

# DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
RESOURCES DIRECTORATE	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	27 JANUARY 2020	9
<b>WEBCASTING</b>			

## PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

## SUMMARY

The technology to live webcast Council meetings was installed as part of Phase 6 of the Accommodation Project refurbishment works of the Town Hall. A subsidiary of Blackpool Council provide the technical know-how to facilitate the mixing of the images for live broadcast, on a rolling six-monthly contract.

Live webcasting provides another avenue to engage with the wider public in the work of the Council, and for those who are unable to attend, but have an interest, feel involved in the process of decision making. It also allows attendees in the Chamber, seated in the public gallery, feel included in the meeting.

At the meeting of the Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019, members agreed to continue with the arrangements with Blackpool Council on a rolling basis with a view to a member of the Governance Team working alongside them to develop the expertise in-house.

An updated report was sought in early 2020 to update on progress.

## RECOMMENDATION

That the agreement with Blackpool Council to provide webcasting for Council meetings be extended on a rolling annual basis, the funding of which to be provided from within existing approved budgets

## SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Accommodation Working Group (AWG) - agreed initial 12 month trial

Finance and Democracy Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services ( <b>Value for Money</b> )	✓
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council ( <b>Clean and Green</b> )	✓
Working with all partners ( <b>Vibrant Economy</b> )	✓
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live ( <b>A Great Place to Live</b> )	✓
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit ( <b>A Great Place to Visit</b> )	✓

## REPORT

1. Recording and uploading of Council meetings to the Council's YouTube channel has been undertaken for many years, to improve accessibility to and increase the openness and transparency of our decision making process. It provides a level of scrutiny, available to a wider audience, which is different to attending a meeting in person.
2. However due to the peripatetic nature of the meetings, the facilities at meeting locations provided many technological challenges, and as a result sound and picture quality often suffered.
3. When the Council Chamber was reinstated into the Town Hall, in 2018, as part of the Accommodation Project, the Accommodation Working Group, a working party of 6 members, considered many options for the audio visual offer in the Chamber.
4. Live webcasting was considered the most natural progression from the previously filmed and uploaded meetings to YouTube. Live webcasting allows for the public to view the meetings as they happen via links on the Council's website as well as the Council's YouTube channel. The live streams are also viewable after the meeting has occurred, as happened previously.
5. When webcasting was considered, options for the delivery were explored. There were various different options available, with large differences in quality and price. These included livestreaming via a social media platform such as Facebook, but with dubious sound and picture quality to bespoke companies specialising in broadcast of council meetings but with high initial outlay and ongoing costs.
6. Research was undertaken seeking feedback and advice from colleagues not only across the North West but across the country, as well as viewing webcasts from those councils and making an assessment regarding quality of audio and ease of accessibility for the public. Other considerations such as whether to purchase or rent suitable equipment were also weighed.
7. After due consideration, Blackpool Council was approached to provide the technical knowledge and facilitate the webcast. Until more recently Blackpool had used a market leader to provide their webcasts, however they had been disappointed by numerous technology issues, lack of support and high costs. A commercial branch of their ICT team, who supported the media offer at the CLC in Grange Park, took over the provision in 2016.
8. The Blackpool team provided various quotes for their service, with numerous cost variables such as payment on a six-monthly basis versus hourly rate. Rental of their equipment, webcast of all committees or just Council meetings.
9. In order to more fully control the sound and visual quality of the webcast, as well as remove the need for ongoing rental costs, the cameras, microphones and additional equipment were purchased. The cost is detailed below;

#### Equipment

3 x Cameras and Joystick Keyboard = £5,880

Blackmagic HD Television Studio Kit (includes cables etc) = £2,025

10. Blackpool was asked to livestream full Council meetings only (not the Annual Meeting) at an annual cost of £5,281, payable in two instalments during the year. Any additional meetings would be charged at £125 per hour although this facility has not been taken up to date.
11. No further contractual arrangements are in place and there is no commitment beyond the current expended period which runs its course at the end of the financial year 2019/2020. However, Blackpool Council would be keen to continue.
12. Prior to his departure from the Council, the previous ICT Team manager was working with Blackpool with a long term view of bringing the provision of webcasting wholly in-house. This did

have staff resource and training implications, but with all equipment owned by Fylde, the cost saving was felt to be worth exploring. The new ICT Manager felt that this work could not be accommodated within the IT Team due to a range of other on-going projects and commitments. The Governance Team however expressed an interest in the matter and one of the team members was identified to work alongside Blackpool Council with a view to developing in-house expertise to film Council meetings.

13. This report provides the outcome of this trial which has not proved to be successful. Principally, the filming of the Council meetings to the current professional standard is a specialist skill that cannot be developed by sitting alongside someone on an infrequent basis; the skill set is niche in nature. The skills of the Blackpool Council employees who provide the service have been built up through attaining professional qualifications in this area, and continuous use and development of expertise. The Governance Team has concluded that they would not be not only be confident in web-casting meetings going forward, but team members have also concluded that they would be unable to attempt to do so as they do not have the requisite skills. This is no reflection on the enthusiasm of the team and their interest in this but is simply a reflection that this area of work requires a professional skill-set which they do not have.
14. This gives the Council two options to now consider, to either commission Blackpool Council to undertake this service on a rolling basis or to cease the service.
15. In giving consideration to possible extension of the offer to the public, the live viewing figures for Council meetings are as follows:
  - 14/11/2019 = 21 Views
  - 15/07/2019 = 17 Views
  - 25/03/2019 = 18 Views
  - 05/03/2019 = 7 Views
  - 11/02/2019 = 30 Views
  - 10/12/2018 = 11 Views
  - 22/10/2018 = 7 Views
  - 16/07/2018 = 25 Views
  - 16/04/2018 = 2 Views
  - 05/03/2018 = 6 Views
16. Whereas the most up-to-date cumulative viewing figures (i.e. live stream views and views following broadcast) for council meetings during the last 12 months are, at the time of writing this report, set out below:
  - 14/11/2019 = 123 Views
  - 15/07/2019 = 103 Views
  - 25/03/2019 = 173 Views
  - 05/03/2019 = 82 Views
  - 11/02/2019 = 102 Views
  - 10/12/2018 = 58 Views
  - 22/10/2018 = 70 Views
  - 16/07/2018 = 90 Views
  - 16/04/2018 = 92 Views
  - 05/03/2018 = 271 Views
17. The meeting on 5 March 2018 was both Budget Council and the first meeting in the Town Hall Chamber which may explain the high viewing figures. However with the public now having the

opportunity to either view in real time (live stream) or watch later via YouTube, and with a better quality of audio as well as a more professional offer than previously, the viewing figures continue to rise. Indeed the meetings from the last 12 months generally have higher viewing figures than past uploaded meetings.

18. If members are minded to continue with the agreement it could be facilitated as an annual rolling agreement as a small contract using informal procedures.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The costs of extending the agreement with Blackpool Council to provide webcasting for Council meetings would be met from existing approved budgets.
Legal	None arising from this report
Community Safety	None arising from this report
Human Rights and Equalities	None arising from this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None arising from this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None arising from this report

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Attached: screen shot of a recent webcast

Screenshot of a recent webcast

