

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Webcasting
Committee: City Council
Date: 16 September 2013
Cabinet Member: Councillor Peter Smith
CMT Member: Assistant Director for Law, Democracy and Governance (Tim Howes)
Author: Tim Howes, Assistant Director for Law, Democracy and Governance
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Ref: DSU/TH/GP
Key Decision: N/A
Part: I

Purpose of the report:

The purpose of the report is to seek approval to undertake a four year webcasting contract with the flexibility to extend to five years following the 12 month trial period which has been undertaken since August 2012. The report details the successes of the trial period and considers the future costs and resource requirement. The report comes before council because of a commitment at City Council in June 2012 to bring the results back.

The Brilliant Co-operative Council Corporate Plan 2013/14 -2016/17:

This report reflects the value of being democratic and our objective of a Caring Plymouth in the emerging corporate plan.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

The annual revenue cost of webcasting is estimated at just under £20,000 per year, resulting in a total contract cost of around £74,000. In addition staff support is required as described later in the report.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

Webcasting increases public access to the Councils democratic process for members of the public who for example, work during the times which meetings take place, cannot access the council house due to a disability or cannot find the time to attend meetings for other reasons such as care commitments. Webcasting makes meetings more inclusive across all communities within Plymouth. Access to the public gallery in the Council Chamber is by means of a steep stair case which can prove problematic to elderly members of the public or those with mobility problems.

Equality and Diversity:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended:

1. that the City Council agree to continue with the webcasting of meetings;
2. to share the costs and resources implications evenly across the City Council.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

In respect of recommendation 1. - Not to webcast meetings would be a retorgade step in the opening up of Council meetings and the Democratic process in general

In respect of recommendation 2. – there is no alternative as the cost and resources implications cannot be absorbed within the Democratic Support budget.

Published work / information:

[Plymouth City Council Constitution](#)

[Minute 13a of City Council meeting of the 25 June 2012](#)

Background papers:

None

Sign off:

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Originating SMT Member: Timothy Howes													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? n/a													

1. Introduction

The Council wants to encourage open government and get more people involved in the decision-making process. The webcasting trial over the past year has opened up those meetings held in the council chamber through webcasting, which is the live or recorded transmission of video over the internet.

2. Results of the trial period

The trial period has seen almost 100 thousand hits in total. These hits include –

- live views
- archive views
- individual document hits
- presentation hits

In terms of live hits (as opposed to archive hits) the average is 194 compared to an average of around 20 people physically attending meetings such as Planning Committee and City Council in the Council House. There have been almost 29 thousand archive views of our meetings in the last year. The meeting with the highest live viewing figures was planning committee on 15 August 2013 which saw at least* 1553 people watching the meeting live! (*figures are quoted as 'at least' because more than one viewer in an organisation or a household only counts as 1 view. For instance, if all Plymouth City Council staff watched a webcast this would count as 1 hit).

The number of hours predicted has proved adequate for current use and so any contract undertaken will be for the same number of hours. A full breakdown of web casting statistics is provided at appendix A.

3. Potential for partnership working and cost recovery

Officers are currently in talks with two partner organisations with regards to hosting their meetings in the Council House. As part of the hosting offer the meetings would be webcast and resource implications dealt with by a service level agreement. This would recover some of the costs of the system. The system has also been used at a Royal Institute of British Architects event held in the Council Chamber and a ceremony for the Outreach Awards.

4. System Potential

There is the possibility to make the meetings more interactive by

- running polls on agenda items
- providing space for a live twitter
- linking to a facebook feed during the meeting.

This would allow greater participation by members of the public watching a live webcast, and support the democratic value.

5. Resource requirement

Each webcast takes around twice the length of the meeting to administer – this includes the set up before the meeting, the actual webcast during the meeting and the time to perform checks after each webcast. At present two Democratic Support staff are required for every meeting webcast. Given the small number of staff in the Democratic Support team, it is not possible to administer the system within the team on an on-going basis. As a tool which could be utilised across the City Council, it is proposed that the administration of it is shared across the council with some nominated operators in each Directorate.

Appendix A – Statistics by Committee

Committee	Date	Live Views	Archive Views
City Council	30 July 2012	643	2508
Planning Committee	23 August 2012	235	1490
Cabinet	23 August 12	62	1182
City Council	24 September 2012	798	1918
Planning Committee	18 October 2012	63	2575
Planning Committee	8 November 2012	43	974
City Council	3 December 2012	203	1802
Planning Committee	6 December 2012	116	2489
Planning Committee	3 January 2013	203	794
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board	9 January 2013	292	776
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board	14 January 2013	62	437
Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel	17 January 2013	18	1105
City Council	28 January 2013	346	1334
Planning Committee	31 January 2013	61	978
Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel	8 February 2013	81	932
City Council	25 February 2013	382	606
Plymouth Plan Event	5 March 2013	27	895
Planning Committee	7 March 2013	66	562
Planning Committee	4 April 2013	53	575
Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel	9 April 2013	43	569
City Council	22 April 2013	257	634
City Council	23 April 2013	21	288
Cabinet	21 May 2013	13	252
Planning Committee	23 May 2013	83	262
City Council	10 June 2013	220	363
Health and Wellbeing Board	13 June 2013	31	225
Cabinet	18 June 2013	9	82
Planning Committee	20 June 2013	43	68
Planning Committee	18 July 2013	14	808
City Council	22 July 2013	162	707
Cabinet	6 August 2013	16	235
Planning Committee	15 August 2013	1553	263
Cabinet	3 September 2013		
Total		6219	28,688