



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

West Oxfordshire District Council

Name and date of Committee	Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee Wednesday 7 October 2020
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 9
Subject	Live Streaming of Council and Committee Meetings
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Toby Morris, Cabinet Member for Resources Email: toby.morris@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Phil Martin, Group Manager, Business Support Services Tel: 07764352360; Email: phil.martin@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To further consider the Motion regarding webcasting of meetings referred to the Committee by the Council and to submit comments or recommendations accordingly.
Annexes	None
Recommendation	That consideration be given to the Motion as set out below, and comments or a recommendation be made to Council.
Corporate priorities	To meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents and to provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services.
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

I. BACKGROUND

1.1. At the meeting of the Council held on 23 October 2019, the following Motion was proposed by Councillor Jake Acock and seconded by Councillor Andy Graham, namely:-

“One of the ethos of this council is to be inclusive; not exclusive. We want to welcome people in and get more and more active with local government. This council recognises we are living in an age of technology that can be used to keep in touch, improve communications and change peoples lives for the better. Therefore, in order to improve our communications, we charge that every council and committee meeting is filmed and recorded, then placed on the West Oxfordshire District Council website for West Oxfordshire residents to view and listen to our meetings. Across the country from Manchester, Wandsworth and Bath, council meetings are recorded. Therefore, this council charges that we will now record and stream live all of our council meetings and committee meetings”

1.2. In accordance with paragraph 11(e) of the Council Procedure Rules, it was resolved that the motion should stand referred without discussion to this Committee – minute no. 50 of the meeting held 27 November 2019 refers.

1.3. Subsequently, Council further considered the matter at its meeting on 22 January 2020 (minute no. 56) and resolved:

- (a) That further study was required on the various methods of recording available, location options and cost of installation;
- (b) That the meetings rooms to be included in the evidence gathering should be Committee Rooms 1 & 2 and the Council Chamber, and that feedback should be sought from other Councils which had installed systems, or were due to do so; and
- (c) That the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the costings and other information prior to further consideration by the Council.

1.4. This further report has been delayed as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, including the cancellation of some meetings earlier in the year, and the situation has of course developed and been influenced by the holding of meetings via video conferencing, which became temporarily permissible under legislation made by the Government in April.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1. The Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously considered a report on the Webcasting of Council meetings, in March 2016. A copy of that report and the associated minute extract were attached to [the report to this Committee on 27 November 2019](#). At that time the Committee resolved “*That the content of the report be noted and the Cabinet be advised that the Committee was of the opinion that no further action should be taken on the matter at this juncture.*”

2.2. In the four and a half years that have passed since this matter was last considered, the webcasting/live streaming of meetings has become more commonplace. Across the Publica partnership, Forest of Dean District Council introduced webcasting of its Council and Planning Committee meetings in May 2018; Cheltenham Borough Council introduced webcasting from its Council Chamber only, in October 2019; and Cotswold District Council has recently approved the award of a contract for the purchase and implementation of a hybrid web casting solution.

2.3. On 4 April 2020 as a result of the pandemic the ‘Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)

(England and Wales) Regulations 2020' were passed by Government. This temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person thus giving Councils the powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology. The Regulations and consequent power are in place until 7 May 2021, however this is currently under review so may be extended or made permanent.

- 2.4. Following the change in legislation the Council has used a video conferencing solution to virtually hold and broadcast Council meetings, which has been well received by residents, with just under 900 views on average per meeting (this should be treated purely indicative as all views even if they were only for a few minutes are included in this figure). Because the current powers are time bound there are no guarantees that the current arrangements for live streaming will be able to continue and, in any event, the current system is not suitable for the webcasting of physical meetings taking place at the Council offices, meaning that an alternative solution is required.
- 2.5. In order to future proof any decision regarding webcasting solutions, it is considered that any system would need to have the capability for Councillors to take part either from the offices or from an alternative location such as their home, thereby providing the flexibility to operate during the current pandemic and when movement / access is less restricted. The following options are based around a hybrid approach that meets this requirement.

