

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO MEMBERS
ADVISORY PANEL**

7 JANUARY 2015

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF LAW
AND DEMOCRACY**

RECORDING AND WEB BROADCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

SUMMARY

At its meeting on the 19 November 2014, Council agreed in principle to the recording and web broadcasting of Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee meetings. Council further agreed that a technical and financial appraisal be carried out and reported back to Members Advisory Panel ("the Panel") and thereafter to Cabinet and Council prior to implementation.

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the Panel of the technical and financial implications of implementation of this agreement in principle and to propose an implementation plan which will introduce recording and web broadcasting of the agreed meetings beginning on 3 June 2015, this being the first meeting of Council following the elections in May 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that

1. The Panel considers the technical and financial appraisal set out in paragraphs 3 to 11 regarding the Council recording and web broadcasting of its own public meetings and recommends the proposal set out in paragraph 13 to Cabinet and Council for approval.

DETAIL

Background

1. At its meeting on the 13 March, 2014 Cabinet asked the Panel to consider issues relating to the possible recording and web broadcasting of Council meetings, and to report the findings to a future Cabinet meeting. At its meeting on 5 September 2015 the Panel agreed an approach which recommended, subject to both a technical and financial appraisal being carried out and reported to Cabinet and Council, that the meetings of Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee would be recorded and web-broadcast. This recommendation was subsequently approved by Cabinet on 6 November 2014 and by full Council at its meeting on 19 November.
2. The reports already made to Panel, Cabinet and Council on this matter have considered The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the related regulations and guidance associated with the recording and broadcasting of meetings which came into force on 6 August 2014. It is noted that the protocol governing recording and broadcasting of meetings and the necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution have already been agreed and approved via the reports in September

and November. This report covers only the technical and financial appraisal of implementation of the in- principle agreement.

Technical and Financial Appraisal

3. Evidence has been obtained from the three North East Authorities who already record and web broadcast Council meetings. Newcastle, South Tyneside and Middlesbrough Councils currently record and broadcast some of their public meetings and have provided information on approach and cost. The three Councils adopt a range of fixed and mobile approaches to filming dependent upon building limitations and the approach taken to speaking in meetings. All three Councils use the publicly and freely available social media platform YouTube as the broadcast channel.
4. Consideration has been given to the options and limitations associated with the buildings in which the Council, Cabinet and Planning meetings take place. It is currently the case that Planning and Cabinet meetings take place predominantly in the Jim Cooke suite in Municipal Buildings and Council meetings in the Town Hall. With exceptions for the AGM, currently in the Forum in Billingham and meetings where a large public attendance is expected usually scheduled for the Baptist Tabernacle in Stockton. It is anticipated that these arrangements will continue.
5. The fact that the meetings to be recorded take place in four different buildings combined with the constraints associated with the listed building status of the Town Hall suggest that any fixed filming option, with investment in wall or ceiling mounted cameras would not be cost effective. This opinion is further supported by the fact that current practice and protocol allows for Members and the public to speak from their seats in Council, Cabinet and Planning meetings. This practice makes the use of fixed cameras difficult as some method of linking the camera to the speaker needs to be established. The use of fixed cameras works well only where all speakers are required to go to a lectern to speak. It is not proposed that this change to meeting protocol is introduced for the purpose of facilitating filming. Accordingly a mobile filming option has been explored that allows Council to continue to conduct its meetings in the current format.
6. Mobile filming options have been explored which will enable meetings to be conducted in any location and with the current format. Cost estimates have been obtained from the current filming framework agreement which is in place for the filming of events. These estimates indicate that the annual cost of filming a typical annual programme of 11 Council meetings, 12 Cabinet meetings and 17 Planning Committee meetings would be approximately £8,000. This estimate is based on an average meeting length of 2 hours plus additional time for filming an introduction and providing the film for broadcast. It is proposed that should this option be approved a separate tender for the work be undertaken as these estimates include a reduction of the current rate paid for events filming reflecting both the nature of the filming and the fact that this would be a commitment to work throughout the year, therefore attracting a lower rate. These rates could only be attracted through a specific tender process. Filming in all four buildings has been reviewed and it is considered that 1 camera operator could cover each meeting.
7. Consideration has also been given to the appointment of a member of staff to carry out this work and the event photography and filming currently commissioned by the Council. However it is felt that the range and flexibility provided by the current framework agreement would not be available with one member of staff. Even with a baseload of meeting recordings and additional events and PR work it is considered

the annual workload is most cost effectively provided by the freelance framework agreement.

