

Part A

Report to: Constitution Working Party
Date of meeting: 22 September 2016
Report of: Democratic Services Manager
Title: Webcasting at meetings

1.0 **Summary**

1.1 At the last Constitution Working Party meeting in June the issue of webcasting was raised. Further research has been carried out for members to consider whether to pursue this further.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 For the Constitution Working Party to consider whether it wishes to further pursue webcasting.

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Report approved by: Carol Chen

3.0 **Detailed Proposal**

- 3.1 Webcasting of council meetings is becoming more commonplace amongst local authorities and of course nationally parliament is televised.
- 3.2 Webcasting meetings can allow local democracy to be opened up to residents (and beyond) who may be interested in issues being discussed, without them having to be present at the meeting in the Town Hall to watch the decisions being taken.
- 3.3 An archive may also be kept for a period to allow access subsequent to the meeting for people to watch at their leisure.
- 3.4 There are various companies which can provide this service. However, the sound system which the council presently has in the chamber is capable of webcasting with the addition of cameras and a further piece of software. There would be several cameras which would be activated by the sound system to focus on the person speaking.
- 3.5 A council which uses a similar system to Watford is the London Borough of Hillingdon where they have attached cameras to their Brahler sound system. Their meetings can be viewed on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/hillingdonlondon> .
- 3.6 An issue for consideration will be the listed status of the interior of the council chamber including fixtures and fittings. The Urban Design and Conservation Manager has advised that the cameras should be small and discreet and the wiring should be located behind the panels to minimise the visual impact.
- 3.7 Other neighbouring authorities who webcast their meetings are St Albans and Hertsmere.
- 3.8 Hertsmere has been webcasting since 2005 and their viewing figures have steadily increased over the following years. They webcast their council, executive, planning committee, local strategic partnership and community safety partnership meetings. From 2005-2014 their average live viewings have been 395 per year.
- 3.9 St Albans has an average of 20 viewings per live broadcast with an average total viewing of 250 including the archive.
- 3.10 Webcasting would not replace taking formal minutes at the meeting to record the decisions and discussion but would be an additional tool to allow more residents to observe the decision making process.
- 3.11 As the cameras would be set up in the chamber the main meetings that would be webcast are full Council and Development Management Committee. These tend to be the meetings which attract the largest number of members of the public attending and

also the press. Facilities are looking at replacing the sound system in the committee rooms, if members wished to explore webcasting in the committee rooms this would need to be investigated and would require additional expenditure.

4.0 **Implications**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The estimated costs for cameras, hardware, software, cabling and installation in the council chamber are in the region of £14,500. Officers are investigating whether this can be covered by existing capital budgets otherwise there would need to be a growth bid submitted if members wish to pursue webcasting.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that currently members of the public are legally entitled to film meetings of the council. By web casting the council would control the content of the filming.

Appendices

No appendices

Background Papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report

WBC Constitution

File Reference

None