

# **Report to Constitution and Members Services Standing Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 4 October 2011**

**Subject: Webcasting Review**

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**Committee Secretary:** Mark Jenkins

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## **Decisions Required:**

- (1) To receive a background information report on the webcasting activities of the Council; and
- (2) To consider what further information is required by members;

## **Introduction**

1. (Senior Democratic Services Officer) At the meeting of the Panel in June members requested a report on webcasting. This report provides information about the contract and the Council's webcasting activities.

## **Background**

2. The Council has been webcasting its meetings and events since 2006. The initial period was funded by central government technology grant called 'Implementing Electronic Government' or IEG grant. Since that time over 300 webcasts have been recorded. The Council is acknowledged, within the context of authorities that webcast, to be one of the most effective in the Country.

## **Contract and renewal process**

3. The Council currently has a contract with Public-I limited, based in Brighton, for providing leased equipment, an integrated Content Management System, monitored webcasts, maintenance and webcast archive hosting and streaming. This contract started on 1 April 2011 and ends on 31 March 2015. Our contract covers 15 hours webcasting per month.

4. The contract with the provider was reached by a formal open tender procedure and shortlisting for an Essex Procurement Hub framework contract. The current contract was let under this arrangement by Portfolio Holder Decision in August 2010.

5. This decision was made on the following basis:

(i) The supplier had confirmed that they willing to enter into a further four year contract term at the same fixed cost per year agreed in 2008 without price increases. Indeed there had been an undertaking from the supplier that some expected changes to the software used by the Council and changes to its microsite (i.e. the Webcast website used to host our webcast content) required by the Council during our website re-launch would not be charged for during the extension period. The supplier has also agreed favourable terms for webcast extensions and provision of a new microsite for the Council.

(ii) The four year contract period was permitted under the current Framework agreement. This longer term contract provided greater value in securing a fixed price contract until 2015 at which time it is expected that the Hub Framework will have been re-tendered. The webcasting contract also provides for a mid-term break clause. The annual cost of the contract is £20,400 and is met from ICT systems budgets.

(iii) The current contractor has supplied a tested reliable product which has proved successful and popular with the public.

(iv) There have been no new Local Government Webcasting solutions suppliers enter the market since the original letting of the framework.

6. This decision (LE-003-2010/11) was published 9 August 2010 and implemented on 20 August 2010.

7. The work to renew the Essex Procurement HUB framework agreement has commenced and is expected to be completed by 31 March 2012. The new framework will be a national one rather than restricted to Essex Authorities.

### **Equipment and Use**

8. The Council currently possesses two sets of webcasting equipment. One fixed unit mounted permanently in the Council Chamber and a portable unit, used for meetings based either at other locations (ie Plans South in Loughton) or in the Committee Rooms where a live internet feed has been installed. The portable equipment is also used for other types of event, supplemented by two further video cameras owned by the Council.

9. This equipment is operated by officers of Democratic Services, Public Relations and occasionally staff from other services. It is not a contractual requirement on staff to undertake this work. They do so on a volunteer basis.

10. The policy for webcasting meetings was set by the Corporate Executive Forum in August 2008. At that time it was agreed that a limit be put on the number and types of webcast meetings to stay within our contracted hours.

11. As a matter of course we webcast:

Council, Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny, District Development Control, Area Plans meetings, Audit and Governance and Budget meetings (ie could be Cabinet or OS Subcommittees and Panels).

12. Over time the equipment has been used successfully at other events and there has been an increased use of video either based on our own you-tube channel or via the webcast player. Examples this year have included the North Weald Airfield Open day, Armed Forces Day flag raising; the Safer Community Conference and the Civic Awards. We have also recorded some member training sessions.

13. The Webcast system operates by combining audio from the microphone system with video images captured by the Cameras into one set of data which is then transmitted to Public-I who then in-turn make different qualities of streaming available to the world wide web. The system allows us to display other contextual information about the meeting for example, agenda points, report links for each item, presentation slides shown in live synch.

14. The system has been set up to enable the Committee Management System to supply agenda/reports and booking information to the webcast system without human intervention, thus saving resources.

15. In recent months the Council has undertaken an update of its player to incorporate new functionality relating to sharing and now is able to embed video straight into news stories on our own website.

16. At each webcast meeting one member of staff operates the webcast system. At Area Planning Subcommittee South two members of staff attend due to the need to set up cameras and audio in a short period of time and due to the weight and size of the equipment involved.

### Hits and views

17. The summary below shows usage over time of the Council's service. The average annual level of viewers is around 20,000. Despite trying a number of different approaches the level of live viewers has remained at between 7-10% of the total viewing level. For information the 'all' category shows the level of access to all parts of the system including slides and related documents. A comparison to website 'hits'.

#### Summary Of Webcast Usage

	<b>live+archive</b>	<b>live</b>	<b>all</b>
yr to end Aug 07	17277	1233	21990
yr to end Aug 08	22381	1096	72073
yr to end Aug 09	20249	1253	81185
yr to end Aug 10	19212	1932	120923
yr to end Aug 11	20087	1710	91294
<b>Totals</b>	<b>99206</b>	<b>7224</b>	<b>387465</b>

18. It is very apparent that there is a direct relationship between the level at which we actively promote a webcast and the level of viewing. For example, active promotion of a recent visit by the Police to Overview and Scrutiny meant that 189 people tuned in live to watch. The homepage presence is critical.

19. Officers are able to report on comparator statistics verbally at the meeting.

#### Requests for webcasts – charge or not to charge

20. The Council receives requests from the public and professionals for copies of webcasts. This is normally in support of a planning appeal. Details of the number of requests are shown in the table below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of requests for webcasts</b>
2011	15
2010	13
2009	14
2008	16
2007	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>

21. The view has been taken by officers that the level of income that could be generated by making a 'reasonable' charge for providing copies is low and goes against the presumption of openness that webcasting itself provides. Additionally webcast copies have been effectively used in both Standards Committee complaints, complaints against the Council and to assist other services in providing background for appeals etc.

22. The Council has approached the Essex Records Office with a view to them taking some of the DVD backup copies of meetings. They have expressed interest in taking a cross section of our archived material for their permanent record.

### **Consultations with members**

23. As part of the process of this review an item has been placed in the Bulletin seeking views on the system. The issues that have arisen have been about technical issues related to viewing. For example lip syncing and using other browsers to view the webcasts.

24. Simon Hill will attend the Panel meeting to discuss the information provided and seek an indication from the Panel as to whether further information is required by members.