

**Webcasting Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings****Report by John Blair, Director, Resources****1 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council consideration and approval of the introduction of a webcasting solution within the Council chamber so as that all Council, Cabinet and selected Committee meetings can be webcast.

**2 Background Information****2.1 Webcasting**

Across the United Kingdom, over 120 local authorities have invested in webcasting technology to enhance the democratic process and to allow members of the public and others who may not otherwise be able to attend Council meetings, the ability to view proceedings and maximise public accessibility and transparency to the decision-making processes of the Local Authority. In Scotland City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland, Moray and Renfrewshire Councils are webcasting meetings of the Council and increasingly have extended that service to include other committee meetings held in their Council Chambers. Argyll and Bute, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, East Ayrshire, Falkirk, North Ayrshire, Perth and Kinross Councils and the Scottish Government are in the process of assessing the feasibility of introducing webcasting within their principal locations.

Webcasting allows meetings to be streamed live over the internet with relevant contextual information (including agendas, reports, presentations, speakers' names, etc.) also being displayed. Any meetings that are streamed live are archived to allow the proceedings to be viewed after the event. Based on the information obtained from those authorities where webcasting is already in place, public viewing statistics have been impressive, with the majority of viewers taking advantage of the recorded archive facility to catch up on meetings following the live webcasting. This means that people who can't attend the actual Council, Cabinet or Committee meeting are able to engage with the decision making process at a time that suits them.

## 2.2 Benefits of Webcasting

It is considered that webcasting of meetings encourages engagement and assists in addressing issues of exclusion. The introduction of webcasting will support Midlothian Council's ambition to be a market leader in the delivery of democratic processes. A webcasting solution would link with the Council's Committee Management System thereby providing a joined up, modern approach to the Council 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, such as: desktop computer; laptop computer; tablet device; and smartphone.

Webcasting will also strengthen the Council's democratic accountability to the public, both directly and via the local media and enable 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 speakers or items of business;
- hear meetings more clearly;
- gain additional contextual information from, e.g., speakers' names, agenda documents, PowerPoint presentations, etc., appearing with the webcast;
- obtain a better understanding of the workings of the Council; and
- better engage in local democratic political processes.

Further benefits of the system are:

- it will enable local media to more readily access and report timeously on information regarding Council meetings;
- it will introduce greater equality of access to Council meetings;
- it can be used as a training resource (e.g., in relation to supporting the curriculum in schools), induction training and other learning opportunities for both Elected Members and Council Officers; and
- it can be used as a communication tool for internal purposes e.g. allowing the Chief Executive to relay important information to all Council staff.

Feedback from Moray Council suggests the introduction of webcasting has been of benefit, enabling many more public witnesses to the democratic process than could be accommodated in the Council Chamber. Feedback from Edinburgh City Council is that viewing figures have been encouraging with further effort being made to publicise the service through social media such as Facebook and Twitter as well as the Council's website.

Since the introduction of webcasting in 2012, City of Edinburgh Council have recorded in excess of 200,000 views to meetings in their archive, with full Council meetings being viewed live 10,000 times and archived meetings being viewed 100,000 times. This represents year on year

growth in viewing as the rollout of the technology now includes all Council and Committee meetings. City of Edinburgh Council also piloted a 'Budget Question Time' broadcast last year, as part of the budget consultation exercise which received over 400 live views.

## **2.3 Next Stages**

In Midlothian since 2012, Council meetings have been recorded by way of audio - only technology. This has provided a verbatim account of the Council proceedings. However this system is not particularly interactive from a community perspective; it can be difficult, on occasions, to identify who is speaking; there is no indexing to 'skip' to the relevant section; and the quality of the recording is variable. Coupled with this, the system is unsupported from a technical perspective which creates a potential risk to business continuity.

As the Council moves towards modernising the democratic process within Midlothian, the increase in the use of technology is essential to allow connection with the communities served. A report to Council in February 2015 from the Joint Director, Health and Social Care suggested that 85% of the population of Midlothian are 'digitally enabled' meaning that there is an opportunity to successfully introduce a more interactive way of connecting the decision making process of the Council with our communities. Coupled with this, Councils are required to demonstrate a transparent decision making process and webcasting will support this.

A briefing was delivered to Elected Members and the Council Management Team on the 1 December 2015 to provide further details of webcasting and the benefits to Midlothian.

## **3 Report Implications**

### **3.1 Resource**

Based on indicative figures in respect of the requirements for the Council Chamber at Midlothian House, the following table represents the cost of introducing a webcasting system and an upgrade to the microphone system within the Chamber.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18	2018/19	Totals
Capital Costs						
<b>Fixed wire Microphone system</b>	<b>£19,000</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>£19,000</b>
<b>Total Capital</b>	<i>£19,000</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£0</i>	<i>£19,000</i>
Revenue Costs						
<b>Loan charges</b>	<b>£314</b>	<b>£4,184</b>	<b>£4,184</b>	<b>£4,184</b>	<b>£4,184</b>	<b>£17,050</b>
<b>Lease of webcasting hardware, software license, support and maintenance</b>	<b>£13,840</b>	<b>£10,715</b>	<b>£10,715</b>	<b>£10,715</b>	<b>£10,715</b>	<b>£56,700</b>
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<i>£14,154</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£73,750</i>
<b>Total Costs</b>	<i>£33,154</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£14,899</i>	<i>£92,750</i>

It is therefore recommended that the Council approves 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 onwards.

### 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 introducing a webcasting solution to Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings, Midlothian will demonstrate its commitment to being accessible to all 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**

The introduction of webcasting will strengthen the transparency of the decision making process within Midlothian and engage 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 the recommendations in this paper coupled with the research into webcasting, communities within Midlothian will be better connected to the decision making process. This also lends itself to further development of community engagement within Midlothian – e.g. potential increased attendance at Elected Member surgeries. The research also confirms that Local Authorities that have introduced webcasting have used this tool to strengthen their engagement with Community Planning Partnerships and other community groups.

### **3.8 Ensuring Equalities**

The introduction of webcasting will support the equalities agenda by ensuring that those who might have difficulty attending Council or Committee meetings will still be able to view the meeting from their own home.

### **3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

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

### **3.10 IT Issues**

There are no direct IT issues as a result of the recommendations in this report as any webcasting solution would be externally hosted. However the introduction of webcasting would require input from Digital Services dependant on the system that is procured following tendering.

#### **4 Recommendations**

Council is recommended to;

- (a) consider and approve the introduction of a webcasting solution to the Council Chamber;
- (b) agree that, initially, Council, Cabinet and other main committees (to be agreed) would be webcast; 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 additional of £14,899 to the Revenue budget for 2016/17 onwards.

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