

**Report To:** Democratic Services Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 7 February 2014

**Lead Officer:** Gary Williams, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

**Report Author:** Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager

**Title:** Webcasting of Council Meetings

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**1. What is the report about?**

This report provides an updated position statement on the progress towards the webcasting of certain meetings in 2014.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

The Democratic Services Committee previously requested an update on the progress towards the webcasting of Council meetings.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Democratic Services Committee considers and comments on the arrangements and progress in respect of the webcasting of meetings in 2014.

**4. Report details.**

- 4.1 The former Minister for Communications and Local Government wrote to all authorities earlier this year indicating that the Welsh Government was making £1.2 million available by way of grants to local authorities in order to assist them in, amongst other things, implementing the webcasting of council meetings.
- 4.2 Each local authority was able to accept a grant of £40k towards the cost of introducing webcasting and 'remote attendance' at meetings. Whilst webcasting is generally viewed as a viable and attractive facility, numerous technical and administrative problems have been identified relating to remote attendance. It should be noted that the Welsh Government has not committed itself to repeating the grant funding in future years.
- 4.3 The webcasting of meetings involves the live streaming of sound and images of meetings. The webcast can also be made available on the Council's website as archived material. This means that members of the public who are not able to attend meetings may either view them live online or at a later time or date via the online archive. Viewers using the archived content have the advantage of being able to use timeline links allowing them to view content by item or speaker.

- 4.4 The merits of webcasting were considered by the Corporate Executive Team (CET) in March 2013 where it was agreed that full Council be asked to decide on whether to webcast certain meetings. A demonstration of webcasting was held for members on 15<sup>th</sup> May and in July 2013, Council gave its consent, subject to successful testing prior to the first public broadcasts.
- 4.5 Denbighshire has now entered into an agreement with a webcasting supplier, and the webcasting system equipment is being installed at the time of writing this report, and a draft timetable for operator training, awareness raising and test and live broadcasts before the end of March 2014 have been drawn up. An updated position will be reported verbally to the meeting.
- 4.6 The Council intends to webcast approximately 60 hours a year of meetings held in the Council Chamber in County Hall using the Chamber's fixed camera and delegate technology. Because of this, meetings of full Council and the Planning Committee, which meet in the Chamber, are expected to be the ones being webcast.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

The issues covered in this report are not statutory requirements but the intentions behind them would be appropriate for the Council's priority area *Modernising The Council To Deliver Efficiencies And Improve Services For Our Customers*.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

Webcasting services for a two-year period have been procured using the Welsh Government's £40,000 grant.

The introduction and operation of webcasting arrangements will result in additional officer time being assigned to the meetings that are webcast. The actual impact of this is not certain yet, but it is expected that the webcasting arrangements will be delivered within existing resources. There could be some resource implications for the ICT service though the external supplier will be expected to provide support as part of the contract.

**7. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others, and has an Equality Impact Assessment Screening been undertaken?**

A demonstration on webcasting was made to members in May 2013 and full Council agreed to the webcasting of meetings in July 2013. CET has also been consulted on the proposals.

Webcasting will enable wider access through the internet to Council meetings and may offer interesting and popular new ways of engaging the public, for example, through the use of social media connected to webcasts. No other equality implications have been identified as a result of this report.

**8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not obtained for this report.

**9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

New, additional activities such as the webcasting of meetings using only existing resources have been identified by the Service as a risk. The risk is related to the capacity available to support to an acceptable standard both webcasting and other essential and statutory democratic and committee services.

**10. Power to make the Decision**

Section 111 Local Government Act 1972.