

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
RESOURCES DIRECTORATE	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	24 JUNE 2019	6
WEBCASTING			

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.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the current arrangements for Blackpool Council to film Council meetings be continued on a rolling six month basis, with a member of the Governance Team working alongside the Blackpool Council team with a view to developing in-house expertise to film Council meetings in the first instance, with the potential to widen out the facility to other meetings.
2. That an updated report be brought forward in early 2020 to report progress

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

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

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

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 were approached to provide the technical knowledge and facilitate the webcast. Until very 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 were 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 last payment. Blackpool Council would be keen to continue. If the Committee are minded to approve the extension of the arrangement with Blackpool Council in the short-term, the cost of this can be met from the approved revenue budget for the IT Service.
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 does have staff resource and training implications, but with all equipment owned by Fylde, the cost saving could be worth exploring.
13. In addition to the filming of full Council meetings, the in house equipment is used to film Planning Committee meetings, which are the meetings alongside full Council that attract most public interest. These meetings are not livestreamed or uploaded, unless there is significant public interest in a particular item.
14. The filming set up for the Planning Committee is different to Council meetings, there is only one wide shot of the Chamber and a shot of the Chairman's bench, whereas at Council, a mix of shots are employed including wide shot, close ups, and captioned shots, which identifies the speaker.

15. The committee filming also does not require a member of staff to be present throughout the committee to facilitate filming. The filming is started as committee commences and stopped when committee ends. With the mixing of shots required at Council, a staff member is required for the duration of the meeting.
16. Consideration could be given to extending the filming of all committee meetings for either livestreaming or later upload. If undertaken on the same basis as Planning Committee currently, this would need minimal staff input to facilitate.
17. In giving consideration to possible extension of the offer to the public, the live viewing figures for Council meetings are as follows;

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

18. 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:

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

19. 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.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	This report proposes an extension to the arrangement with Blackpool Council for the webcasting of meetings, the cost of which can be met from the approved revenue budget for the IT Service.
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 shots of a recent webcast

Screenshots of a recent webcast

