

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	29 June 2016
DIRECTOR	Chief Executive
TITLE OF REPORT	Webcasting – Trial Summary and Procurement of Services
REPORT NUMBER	OCE/16/025
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report summarises the success of the twelve month webcasting trial and recommends that the Council invite tenders for the provision of a service over five years.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council:-

- (1) notes the viewing figures for the webcasts of Council meetings over the previous twelve months;
- (2) notes the decision of the Chief Executive to authorise the extension of the present contract to allow for the continuation of webcasting pending the outcome of tendering, if agreed;
- (3) invites tenders for the provision of a webcasting service for Council meetings only for five years, at an estimated annual cost of £20,000;
- (4) determines whether or not committee meetings held in the Chamber should be webcast at an approximate additional annual cost of £1,000; and
- (5) determines whether the webcasting system should be extended to Committee Room 2 to cover meetings held there, and if so approves an additional annual cost of £18,000, based on three cameras being used and one year of webcast archiving, and instructs a further report on tendering for a replacement audio system and on the cabling costs involved.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The approximate cost of the contract would be £20,000 a year for five years. No provision has been made for this but the residual earmarked reserves allocated to the Chamber replacement audio and webcasting

project, amounting to £35,000 and carried forward to this financial year, can accommodate the twelve month contract extension and the bulk of the first year of the contract cost. If approved by Council, the subsequent years' costs would require to be incorporated into the annual revenue budget from 2018/19.

- 3.2 Should Council decide to webcast committee meetings held in the Chamber, there would be an additional annual cost of approximately £1,000 based on hourly usage (archiving from the current contractor is bought in 50 hour blocks, and webcasts remain available to the public for twelve months, though this period can be extended or reduced).
- 3.3 If Council decides to extend webcasting to Committee Room 2, the additional cost will be approximately £15,000 for the lease of three cameras, plus approximately £3,000 for webcast archiving for one year, with costs for cabling and associated works which would require further work to estimate but may be around £10,000. As the audio system in the room will not link to the automated cameras, this too would need replaced and based on the costs for the Chamber, a suitable system may cost £42,000. There is no financial provision for any work associated with Committee Room 2, and so, if this option is agreed, costs would need to be built into the budget from 2017/18.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no other implications associated with this report; however, continuing the present contract pending the outcome of the procurement exercise allows the service to be continued for the public and the cameras to remain in place pending a decision.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 The Council undertook a one off webcasting trial in October, 2014, and following the positive response the Chief Executive, with the consent of all group leaders, authorised a one year trial commencing in June, 2015. This saw new digital cameras (an improvement on those used in the preceding trial) installed in the Chamber at the same time as necessary improvement works were undertaken to replace the redundant audio system.
- 5.2 The viewer figures for the year long trial are appended to this report, and whilst one or two meetings have relatively low numbers, this can be attributed to technical issues including an audio drop out at one meeting and a break in broadcasting caused by an automated update at another.
- 5.3 Public-i, the current provider, state that the Council's viewing figures are better than comparator authorities. The company views the Council as one of its more successful clients.

- 5.4 The Chief Executive has authorised the extension of the current contract for up to twelve months to allow Council to review the viewer figures and determine the way forward, and to allow a procurement exercise to be undertaken. This cost has been met from the underspend in the funding allocated to the Chamber replacement audio and webcasting budget in 2015/16, which has been carried forward.
- 5.5 It is intended to invite tenders from the existing webcasting framework used by other local authorities. A tender for five years would allow the next Council term to be covered and the Council at that time could then determine whether to continue for the succeeding four year term.

6. IMPACT

6.1 **Improving Customer Experience –**

The continuation of webcasting allows the public to view Council meetings in real time or in archived format soon after the meeting has concluded. Viewer figures show that on average possibly ten to twenty times as many people view the meeting through webcasting as attend in person, which shows that it increases public access to democracy significantly.

6.2 **Improving Staff Experience –**

There is no doubt that a number of viewers of the webcasts will be Council staff – in addition to allowing staff to view discussions and debates on reports of relevance to them, webcasting is also a useful tool in that it allows officers who not would normally attend Council meetings, or who would do so only rarely, to receive a flavour of meetings and to be better prepared for those occasions when they would attend.

6.3 **Improving our use of Resources –**

By its very nature, webcasting enhances the transparency of Council decision making and makes it easier for the public to see how resources are used. For a modest annual charge to the Council, significant numbers of viewers are now able to access the decision making process, thereby improving the Council's accountability.

6.4 **Corporate –**

Webcasting meets several aspirations in Aberdeen – The Smarter City: it increases participation in governance, facilitates active citizenship and increase knowledge about the operation of the Council. In addition, it reduces the need for members of the public to travel to see Council meetings and so improves our carbon footprint. Webcasting is also one of the targets in the Legal and Democratic Services service plan to assist in engaging with the public and improving access to democracy.

6.5 **Public –**

An EHRIA has been completed for this project as webcasting improves the access to democracy for all groups and it makes decision making more transparent and members more accountable. In general terms,

feedback although limited had been very positive and feedback now tends to be questions about when the Council will extend webcasting to all meetings.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

- 7.1 As the Council has been webcasting for a year, there is now a public expectation that it will continue and be extended. Were the Council to cease webcasting, public accessibility to democracy would diminish and accountability and transparency would be reduced. It is always a risk that a member may make a comment in the heat of debate which they may regret subsequently; we know from discussions that other Councils have been asked by members if comments can be excised from the public record and this is not the case.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None, other than viewer statistics provided by Public-i.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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