

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	11th July 2018
Subject:	Consideration of proposal to webcast council meetings		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report considers the financial and other implications of webcasting council meetings alongside the benefits of providing such a service, following the approval of a Notice of Motion by full Council to bring a report to Cabinet to consider the matter in light of other pressures and priorities.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that, in light of the Council's other priorities, the webcasting of council meetings not be pursued.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Notice of Motion approved by Council stated the following:

"Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, transparency and accountability in its decision taking processes and the delivery of public services.

Council believes that live streaming of Council meetings will be of benefit to residents, keep them informed of issues that affect their community and greatly enhance the accountability of decision taking.

The availability of recordings will make a significant contribution to enhancing accessibility to Council meetings for those who would have difficulty in attending in person. Reaching a broader audience will assist in educating members of the public regarding the purpose and operation of Council meetings.

The more we can engage with and involve members of the public in civic life the greater we enhance the process of local democracy.

Council notes that the cost of live streaming would be between £10-15,000 per year for which there is currently no budget provision and therefore resolves to bring a report to Cabinet to consider the matter in the light of other pressures and priorities.”

- 3.2 In considering the possibility of introducing webcasting at Gloucester City Council, information was obtained from Gloucestershire County Council and the other District Councils within the County in respect of equipment and hosting arrangements, costs and viewing figures.
- 3.3 The information received showed the variety of webcasting arrangements that are possible, from a fully hosted live webcasting service with integrated links to the seating plan and agenda, and indexed recordings available post-meeting, to a more rudimentary live stream direct to social media with no indexing. Two of the Councils have actively chosen not to webcast their meetings.
- 3.4 The likely costs also vary considerably depending on the equipment and service. Broadly speaking the upfront cost of upgrading the conferencing system to enable webcasting could be anywhere between £24-60k and a full assessment of requirements would be essential. The annual cost of the webcasting service could be between £1,000 and £15,000, again depending on the level of sophistication required. Some options would also require the presence of an additional officer to oversee the webcast. There is currently no budget available to fund the purchase of equipment or the annual cost of the webcasting service; in order to proceed, borrowing would be required to fund the initial investment and any ongoing costs would need to be factored into future savings requirements.
- 3.5 Information on viewing figures is limited as some of the Councils consulted have not yet commenced with webcasting, but where figures are available at District Council level, they range between 5 and 77 live views with an average of 35 views across all meetings in 2018 and between 1 and 20 video on demand views with an average of 8 views across all meetings in 2018. Based on this data, although webcasting has the potential to increase transparency in the decision-making process, the evidence indicates that it is not well-utilised by members of the public and therefore does not result in significant levels of public engagement in the democratic process.
- 3.6 Based on the information above, while the availability of webcasting could be a valuable tool in the promotion of open and transparent decision-making and accountability, when balanced against the council’s other pressures and priorities, the resources required to implement webcasting cannot be justified and the information on viewing figures further supports this recommendation, showing very limited use of the facility.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

- 4.1 There are no specific ABCD implications associated with the recommendations, however, existing national regulations permit members of the public to attend public council meetings and make their own recordings and the council has recently increased its use of social media to promote meetings and encourage attendance.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 Without straying into a detailed assessment of requirements, the broad variety of webcasting options and costs have been considered and reasons for not proceeding are contained in the body of the report.
- 5.2 Consideration has also been given to moving council meetings to a location that already has webcasting facilities, therefore, removing the requirement to purchase new equipment; however, a proposal to move meetings out of the council's own civic suite is not welcomed.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that the council does not implement webcasting because it is cost-prohibitive in light of other priorities and the evidence shows that usage of facilities in other local authorities in the area is limited.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 If the recommendation not to introduce webcasting is approved, consideration will need to be given to replacing the conferencing system at an appropriate time in the future.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The likely costs of pursuing webcasting are detailed in the body of the report, however, as the recommendation proposes that the council does not pursue webcasting, there are no financial implications associated with that decision.
- 8.2 Consideration will need to be given to the cost of replacing the conferencing system at an appropriate time.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications of not introducing webcasting and the recommendation does not prevent the ability of members of the public and press to film proceedings of public meetings under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.
- 9.2 If the council chose to introduce webcasting, consideration would need to be given to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the necessary steps to ensure compliance.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 While not pursuing webcasting denies the potential to increase transparency in the council's decision-making process, it ensures that funds are not diverted away from important priorities that provide a greater benefit to the city's communities.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

- 11.1 While webcasting has the potential to increase access to the decision-making process, there is no evidence to suggest that physical access to meetings has been an issue for residents in Gloucester. Webcasting would only provide viewing access and would not enable any person who is unable to attend a meeting in person to participate directly in the meeting.
- 11.2 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.
- 11.3 There are no safeguarding concerns associated with the recommendations in the report.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 12.1 None.

Sustainability

- 12.2 None.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 None.

Background Documents: None