

Constitution Committee

Date of Meeting: 28 June 2018

Report Title: Recording and Webcasting of Council Meetings

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Paul Findlow, Corporate Policy and Legal Services

Senior Officer: Dan Dickinson, Acting Director of Legal Services

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report reviews the operation of the recording and audio webcasting of Council decision making meetings over the last twelve months.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the recording and audio webcasting of Council decision-making meetings is continued, with backup recordings also being made.
- 2.2. That Audio Minutes continue to be used as the technical platform to audio webcast decision making meetings, but that officers monitor the market to review alternative products as they become available.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. At a meeting of the Constitution Committee held on 23 March 2017 it was resolved that all formal decision-making meetings of the Council should continue to be recorded and that, in addition, during the 2017/18 Municipal Year audio webcasting should be introduced, so that meetings could be listened to live via the Council's website and then be available from an archive. A review after twelve months operation was requested by the Committee.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. There is no legal requirement to record or webcast decision-making meetings. However, the desire to be open and transparent and to encourage public participation in local democracy has led many councils, including Cheshire East, to record meetings and make them available from an archive.

- 4.2. Meetings of Cheshire East's Cabinet were video webcast for a period of approximately two years; this practice was discontinued due to cost.

5. Background

- 5.1. A system of audio webcasting was introduced in the summer of 2017. The product used, "Audio Minutes", has proved itself to be resilient and easy to operate. It is also relatively inexpensive (£3,900 a year) and integrates into the Modern.gov system used to manage the production, publication and archiving of papers for meetings.
- 5.2. There have been a number of teething problems, largely related to connectivity to the Internet and the quality of the audio feed into the system. Problems with connectivity to the Internet have meant that on a couple of occasions it has not been possible to live stream the meeting. However, the tablet computer used to operate the system records the meeting and the audio can, at a later date, be published to make it available online to those wishing to listen to the meeting. A backup recording is also taken and if the tablet were to fail this recording could still be published.
- 5.3. The quality of the recording is in no small measure influenced by the microphones used. A simple (and inexpensive) portable system has been purchased from Audio Minutes and has been used when a better PA / microphone system has not been available. The quality of the recording has been adequate, but on occasion it has been difficult to follow meetings. Historically there has been no "committee meeting" microphone system at Westfields.
- 5.4. A procurement exercise has recently been completed and a new microphone system for Westfields will be available in the very near future. This will be used for all formal meetings held in the Committee Suite. The system should have a life expectancy of in excess of ten years.
- 5.5. The number of people listening to live webcasts is low; often no more than 20 people will be accessing the audio of a meeting whilst it is taking place. However, recordings of meetings are listened to by significantly more people.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

- 6.1.1. There are no specific legal implications to this recommendation.

6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. The cost of recording and audio webcasting of meetings will be met from existing budgets.

6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. There are no specific policy implications.

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. There are no specific equality implications, but the ability for people to follow meetings from remote locations contributes to wider public participation in democracy.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. There are no specific HR implications. Staff from Democratic Services operate the equipment needed to record and webcast meetings. Microphones are set up by staff in Facilities management. Appropriate training has been provided.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1. There are no specific risk management implications.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities, but the ability for people to follow meetings from remote locations contributes to wider public participation in democracy.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People

6.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

6.9. Public Health Implications

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1. All Wards are affected.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1. No consultation has been necessary.

9. Access to Information

9.1. There is no background information.

10. Contact Information

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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