8. It has also been considered that filming of meetings could be carried out using existing employees or by college students taking a media or film course. The use of college students has been adopted by Middlesbrough Council, their experience to date is positive although limited. Stockton Riverside College have indicated that they would be interested in taking part in a similar arrangement and if this approach is adopted discussions with other local colleges and groups would be pursued. Given the volume of meetings to cover in a year (typically 40 meetings) and the fact that some of the meetings will fall outside of term time it is considered that an option to rely solely on college students may be unrealistic.
9. A hybrid approach could be adopted whereby a professional filming contract is awarded to carry out some filming as required but also to oversee, train and advise the college students and also members of the Council's communications team. This approach would add value to the students and build additional skills in the Council which could be used for in-house training sessions such as Setting the Standard and Council wide briefing films etc. The cost of such an approach is estimated to be approximately £6,000 per annum, including the minor capital cost of investing in filming equipment for use in house. This estimate assumes that the in-house team and the students would be able to film half of the meetings in the year. Under this arrangement a decision could be taken to use the professional filming input at major meetings such as the AGM or as additional capacity at meetings where it is anticipated that there may be a number of public speakers.
10. The broadcast of meetings can be delivered using current technology in the Communications team via the Council's YouTube account. Links to the films will be made from the Council's website and will be supported by wider social media promotion.
11. It is proposed that the films are broadcast unedited and in full. It is recognised that this may mean that some of the footage is slow and silent as people move around the room in a meeting or between agenda items however it is felt that the benefits of transparency in broadcasting a full unedited version of the meeting outweigh the costs of potential claims of editing bias or omission. It is noted that the films currently broadcast on line are very much improved by having a short filmed introduction outlining the process and the agenda for the meeting. This introduction acts as a useful summary of what is to be covered so users can review this element before deciding whether they wish to watch the whole film. The introduction also provides a useful content guide for the purposes of estimating where in the film a particular item may appear if a viewer only wishes to view one item.

Recommendation

12. It is proposed that Members of the panel consider the options outlined above and propose an approach to Cabinet and Council. On balance it is recommended that the approach outlined in paragraphs 9-11 is the preferred approach as this approach balances cost and quality considerations, builds in-house capacity and has the added benefit of building democratic engagement and links with local colleges. It is further recommended that the filming be introduced at the AGM on 3 June 2015, this being the first meeting following the May elections. This timetable would allow time to carry out a procurement process and put in place arrangements with local colleges.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

13. It is estimated that the financial implications of the proposed approach will be £6,000 per annum. This cost would be considered as part of the MTFP process in February 2015.

Legal

14. The legal implications associated with the decision to implement recording and broadcasting of meetings were addressed in the earlier reports which agreed the decision in principle. There are no legal obligations to record or broadcast Council meetings.

RISK ASSESSMENT

15. The risks involved in the recording and broadcasting of public meetings should be categorised as low to medium.

COUNCIL PLAN IMPLICATIONS

16. Organisational and Operational effectiveness and strong local democracy.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

17. Should the Council decide to record or broadcast its own meetings an assessment will be carried out at the appropriate time if thought necessary.

CONSULTATION

18. Members have been consulted through reports to Cabinet and to Council.

Name of Contact Officer: Beccy Brown
Post title: Head of HR and Communications
Telephone No: 01642 527003
Email address: beccy.brown@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers: Previous reports to Cabinet and Council on 5 September 2014, 6 November 2014 and 19 November 2014

Ward(s) and War Councillors: Not ward specific

Property Implications: None