3. OPTION 1 – PROVIDING RECORDING AND WEBCASTING CAPABILITIES FOR THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND COMMITTEE ROOMS 1 & 2

- 3.1. The implementation of a webcasting solution that provides functionality for meetings to be held in either the Council Chamber or Committee Rooms independently.
- 3.2. The solution can be configured for either a dual delegate unit, which enables two members to log into one delegate unit, with each unit having its own push to talk button and voting capability or a single unit. The difference in costs will be outlined in the finance section of the report.
- 3.3. The solution will utilise four cameras located in the Council Chamber to digitally capture the meeting and three large flat TVs would be installed so that all participants can see what is happening throughout the meeting.
- 3.4. Committee Room 1 would have a similar specification to the Council Chamber using multiple cameras to record the meeting and additional TV screens so that when needed the dividers can be opened up to give access to Committee Room 2, which would be equipped with two cameras and speakers so attendees can fully take part in the meeting.
- 3.5. As with the webex video conferencing system currently being used for all meetings, Councillors would also be able to join the meeting at another location, from their personal device, via a web browser. Whilst possible, this would happen only if Government Regulations allow it beyond 7 May 2021, but would remain possible for informal meetings, such as Councillor briefings or workshops.

4. OPTION 2 - PROVISION OF RECORDING AND WEBCASTING CAPABILITY FOR THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

- 4.1. The implementation of a webcasting solution that provides functionality for meetings to be held in the Council Chamber. The solution can be configured for either a single or dual delegate unit. The difference in costs will be outlined in the finance section of the report.

5. OPTION 3 - RECONFIGURATION OF COUNCIL CHAMBER OR COMMITTEE ROOM 1, WHICH WILL INCORPORATE RECORDING AND WEBCASTING CAPABILITIES

- 5.1. The layout of the Council Chamber is inflexible and so limits how it can be used currently and as a result of this it has generally been used only for full Council and Cabinet meetings, with other meetings being held in the Committee Rooms, mainly Committee Room One.
- 5.2. A possible solution to this is to explore the feasibility of either reconfiguring the Council Chamber so that it could then host all meetings or alternatively making the necessary changes to Committee Room One and hosting all meetings in there, thus freeing up the Council Chamber to be re-purposed.
- 5.3. Whilst costs have been provided for the technical solution in the finance implications section, these do not include the costs of new furniture, lighting and other items required in either the Committee Room or Council Chamber. If the Committee wishes to pursue this option than a full set of costs will be produced.
- 5.4. In addition to providing a steer on their preferred options, the Committee may also wish to provide some clarity as to which meetings might be webcast/live streamed, as there will be different implications associated with different options.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The indicative one off capital costs for the options outlined in the main body of the report are:

Option	Costs
Option 1 with Dual delegate units	£192,132
Option 1 with Single delegate units -	£270,347
Option 2 with Dual delegate units –	£98,109
Option 2 with Single delegate units –	£156,253
Option 3 (re-configuration of Committee Room 1)	£92,189 (does not include furniture or other associated costs)

- 6.2. The revenue costs for system maintenance and hosting are £32,195, based on a three-year contract paid upfront and then £12,763 annually afterwards.
- 6.3. Currently there isn't any funding available in either the Council's capital programme or revenue budgets so this needs to be taken into consideration as part of the recommendation to Council. Should the Council wish to proceed, it will need to be subject to the budgetary process and to it being in a position to make a decision in the knowledge of what consequential impacts there may be.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are potential data protection issues associated with webcasting and live streaming of meetings. Should Council decide to progress with such a project it would be essential to learn from the experience of others and ensure robust safeguards were in place to protect against the misuse of such recordings. This will include the installation of notices in the council chamber and/or other rooms where webcasting/live streaming takes place, updating the constitution to include a protocol for webcasting, and an updated privacy notice.

- 7.2. Although it is recommended that if the Council chooses to progress this matter it should choose a hybrid-option, it remains the case that from May 2021 it may not be possible for councillors to attend a meeting otherwise than by being physically present.
- 7.3. In order to comply with both public procurement regulations and the Council's own Contract Procedure Rules, a framework would be used as this mitigate risks, whilst also reduces the costs and time involved.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1. The main risk associated with webcasting/live-streaming of meetings is highlighted in section 7 above, i.e. the misuse of such recordings. Putting in place robust safeguards would mitigate against such a risk.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1. The Council could choose not to implement a recording / webcasting solution and return to how meetings were held once the current ability to hold meetings remotely changes or comes to an end. It is also possible that the Government may advise that hybrid meetings take place either temporarily – to protect anyone particularly at risk from Covid – or permanently to make democracy more accessible.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1. None.