

Review of Webcasting Council meetings - Report by Director, Resources

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider approval for a change to the current meetings webcast to enable the Council to evaluate other Committees which may be of greater interest to Midlothian residents.

2 Background Information

2.1 At a meeting on 15 December 2015 the Council, by a majority vote, agreed to:-

- “(a) Approve the introduction of a webcasting solution to the Council Chamber;*
- (b) Initially Council and Cabinet meetings be webcast with consideration of other Council committees at a later date and;*
- (c) Approve the addition of £19,000 into the Capital Plan for 2015/16 and a supplementary estimate of £14,154 in 2015/16 and the addition of £14,899 to the Revenue Budget for 2016/17”.*

2.2 Webcasting of Council and Cabinet meetings commenced in May 2016. It is considered that webcasting of meetings encourages engagement and assists in addressing issues of exclusion. Webcasting links with the Council’s Committee Management System (CMIS) and therefore provides a joined up, modern approach to the Council democratic decision-making process. It is a cost effective way to reach a large audience on key issues. Webcasting is widely accessible via a range of electronic devices including desktop computer; laptop computer; tablet device; and smartphone.

Webcasting has strengthened the Council’s democratic accountability to the public, both directly and via the local media and has enabled audiences to:

- replay meetings after they have taken place, which may be helpful when the meeting time clashes with other events;
- search for and view particular presentations or items of business;
- hear and understand meetings debates more clearly;
- gain additional contextual information from, e.g., speakers’ names, agenda documents;
- obtain a better understanding of the workings of the Council; and
- better engage in local democratic political processes.

Further benefits of the system includes:

- it enables local media to more readily access and report timeously on information regarding Council meetings;
- a greater equality of access to Council meetings

- 2.3** Webcasting of meetings of the Council have attracted healthy viewing figures with increased viewing figures when items of a particular local interest are being debated. This demonstrates a willingness by Midlothian residents to engage with the decision-making process. Whilst figures for meetings of the Council have been encouraging, the viewing figures for meetings of the Cabinet have remained relatively low. Examples of the viewing figures are as follows:-

Meeting	Date	Live views	Total times played
Council	26/6/18	61	105
	8/5/18	75	184
	27/3/18	81	139
	13/2/18	348	501
Cabinet	22/5/18	13	21
	10/4/18	13	10
	27/2/18	2	10
	16/1/18	7	17

- 2.4** Following receipt of communications from (a) Midlothian Federation of Community Councils dated 22 May 2018 (Appendix 1) and (b) Eskbank and Newbattle Community Council dated 24 May 2018 (Appendix 2), both of whom have suggested that a much greater value would be provided to the community of Midlothian if meetings of the Planning Committee were webcast instead of Cabinet meetings and taking into consideration the low viewing figures for meetings of the Cabinet, it is proposed that the webcasting of Cabinet meetings be suspended and instead meetings of the Planning Committee be webcast as an alternative.
- 2.5** Webcasting of meetings of the Planning Committee will allow the Council to evaluate another Committee viewing figures prior to the expiry of the current webcasting contract. This would be in keeping with the original decision made when Council approved the introduction of webcasting. This in turn will allow the Council to have wider data available when considering whether to continue with webcasting, extend webcasting or not to proceed with webcasting after the current contract expires in February 2021.
- 2.6** For indicative purposes the cost of webcasting the Planning Committee in addition to the Cabinet would amount to £***. Accordingly in view of the financial position facing the Council it is proposed to suspend webcasting of the Cabinet meeting as set out above.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no additional resources implications, if the proposals outlined in this report are adopted.

3.2 Risk

There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- Community safety
- Adult health, care and housing
- Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- Sustainable growth
- Business transformation and Best Value
- None of the above

3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

By providing a webcasting solution, Midlothian demonstrates its commitment to being accessible to members of the communities served by introducing a modern approach to the democratic process and thereby strengthening the engagement of communities with democracy across Midlothian.

3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Webcasting strengthens the transparency of the decision-making process within Midlothian and engages officers and communities with the decisions that affect them.

3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable.

3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

As a result of webcasting communities within Midlothian are better connected to the decision-making process.

3.8 Ensuring Equalities

Webcasting supports the equalities agenda by ensuring that those who might have difficulty attending Council or Committee meetings are able to view the meeting.

3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

There are no Sustainable Development issues as a consequence of this report.

3.10 IT Issues

There are no additional direct IT issues as a result of the recommendations set out in this report.

