

Report to Constitution and Members Services Standing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 20 Febraury 2012

Subject: Webcasting Review

Officer contact for further information: Simon Hill ext 4249

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins



Decisions Required:

- (1) To receive a further background information report on the webcasting activities of the Council; and**
- (2) To consider any recommendations to be made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**

Introduction

1. (Senior Democratic Services Officer) At the meeting of the Panel in October 2011 members requested a report on webcasting. This report provides further information about the contract and the Council's webcasting activities based upon requests made at that meeting

2. The report falls into sections which reflect the list items member sought further information on.

(a) Opportunities for charging professional organisations for copies of DVDs;

3. Since 2007 the Council has provided, on request, a copy of the video file of any meeting requested. The view has been taken that, as residents have already paid for the Webcasting project, no charge has been levied for these copies. Occurrences are in the range of 10-15 per year (as reported at the meeting on 4 October 2011).

4. Members have asked whether there is an opportunity to charge professional organisations for copies of these files. It is officers' understanding from other authorities is that they either do not charge at all or charge for all requests. Normally, these requests relate to planning issues. Therefore the charges would normally be made to a planning agent. From several conversations with residents, it is apparent that planning agents will ask for the applicant to seek the webcast from the Council on the basis that they think they would be charged if they rang themselves.

5. Given that income generated would, say, be generated from half of all requests the income would be less than £100 less the cost of processing these payments.

(b) Staff costs for filming other bodies' meetings;

6. The Council's Management Board considered the Council's policy in relation to webcasting at their meeting on 3 September 2008. At that meeting they considered a request from a Parish Council who wanted the Council to webcast some of their Parish meetings. The view was taken that charges should be sought for such requests on the basis of covering all the costs to the Council. In this instance, the Parish declined to pay for the costs involved.

7. Any request received now would be considered on the basis of:

(1) Whether the staff had the capacity to undertake the function/meeting;
and

(2) Charging back all officer time and associated webcast costs.

8. There is currently the potential that the PLP (Public Law Partnership) may wish us to undertake some filming of training. This has been similarly estimated.

(c) Use of the Forester, Yearbook and Diary and Council website to advertise and advise of forthcoming meetings;

9. Officers do place regular articles in the Forester magazine, the last one appeared in issue 63 and the Christmas 2011 issue 65 also carries a webcasting story highlighting the passing of the 100,000 views landmark. We tend to publicize webcasting in connection to current issues as a way to see the work of the council.

All agendas carry a webcast logo which has been recently redesigned.



10. Democratic Services has now taken back responsibility for the production of the yearbook and diary. It is the intention to flag webcast meetings in the diary section.

11. The new website (due May/June 2012) will better integrate the webcasting information on the home page by taking a direct RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feed showing upcoming webcast meetings.

12. Officers are open to any further suggestions from members.

(d) Webcast index points did not always match the on-screen discussion, and speech and images not being synchronised;

13. The webcasting operator at each meeting is responsible for:

(1) Aiming the Camera at the person speaking and ensuring that the caption relates to that member and that the framing of that image is correct, focussed and appropriately light/dark;

(2) Ensuring that the agenda item shows the correct item being discussed;

(3) Ensuring that any slide being shown at the meeting corresponds with that being shown on the webcast unit;

14. Occasionally that officer will either not notice the caption is wrong or not show the correct agenda item. These can be changed after the event if the operator makes a note of them. As a percentage of the whole output these errors are small. Operators have been reminded of the need to note issues for subsequent changes.

(e) views of members of the District Council, County Council and Town and Parish Councils;

15. Members views were canvassed during the preparation of the last report. The only representations made related to (i) viewing with a non-IE browser; and (ii) the syncing of audio and video. The former was resolved by reference to the FAQ's section of the microsite and the latter is currently being addressed by the supplier and requires minor programming adjustments.

16. The Local Council's Liaison Committee has asked that their meetings be webcast in future to allow the topics to be disseminated to Parish and Town Councillors. If this can be accommodated within the current contracted hours/staff are available the request will be trialled at their next meeting.

17. Local Councils are also given access to any training session's webcast. No specific consultation has been done with County Council and Town and Parish Councillors, if members want this to be done they need to give officers guidance as to the types of questions they want answered and the aim of that consultation. Officers are of the view that Town and Parish Councils are unlikely to wish to pay for webcasting their meetings.

