

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
Committee:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 November, 2018
Title:	Webcasting
Purpose of the Report:	To consider options for extending webcasting to include scrutiny committees and make recommendations to Council
Author:	Head of Democratic Services

1.0 Background

This report has been prepared in response to a decision by the Council on 28 September 2018 to refer the undermentioned Notice of Motion to the Democratic Services Committee and provide an opportunity for the Committee to make recommendations to the Council:

“The Constitution of Anglesey County Council should be amended to allow webcasting of both Scrutiny Committees”

Since June 2014, meetings of the Council, Planning and Orders Committee and the Executive have been webcast and progress reports submitted to this Committee.

Webcasting of meetings is not currently a legislative requirement but is strongly supported by Welsh Government and is linked to the provisions within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to strengthen local democracy and community engagement in ensuring that local authorities reach out to and engage with all sectors of the community they serve.

At present, the Council’s webcasting equipment is located in the Council Chamber and the current contract allows for up to 40 hours of broadcasting per year to cover the meetings referred to above. This also provides for the lease of all hardware and software, upgrades and maintenance. The current contract ends in March 2021 and costs per year are in the region of £12,000.

Current practice on webcasting meetings vary – most Councils webcast a combination of Council, Planning, Cabinet and some or all Scrutiny Committees where there is most public interest. The situation across North Wales is summarised in Appendix 1

Matters for consideration

Although the extension of webcasting to include Scrutiny committees would potentially put the Council in a better position to meet any statutory obligations to broadcast meetings which may be introduced in the future, it is necessary to highlight some specific issues and practical considerations:

Use of Council Chamber and Committee Rooms for the purpose of webcasting

On a practical level webcasting equipment has only been installed in the Council Chamber. It would be necessary to hold Scrutiny Committee meetings in the Chamber for the purpose of webcasting as there is no scope to change the layout and seating plan. Such practical considerations can be accommodated in Committee Rooms 1 and 2 which is a preferred layout setting for conducting meetings of Scrutiny Committees and reflects current practice.

There is, however, a potential option to use mobile webcasting equipment in Committee Rooms 1 and 2 but there would be additional associated costs per annum of hiring equipment alone in the region of £10,000, depending on usage; such costs are being incurred on an hourly basis and additional time in relation to staff; both of these issues are addressed in the paragraphs below. There is no provision in the budget for this expenditure and technical aspects would need further consideration.

Number of Meetings

Another consideration is the number of Scrutiny Committees per year in the Council calendar and any extraordinary meetings held. There are already 15 meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and 8 meetings of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in the diary for 2018/19 – this includes a number of extraordinary meetings.

Therefore, for the purpose of cost estimates, based on 23 Scrutiny Committees this municipal year, assuming that meetings last up to 3 hours on average, it is envisaged that there would be a need to webcast an additional 69 hours on top of the annual contracted 40 hours. Indicative costs, based on a per hour rate, are likely to be an additional cost in the region of £3,000 per annum, on top of current costs. There is no provision in the budget for these additional costs.

Demands on staff time

Members also need to acknowledge that there would be more demands on staff time to manage webcasting equipment should a decision be made to extend current arrangements. Democratic Services staff are responsible for ensuring the proper working of the webcasting equipment when meetings take place. This includes setting up in advance of meetings and testing of equipment and also publishing and archiving after meetings. This is a demand on staff time over and above actual live webcasting. This would be at a time of other competing service delivery demands and targets for budgetary savings within the service. Having regard to the number of Scrutiny Committee meetings in the calendar in this municipal year it is estimated that this would equate to a cost element of up to £3,500 when factoring in staff time required to manage equipment.

In summary, there are practical and financial considerations associated with extending webcasting and there is no current provision in the budget to meet the additional costs noted above including mobile equipment for the purpose of holding meetings in

Committee Room 1. This needs to be considered in the context of demands on the Council's budget and required savings.

Based on the information in this report the following options are presented to enable the Committee to make recommendations to the Council on the 11 December, 2018:

2.0 Recommendations

- i) To consider whether to recommend no change to the current arrangements for webcasting or support the webcasting of Scrutiny Committees taking account of funding issues, use of Committee rooms and demands on Democratic Services staff time.
- ii) If the merits of extending webcasting is supported, consider piloting a set number (maximum of 4) of Scrutiny Committee meetings during 2019/20 - meetings of most public interest e.g. annual budget proposals. Arrangements to be agreed by the Chairs and Vice-chairs Scrutiny forum in consultation with the Leader and Chief Executive.

Huw Jones
Head of Democratic Services
7 November, 2018

Appendix 1

Number and Type of Meetings Webcast December 2017 – May 2018

Council	Meetings Webcast
Conwy	Council Cabinet Planning Scrutiny
Denbighshire	Council Cabinet Planning Scrutiny
Flintshire	Council Planning
Gwynedd	Council Cabinet Planning Scrutiny
Wrexham	Council Executive Planning Scrutiny