WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 MARCH 2016

WEB CASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

REPORT OF THE JOINT HEAD OF BUSINESS INFORMATION AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

(Contact: Phil Martin: - Tel (01993) 861201)

(The report is for information)

1. **PURPOSE**

   To explore the feasibility and associated costs of introducing web casting of Council meetings.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

   That the Committee considers the report and makes recommendations to Cabinet.

3. **INTRODUCTION**

   3.1.   This Council supports the principles of openness and transparency in its workings;

   3.2.   The Openness in local Government Bodies regulations 2014 give members of the public and press the right to record (either pictures and/or audio recordings) meetings of the Council held in public. Whilst the Council has allowed filming for some time and has a protocol in place the Chair has always had the discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that, in his or her opinion, are disruptive.

4. **BACKGROUND**

   4.1.   Webcasting of meetings involves live or 'real time' audio and/or video streaming the proceedings over the web so that the meeting can be experienced remotely. In addition, or as an alternative, a copy of the broadcast will also be made available after the event which is known as „on demand" availability.

   4.2.   Webcasting usually involves either the use of at least one camera with pan and zoom facilities or the use of several fixed cameras focusing on different parts of the room linked to activation of microphones. A thirds option could be one fixed camera providing a suitable 'wide' shot of the Committee Members, however a detailed survey would be required to ensure a suitable approach, taking into account our facilities and available staffing resources to manage cameras during an event would need to be undertaken to identify the associated costs.

4.3.   While web-casts are generally considered to be positive in terms of increased transparency and understanding of the decision making process, viewing of such web-casts can vary considerably in scale.

4.4.   Experience from Cherwell District Council who have been webcasting their meetings for a number of years has shown that in 2015 the number of 'live' viewers was approx. 1,129, so relatively low but they had 30,522 archive video viewers. This is to some extent similar to other Councils experiences, but numbers can significantly increase when a controversial item is discussed.

4.5.   Some of the wider advantages and disadvantages are outlined below:

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Allows people to view proceedings from a wide range of locations rather than having to attend the meeting – this could be a benefit given the geographic spread of the district although ironically those in the more remote areas are likely to have the poorest broadband service at present. This would also support the sustainability agenda through reducing the need for members of the public to travel to witness meetings • Helps meet public expectations of Authority transparency and provides the potential for increased public understanding of decision making processes. • High quality pictures available for a wide range of subsequent purposes including evidence. • Existing print and broadcast media have steadily moved away from providing lengthy, verbatim reporting of what goes on in elected bodies because it's not what the public wants	• Cost – There is currently no budget provision for webcasting. • Given the current pressure on budgets it is possible that the budget for other activities would have to be reduced to accommodate this new cost. • Ideally webcasting should be accompanied by information to help people understand what they're watching, the reasons it is relevant to them and what procedures the Council is following. This is an additional workload, especially as further enquiries/questions may be raised. • Potentially low levels of 'live' viewing for meetings based on experience of other users • Webcast video quality can be affected by low bandwidth, either from the broadcast venue or through the user's internet connection.

5.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1.   Based on Cherwell DC current solution, the Council could expect to pay around £17,500 per year for 60 hours of uploaded content.

5.2.   In addition to this, 'one-off' set up costs of between £25,000 - £50,000, depending on the specific requirements the Council has, which would include

video cameras, microphone conference units, projectors /monitors, would need to be factored in following a site specific survey.

    5.3.   Currently there is no provision within the ICT capital or revenue budgets to meet the costs associated with introducing web casting of Council meetings.

6.   RISKS

    6.1.   The risks are mainly reputational and arise from the conduct of the meeting or of individual Members as a result of inappropriate words or gestures being broadcast, some of which could breach legislation.

    6.2.   Recordings/webcasting of quasi-judicial proceedings such as Planning and Licensing & Regulatory Committees and the consequences of having a 'recording' of proceedings should a decision be questioned by a member of the public. Recordings/webcasting do not make a meeting any more 'public' than it already is, but it does provide a transcript which could allow for a greater level of challenge.

    6.3.   There is no legal risk should the Council wish to remain with the current arrangements.

Phil Martin
Joint Head of Business Information and Customer Services

Date: 24th February 2016