(f) Details of contract costs

18. The existing contract is made under an Essex HUB Webcasting Framework Contract let in competition. The current contract price is £20,400 this includes:

- (1) Lease of two sets of webcasting equipment; one mounted in the chamber, one mobile unit used for Plans South and other external events;
- (2) The maintenance of that equipment based on a Service Level Agreement;
- (3) The hosting of live webcast files for a period of six month from date of original meeting;
- (4) The monitoring of all live webcasts by a technician from the provider (daytime or evening)

19. The contract renewal was achieved under the Framework and is for a term of four years from 1 April 2011 (i.e. until 31 March 2015). There is a break clause in March 2013. At the time of renewal an assessment was made of the current market and on the basis that no new local authority webcasting services providers have entered this already restricted market since the letting of the original webcasting contract in 2008 and that evidence from other authorities undertaking tendering of webcasting services indicates that the Council may not achieve savings equivalent to resources employed in the tendering exercise the contract was renewed.

(g) further analysis of staffing costs

20. One additional officer is required at a meeting to operate the webcast unit. The exception is at Area Plans Subcommittee South, which requires two officers due to the amount of equipment required to facilitate the webcast.

21. All officers attending evening meetings have to take the same payment under current contractual arrangements. TOIL is no longer permitted and overtime is not payable. The payment is £58.63 if the meeting finishes before 10.00 p.m. and £86.13 if it finishes after 10.00 p.m. These sums formed part of the Single Status agreement. Meetings generally finish before 10.00 p.m. excepting Area Plans South, being in Loughton, requires officers to put away equipment and bring it back to the Civic Offices store before going home. This meeting often attracts the higher fee.

22. Officers from four departments have volunteered for webcasting duties in the last year and their payments are met from the existing attendance allowance in Democratic Services (annual budget currently £24,560 (all attendances))

23. The table in (k) below shows the total number of webcasts in the period November 2010 to October 2011 being 83. Therefore an approximate staffing cost for those meetings would be in the region of £5,800. It would require an in-depth review of those meetings to determine the exact figure but this sum is a good estimate.

(h) Arrangements under the contract when 15 webcasts per month is exceeded and the charges which then applied;

24. The contract currently in place has a restriction of 15 hours of webcasting per month (not 15 webcasts). This equates to 180 hours per annum. Each quarter a rota of meetings is devised taking account of Management Boards instructions and requests from Service Directors (Examples from this year would include meetings relating to Park Homes and the 30 Year Housing Plans).

25. It is very difficult to estimate the time that any meeting will take. We can estimate the average meetings length based on previous meetings (currently just under two hours on average – data taken from Committee Management System). Experience tells us therefore that we can webcast approximately 8 or 9 meetings per month.

26. The provider has indicated that:

- To increase the Council's capacity to 20 hours per month (240 per annum) would cost an additional £2,250 per annum; and
- To increase to 25 hours per month (300 per annum) would cost an additional £4,500 per annum

(i) occasions when officers are restricted by the limit of 15 webcasts per month

27. There have been no instances that officers have been restricted. Webcast time has varied over the years. The outturn report for the period November 2010 to October 2011 is shown in (k) below. In previous years we have been much closer to our limit figures. There is two reasons for the lower figures this year (i) the reduction in the number of planning committees and the overall length of meetings; and (ii) the

cancellation of a number of meetings. There have been occasions when the limit of 15 hours per month has been exceeded but no charges have been levied by the provider.

(j) Charging for advising other bodies on webcasting including visits to other authorities/bodies

28. Members asked whether charges could be made for advising other Council's about webcasting. Within local government there has always been a view that all authorities provide mutual assistance. This is very different from the commercial sector. In Democratic Services this might mean that we can provide advice about webcasting, committee management, elections, and civic events to other authorities. They in-turn assist us solving problems that we might not have come across before. This system is common across all local government disciplines and this Council would have benefited many times from using good practice from other Council's. The authority has been previously contacted by another Council to provide project management but no capacity exists to provide this level of support.

29. Given the national situation officers see little or no scope to charge for this advice.

30. The Senior Democratic Services Officer also Chairs the National Webcasting User Group and belongs to small group that advises the provider on development roadmaps and new functionality. This does enable the Council to be at the forefront nationally.

