

Report to: County Council

Date of meeting: 9th July 2013

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Barbara Smith / Gary Williams

Report Author: Gary Williams, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Webcasting

1 What is the report about?

1.1 This report is about the potential for webcasting meetings of the Council.

2 What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 The report seeks to inform Members about the webcasting of council meetings and seeks their approval in principle to the introduction of webcasting.

3 What are the recommendations?

3.1 That the Council agrees in principle to the webcasting of Council meetings.

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 grant 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 £20k towards the cost of introducing webcasting.

4.3 The webcasting of meetings involves the live streaming of sound and images of council 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 Welsh Government and WLGA have facilitated meetings with Democratic Services Officers to discuss the issue of webcasting at which a demonstration of one of the systems that are available has been delivered. In addition a demonstration was held for members on 15th May in the Council Chamber.

- 4.5 There is the facility on some systems to enable members of the public who are viewing a meeting that is being webcast to get involved in discussion forums via social media tools such as twitter and facebook and give their views on issues that are being discussed.
- 4.6 It is possible to webcast in such a way that the viewer is able to access the translation service. If a viewer wishes to access the simultaneous translation service, they would view the meeting via the English language version of the website. Whenever the person speaking at the meeting is speaking in Welsh, the viewer will hear the voice of the translator in English. If a viewer wishes to access the Welsh language content then they would view the meeting through the Welsh language version of the website which would stream the content of the meeting without the translator.
- 4.7 There is no statutory obligation on the Council to webcast meetings. This is however becoming a more common practice among local authorities in the United Kingdom. In Wales, Cardiff Council has been webcasting Council meetings for some time. Carmarthenshire County Council has recently begun webcasting meetings and does so in Welsh and English as described above. It is understood that all of the remaining authorities in Wales are actively considering the introduction of webcasting.
- 4.8 The Council is already obliged by law to hold meetings in public, subject to the exclusion of the public for certain confidential matters. Members of the public are entitled to attend meetings of the Council, Cabinet and other Committees.
- 4.9 There is not generally a large attendance by the public at meetings and the facilities available to accommodate large numbers of people are limited. Members of the public may be interested in hearing the debates of Councillors but are unable to attend due to work or other commitments or difficulties with transport.
- 4.10 The webcasting of meetings would make meetings of the Council more accessible to members of the public.
- 4.11 There will be a cost to the provision of webcasting and the Welsh Government grant is only available for one year with no guarantee of future funding. In addition to software licensing fees there may be additional costs associated with the integration of the system with existing cameras and microphones.
- 4.12 It is suggested that the use of webcasting be limited in the first instance to a duration which can be paid for from the grant monies available. The continued use of webcasting should be reviewed thereafter.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The potential for improved access for the public to view Council meetings and engage with the Council via social media contributes to the priority of Modernising the Council to deliver efficiencies and improve services to our customers.

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

- 6.1 It is anticipated that a dual language webcasting solution would cost in the region of £20k per annum.

7 What consultations have been carried out?

- 7.1 CET have been consulted and are of the view that the question of webcasting be put before members at Council in order that they can decide whether or not they wish to have meetings webcast. The Corporate Governance Committee received a report in respect of webcasting and agreed that a report be put to the wider membership for their consideration. A demonstration has been held for Members.

8 Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 8.1 The cost of implementing the proposals should be considered in relation to the funding available. Costs should be contained within the funding available. Any ongoing costs beyond the term of the grant would be a cost pressure for the Council.

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

- 9.1 The risks associated with webcasting are that if it is implemented and the system does not work consistently then the Council's reputation may suffer.
- 9.2 There is a risk that there will be no additional funding from Welsh Government for this system from 2014/15 onwards.
- 9.3 The risk associated with not implementing a webcasting solution is that the Council will be seen to be left behind if other authorities in Wales proceed.

10 Power to make the decision

- 10.1 S111 Local Government Act 1972.