

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/046/2007-8.

Date of meeting: 8 October 2007.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance and Performance Management & Corporate Support Services.

Subject: Webcasting Project.

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Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 – 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the project evaluation report of the webcasting pilot be noted;**
- (2) That the support for the continuation of the project after 31 March 2008 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be endorsed by the Cabinet;**
- (3) That a revenue CSB growth bid in the sum of up to £25,000 and a revenue DDF growth bid in the sum of £4,000 for 2008-09 be made, subject to:**
 - (a) the receipt and consideration of further advice from the Essex Procurement Hub on any pre-tender expressions of interest received from other companies able to provide webcasting services to the Council;**
 - (b) final budgetary approval by the Council;**
 - (c) satisfactory contract terms, conditions and specification being met by any supplier; and**
- (4) That, following approval of the budget by the Council and further advice from the Essex Procurement Hub, the Finance, Performance Management & Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder be given delegated authority to either:**
 - (a) accept the lowest tender and authorise the entering into a three year contract for webcasting services with the successful tenderer; or**
 - (b) approve a negotiated contract with the existing contractor; and**
- (5) That, if necessary and subject to (2) above, the Assistant Chief Executive be authorised to extend the current contract with the existing contractor on a month by month basis from 1 April 2008 to ensure the continuation of the service during any tender process.**

Report:

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at an extraordinary meeting on 2 August 2007 received the project evaluation report of the pilot webcasting period. That committee has recommended to Cabinet that the project should be continued subject to Essex Procurement Hub (EPH) seeking pre-tender expressions of interest from suppliers to establish whether a full tendering exercise or negotiated contracts should be entered into. The Committee also asked that officers investigate the cost of procuring portable webcasting equipment.
2. The EPH have now taken soundings across Essex to establish likely interest in

developing a framework contract for Essex authorities through the Essex Online Forum. Given the potential level on framework contract that could ultimately be let, EPH are proposing placing appropriate adverts in relevant journals shortly. In order to follow EU procurement rules, the advert is required to give a 37-day period for response. This will mean that the Council will not know whether effective competition exists until mid to late November.

3. By that time, the Council will be in the advance stages of budget preparation. In order to ensure that a bid is made for CSB growth for 2008 to cover the likely annual cost of the service, officers have made an estimate of the level of likely costs involved based upon existing known costs. These can be broken down into four elements and costs as follows:

Item	Budget Estimate £
(i) the annual cost of leasing fixed equipment, maintenance, hosting and monitoring of live webcasts from the chamber (CSB);	19,000
(ii) the annual cost of leasing portable equipment (CSB);	5,000
(iii) the associated costs of uploading non-meeting content and consumables. (CSB)	1,000
(iv) outright purchase of video and sound equipment to support the portable webcast unit. (DDF)	4,000

4. The CSB sums are estimates only and it is hoped that through the framework contract approach these can be reduced.

5. It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder be given delegated authority to enter into a contract, either as a result of tendering or by negotiation. Either method will follow procedures laid out within Contract Standing Orders.

6. Preliminary advice from the EPH is that a number of companies have expressed interest in the proposed contract. This level of interest is greater than anticipated and may lengthen the procurement process. As a precautionary step, the cabinet is requested to allow officers to extend the current contract on a month-by-month basis (only if necessary) to ensure that there is no break in the service.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

7. Members have received a full evaluation report on the pilot period of webcasting and are supportive of continuing for a further period. The council budget process requires known sums to be put forward as bids for the budget. Delegation proposals are designed to allow the entering into a contract to take place as soon as the Council budget is finalised in the new year without need for further report unless tendering results require further Cabinet reports to be made.

Other Options for Action:

8. The Cabinet has the following options:

- (a) cease webcasting with effect from 31 March 2008;
- (b) seek to tender and let a new contract from 31 March 2008; or
- (c) seek a negotiated contract with the current supplier.

9. In terms of the options for financing the project, the Cabinet has the following options:

- (a) agree estimates as outlined above;
- (b) fund only elements of the project (i.e. not fund additional portable equipment). This

would limit future off-site usage; or

(c) wait until the results of the pre-tender expressions process are known. This option could mean that the current contract could lapse before a replacement is in place leading to a gap in service provision. This is not recommended.

10. In terms of the delegation proposed, the Cabinet could ask for a further report after the budget is agreed on the contract terms. The Council is due to agree the budget on 19 February 2008 and the earliest Cabinet meeting following that date is 10 March 2008. Allowing for call-in, the contract could not be in place by the start date of 1 April 2008. This is not recommended. Additionally the officer delegation, if not agreed, could mean that by 31 March no valid contract for services will exist, potentially leading to loss of service.

Consultation Undertaken:

10. Consultation on the project has been undertaken with public users of the service. Their responses are favourable and are documented in full in the evaluation report. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have supported the continuation of the project and views from officers and other members sought are likewise supportive.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: The report proposes a bid for CSB Growth in the sum of £25,000 and DDF in the sum of £4,000. Members should be aware of a report on the Civic Offices maintenance budgets elsewhere on this agenda that contains a bid of £45,000 (DDF) for the replacement of the speech reinforcement system in the chamber and associated works.

Personnel: From existing provision.

Land: Nil.

Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference: N/A.

Relevant Statutory Powers: N/A.

Background Papers: Evaluation report on pilot period (available on request).

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: The Council has agreed a protocol on the operation of the webcast system that seek to protect the rights of individuals relating to filming of their images at meetings and events.

Key Decision Reference (if required): Not a key decision.