

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet: 30th April, 2018

Report of the Leader

Webcasting Equipment

Purpose of the Report

1. To apprise Members of the current condition of the Council's webcasting equipment, how the webcasting service itself is facilitated and to seek the relevant authorisation to undertake a tendering process in respect of its update / replacement.

Recommendations

1. That the replacement of the existing webcasting equipment be approved.
2. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Finance to approve the issue of tenders for the supply of Webcast Equipment.
3. That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Leader and the Managing Director, to accept the most economically advantageous tender for the replacement of the Council's webcasting equipment and the support of such, for a period of 3 years.
4. That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Legal Services to draft and execute the contract.
5. That the Urgent Decision Procedure under section 14.14 of the Council's Constitution be authorised in respect of recommendations (1) to (3).

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To ensure the Council's webcasting equipment is "fit for purpose".
- 2-4 To have an appropriate contract in place for the supply of webcast equipment
5. To enable a new replacement system to be sourced and installed by the end of the Summer recess.

Background

2. In 2012, the Consultancy team within the Council's Property Section managed the construction of an audio / visual control room and the installation of equipment to support meetings, e.g. 60 wireless microphones, 4 television screens located in the Chamber and public gallery, 3 video cameras located in the ceiling, etc. This equipment also provided the facility to webcast meetings live onto the internet.
3. As part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requirements to strengthen public participation in local decision-making, Welsh Government provided a one-off grant of £40,000 to each Council in Wales, which was utilised to part fund the equipment which currently facilitates webcasting.
4. In terms of the future, it should be noted that Welsh Government, in the draft Local Government Wales Bill ("No. 2") allude to potentially legislating to make the broadcasting of (all) "council meetings" a statutory requirement.

Relevant Issues and Options

5. The Council began the piloting of webcasting of meetings in December 2014. At the time, it was agreed that the pilot scheme (resourced internally through ICT officers) would involve live webcasting of meetings of the Planning Committee. Since December 2016, meetings of Full Council have also been webcast live.
6. The initial pilot programme was intended to be subject to review after 12 months and officers from Democratic Services and ICT have considered webcasting arrangements and the issues which have arisen around such (as contained in this report) on many occasions since the pilot began.
7. The Bosch wireless microphone system in the Council Chamber operates on a wireless frequency range which, in 2012, was essentially industry standard. Since 2012, there has been a further increase in and development of the availability and use of mobile technology, e.g. mobile phones, tablets, laptops, etc. All of these mobile devices are designed to operate on the same frequency range that was being used by wireless audio devices in 2012.
8. Since 2013, all professional wireless audio devices have been designed to operate on a much higher frequency range as the quality of the audio signal at the lower range was being adversely affected by the proliferation of other mobile devices using the same frequency.
9. Over the course of the pilot programme, various issues have either been identified or have occurred which illustrate the "frailty" of the current infrastructure for webcasting within the Council Chamber.
10. Members themselves will be aware that there have been many issues reported relating to the poor quality and interference experienced with the audio in the Council Chamber during meetings. This is directly related to the issues as stated above. In addition, in the event of a microphone malfunction or breakdown, it has become increasingly difficult to source replacement parts as the system is, in effect, largely obsolete and no longer manufactured. There are currently just enough operating wireless microphones to support a Full Council meeting.

11. In terms of presentation facilities, due to the way the audio / visual equipment has been specified, configured and installed in the Council Chamber, the number and type of devices that can be used to project presentations is limited. The development of laptop / tablet technology has meant that the system in the Council Chamber has a limited life time and is heavily dependent on the above equipment, which is itself at the end of its operational life.
12. It can be seen from the above that there is a clear need to review, update and "future proof" as far as practicable the current equipment and webcasting services. As such, officers have looked at some of the potential equipment and options that now exist within the market. In terms of "future-proofing", elements that officers will take into account in drawing up specifications for a tendering process will include:
 - Future potential legislation requirements;
 - Bilingual provisions and the need to take account of any relevant Welsh Language Standards;
 - Provision for the use, and display, of electronic recorded voting; and
 - The potential for the use of shared microphones (subject to satisfactory assessment by officers).

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

13. Some funding is available in the Democratic and Freedom of Information reserve to support this initiative. However, ongoing costs will have to be considered as part of the 2019/20 estimate process when the full cost of this initiative is known. In terms of the tender process, the contract will be awarded on the basis of 70% cost / 30% quality.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

14. There are no direct implications as a result of the report.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

15. As alluded to earlier in the report, in terms of the future, it should be noted that Welsh Government, in the draft Local Government Wales Bill ("No. 2") allude to potentially legislating to make the broadcasting of (all) "council meetings" a statutory requirement.

Crime and Disorder Implications

16. There are no direct implications arising from the report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

17. Webcasting can benefit people with disabilities and other individuals and groups who may be unable to attend meetings, but who, through this medium, may be able to access the proceedings.

Corporate/Service Objectives

18. Webcasting of Council meetings can contribute to promoting local democracy and increasing community engagement by increasing citizens' awareness of the democratic process.

Policy Framework and Budget

19. This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

20. This is an internal matter and no consultation, therefore, has been undertaken.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

21. Corporate Performance and Resources.

Background Papers

None

Contact Officer

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Officers Consulted

Managing Director
Head of Finance
Head of Legal Services
Operational Manager (ICT)

Responsible Officer:

Rob Thomas, Managing Director