards: -
 - 23.1 Meetings no longer live-streamed, recordings provided via YouTube after the meeting
 - 23.2 Recordings available to residents for longer than 6 months (duration to be determined in discussion with Members)
 - 23.3 Members can request to record other meetings where there is significant public interest, rooms and staff available
 - 23.4 Improved publication of available recordings, in particular to ensure that residents are aware that recordings will be available and that they have been published
 - 23.5 Improved training for Members
 - 23.6 Tagging of items and speakers to permit skipping to sections of recording no longer permitted
 - 23.7 Presentations will only be available via Modern.Gov

Reason/s for decision

24. In light of the Council's decision not to renew the existing contract for webcasting meetings it is necessary to agree a future approach from 01 January 2018 onwards so that this can be implemented in time not to impact on the production of video recordings of meetings once the existing contract terminates.

Council Priorities

25. Webcasting enhances the openness and transparency of meetings and enables the Council to engage with residents through a different channel. The Council is committed to responsiveness to local communities and

continuing to record meetings will enable further engagement with communities.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

26. Whilst there is no statutory requirement to webcast Council meetings or produce a video recording it is recommended best practice by the Department for Communities and Local Government.
27. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 also 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 is beneficial for the Council to have and make available one audio visual recording of some public meetings through webcasting.
28. The Minutes will continue to be the formal record of the meeting.

Financial and Risk Implications

29. The decision not to renew the existing contract with Public-i will enable the Council to deliver savings from 2018/19 onwards. The new video recording solution can be delivered at nil cost, which ensures that there will be no negative financial impact as a result of these changes.
30. Should Members choose not to implement these proposals there may be financial implications depending upon the approach that is preferred, for example the continued presence of an officer at meetings dedicated to the delivery of a video recording.
31. Furthermore, there is a risk that if Members choose to continue to live-stream meetings via YouTube confidential or exempt information may be shared publically without the opportunity for the Council to rectify this first.

Equalities Implications

32. 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.
33. The changes proposed in this report enhances the openness and transparency of meetings and enable the Council to engage with a wider group of residents who may not be able to attend council meetings.

Conclusion and next Steps

34. The changes proposed in this report are necessary for the Council to continue to be able to produce a video recording of meetings following the cessation of the existing contract with Public-i.

35. Following the consideration of this report it is proposed that these changes be implemented from 01 January 2018 subject to any amendments that Members may feel are necessary. There will be no requirement for further presentation of these proposals to Council.

Appendices

Appendix A: Central Bedfordshire Council Protocol on the use of social media and recording at the Council's meetings

Appendix B: Central Bedfordshire Council protocol for webcasting, recording and use of social media in council meetings.

Background Papers

None

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