(k) Statistics on the split between public and officer viewing figures

month	all activity	live viewers	archive viewers	no hours webcast	no meetings covered	% Council originating viewers
Nov-10	9847	167	2271	16:41:00	8	3.20
Dec-10	7903	100	1631	11:21:00	6	2.20
Jan-11	7131	100	1120	15:05:00	8	1.89
Feb-11	5564	149	1128	14:37:00	9	2.90
Mar-11	9597	175	1668	12:05:00	8	3.26
Apr-11	8724	147	1276	13:44:00	8	2.81
May-11	6658	79	1561	7:58:00	5	2.38
Jun-11	8221	161	1778	14:53:00	7	3.61
Jul-11	8912	204	2792	11:07:00	6	2.37
Aug-11	1089	72	734	8:16:00	5	3.97
Sep-11	3708	1307	1885	22:02:00	9	2.85
Oct-11	1876	69	1169	7:55:00	4	8.80
Totals Combined	79230	2730	19013 21743	155:44:00	83	Ave 3.35%

31. During this period calculations have also been taken using a different measurement which estimates views originating from our IP address as being 4% of total.

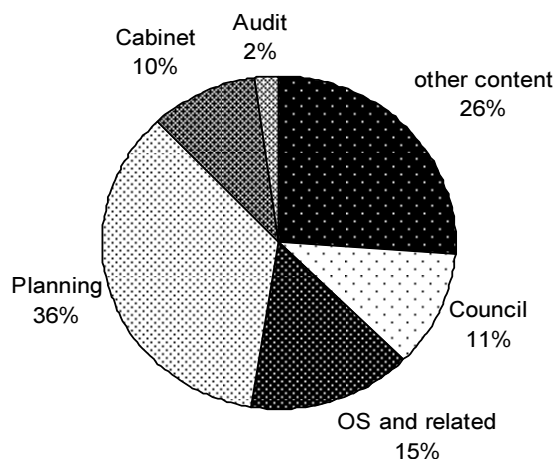
32. In addition for the period November 2010 – October 2011:

Total unique visitor IP addresses were: 5254
 Total return visitor IP addresses were: 3305
 Total one time visitor IP addresses were: 1949

(l) Analysis of the number of "hits" for meetings

33. Based upon the 'combined' views during the period November 2010 to October 2011 the following table shows the breakdown meetings being viewed.

	%	no
Other content	26	5675
Council	11	2500
OS and related	15	3270
Planning	35	7679
Cabinet	10	2151
Audit	2	468
Totals	100	21743



(1) Other content includes all non-meeting webcasts such as events, conferences and films but not those from the Council's Youtube channel.

(2) Planning includes all Planning meetings and DDCC

(3) Cabinet includes any webcasted Subcommittee meetings

(4) OS and related includes all OS Panels etc.

(m) Comparisons with the website statistics for other councils

34. The following shows viewing statistics against other Council's.

Council Type	Total	Live	Archive
City Council 1	122028	28280	91229
Association 1	81512	5725	75645
County 1	42622	11741	30608
Unitary 1	33035	5861	27133
City Council 2	28213	4364	23738
Unitary 2	24146	3759	20297
County 2	24203	6288	17813
County 3	24161	7707	16442
Epping Forest	21743	2730	19013
Metropolitan Council 1	17992	1553	16213
Unitary Borough 1	20982	5940	15001
County 4	18520	4676	13799
Unitary Borough 2	20515	7221	12978
Unitary Borough 3	13564	1436	12106
County 5	14518	2672	11825

Council Type	Total	Live	Archive
Metropolitan Council 2	13160	1503	11484
County 6	13069	2930	10030
Unitary Borough 4	13583	4048	9522
County 7	11286	2083	9183
District 1	10127	1845	8272
Other Authority 1	11827	2103	8194
District 2	9652	1508	8111
District 3	8415	645	7750
District 4	8320	629	7639
District 5	8430	831	7536
County 8	10485	2793	7526
Metropolitan Council 2	10616	3093	7378
Unitary Borough 5	8414	1121	7265
District 6	7877	1399	6440
Other Authority 2	6396	683	5706
City Council 3	7691	2567	5112
Unitary Borough 6	8100	3112	4963
City Council 4	5989	1082	4902
Unitary	5176	416	4754
County 9	5010	573	4423
District 7	5468	1054	4409
Metropolitan Council 3	4835	499	4328
District 8	4946	758	4176
District 9	4392	487	3900
City Council 4	4428	1228	3200
Other Authority 3	3841	652	3187
City Council 5	3818	799	3018
District 9	3912	1019	2879
County 10	1738	133	1604
County 11	1210	345	865

35. The Council also uses the webcasting technology and equipment to produce video for the Council's Youtube channel. During the same period these videos have been viewed 5423 times. This would have the effect of bringing combined viewership to 27,166.

36. Members are requested to consider the report and make any recommendation to the Committee as they consider is appropriate.