4 Recommendations

Council is recommended to;

- (a) consider and approve the suspension of webcasting of meetings of the Cabinet after the next scheduled meeting on 4 September 2018 and in its place introduce webcasting of meetings of the Planning Committee with effect from 9 October 2018, being the next scheduled meeting of the Committee;
- (b) request the Director, Resources to evaluate the viewing figures in respect of the Planning Committee in comparison to the meetings of the Cabinet webcast up to 14 September 2018 and;
- (c) request the Director, Resources report back to Council before the expiry of the current webcasting contract in February 2021 relating to the evaluation and the future of webcasting.

16 July 2018

Report Contact:

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Appendices:-

Appendix 1 – Letter dated 22 May 2018 from Midlothian Federation of Community Councils

Appendix 2 – Letter dated 24 May 2018 from Eskbank and Newbattle Community Council

Midlothian Federation of Community Councils

From: Robert Hogg,
Chair,
Midlothian Federation of Community Councils

22nd May 2018

To: Kenneth Lawrie
CEO, Midlothian Council
Midlothian House
40-46 Buccleuch St.
Dalkeith
Midlothian
EH22 1DN

Dear Kenneth,

MFCC Comments on Midlothian Change Programme

At the meeting of the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils held yesterday evening, 16th May, the issue of webcasting of Midlothian Council meetings was discussed at length. It is understood that the current webcasting contract has approximately two years left to run and that the council will review the success and value of these webcasts at that time, prior to considering renewal.

Currently the contract covers webcasting of full Council meetings and Cabinet meetings, but it is the view of Federation members that much greater value would be provided to the community if Planning meetings were also covered. As this would doubtless involve additional costs, we agreed instead to request that Planning meetings are webcast instead of the Cabinet meetings.

Therefore, as Chair of the MFCC, I am writing to formally request that MC should seek to amend the current Webcasting contract to cease webcasting Council meetings and to, instead, webcast Planning Meetings.

The rationale for this is three-fold:

1. The demand for online viewing of Planning Meetings is quite high and the actual viewing figures for Cabinet meetings is low.
2. The contract for webcasting will be up for review in approximately 2 years, at which time MC will have to decide whether or not to renew the service. We consider that it will be to the council's advantage to be able to compare the demand for webcasting 3 different types of meeting, rather than just two, when it comes time to make that decision.
3. Planning Meetings arouse much more interest in the community and there is much more speculation about why particular decisions have been taken. If

the meetings were opened up in this transparent manner, the ongoing discussions would be much better-informed.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Hogg, etc.

Appendix 2

ESKBANK & NEWBATTLE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

10, Glenesk Crescent, Eskbank,
Dalkeith,
EH22 3BL
enccmailbox@gmail.com 0131 561 9687
0771 935 9201

24 May 2018

To: Kenneth Lawrie CEO, Midlothian Council Midlothian
House
40-46 Buccleuch St. Dalkeith
Midlothian EH22 1DN

Dear Kenneth,

ENCC Requests re. Webcasting of Council Meetings

At the meeting of the Eskbank & Newbattle Community Council held on 3rd May, the issue of webcasting of Midlothian Council meetings was discussed at length. We understand that the current webcasting contract has approximately two years left to run and that the council will review the success and value of these webcasts at that time, prior to considering renewal.

Currently the contract covers webcasting of full Council meetings and Cabinet meetings, but it is the view of our members that much greater value would be provided to the community if Planning meetings were also covered. As this would doubtless involve additional costs, we agreed instead to request that Planning meetings are webcast instead of the Cabinet meetings.

It was further decided that we would present this issue to the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils, to request that they take this matter up as a Federation issue.

In support of that submission, and as Chair of the ENCC, I am writing to formally request that MC should seek to amend the current Webcasting contract to cease webcasting Council meetings and to, instead, webcast Planning Meetings.

The rationale for this is three-fold:

1. The demand for online viewing of Planning Meetings is quite high and the actual viewing figures for Cabinet meetings is low.
 2. The contract for webcasting will be up for review in approximately 2 years, at which time MC will have to decide whether or not to renew the service. We consider that it will be to the council's advantage to be
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able to compare the demand for webcasting 3 different types of meeting, rather than just two, when it comes time to make that decision.

3. Planning Meetings arouse much more interest in the community and there is much more speculation about why particular decisions have been taken. If the meetings were opened up in this transparent manner, the ongoing discussions would be much better- informed.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Kerr-Smith, Chairman

Eskbank & Newbattle Community Council