

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
NAME OF COMMITTEE:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING:	1 OCTOBER 2013
TITLE:	WEBCASTING OF MEETINGS AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE
AUTHOR:	INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES/ICT MANAGER
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR VAUGHAN HUGHES

1. Background

1.1 The webcasting of meetings is linked to the provisions within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to strengthen local democracy; the intention is to strengthen the structures and working of local government in Wales at all levels and to ensure that local Councils reach out to, and engage with, all sectors of the community they serve. However, webcasting is not a legislative requirement but is strongly supported by Welsh Government.

2. Welsh Authorities current position

2.1 At present some Councils in Wales webcast Council meetings including:

- **Cardiff** webcast their Council meetings only (hosted by Public-i)
- **Carmarthenshire** webcast their Council meetings only (hosted by Public-i)
- **Powys** has used Public-i for meetings of high public interest.
- **Brecon Beacons NPA** webcast all their major meetings using a system provided by Public-i, on an 18 month pilot, funded by the Information Commissioners Office.

3. The Council's position

3.1 As reported to the Democratic Services Committee on 1 July 2013. The Welsh Government has now offered a grant of £40,000 to each Council to assist the promotion of local democracy and public engagement. The purpose of the funding is to enable Councils "to make particular arrangements to broadcast council meetings, introduce remote attendance at council meetings, and assisting community councils to publish information on and be contactable through the Internet." An additional £20,000 of funding is allocated to assist community councils to set up websites. This allocation is currently being distributed to Community Councils.

- 3.2 The funding has a condition that the Authority must webcast at least a meeting(s) during 2013/14 and provide a remote attendance service. There is no guarantee of grant funding in future years

4. Remote Attendance

- 4.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 places a requirement on local authorities to put arrangements in place for Members to participate in meetings remotely. This requirement has not yet been enacted but is likely to be scheduled for the Spring of 2014. Draft guidance on remote attendance has been received for consultation and it is envisaged that the final guidance will be published shortly.
- 4.2 The Council's Standing Orders will need to be amended once Section 4 of the Measure is enacted to include an enabling provision in relation to remote access.
- 4.3 The draft guidance does give some flexibility in allowing each local authority to determine which types of meetings can be attended remotely and how this is effected. Advice received from the Welsh Government leaves it to local Authorities to determine how to take this forward and the extent. This approach will satisfy the terms of the grant. Welsh Government are encouraging local authorities to trial remote access. Implementing remote access from a remote location such as a library or even another room in the Council Office is a realistic option for an area such as Ynys Môn and would enable us to comply with the requirement of the grant. The use of desk top video conferencing is being considered for this purpose.

5. Webcasting

- 5.1 Webcasting would allow meetings of the Council to be available to view over the internet by way of streaming media. The website would allow the public to view the meetings live or later through the website via an archive, all the audience needs is a device with an internet connection. Interface with Modern.gov management systems is being considered to facilitate engagement.
- 5.2 Typically, Councils using webcasts report that the number of people watching live is higher than the number of people who actually attend meetings, and that significantly higher numbers of people watch archived material as opposed to those that watch live.
- 5.3 The equipment would consist of a computer system with a series of cameras set up in the Chamber which automatically focus on the Member speaking when the button is pressed on his/her microphone.

6.0 Benefits

- 6.1 There are a number of benefits to promote local democracy through web-casting:
- View meetings live, which may be helpful for people who have difficulty travelling to attend the meeting or who may otherwise prefer to watch from another location

- Replay meetings after they have taken place, which may be helpful when the meeting time or location is inconvenient
- Search for, and view, particular speakers or agenda items
- Transparent governance and accountability
- Improved citizen engagement, particularly with the younger generation
- Improved understanding of the democratic process for example understanding of planning decisions
- Enables LG (Wales) Measure requirement for engaging public in Scrutiny
- Incentive for high standards of member attendance, engagement and conduct at meetings
- Effective means of communicating to officers and other members information and decisions
- As many council officers rarely have the opportunity to attend or observe formal council meetings, webcasting provides a valuable opportunity for more officers to view and understand council meetings and the democratic process, and webcasting (and archived meetings) could also be a useful part of officer induction and training.
- Opportunities for members to learn from peer observation and inform potential candidates about their role to encourage democratic renewal.

7. Resource Implications

- 7.1 Informal discussions have taken place with leading suppliers in order to gain a better understanding of the proposals, the costs involved and whether webcasting is a feasible option. Indicative costs for a managed service suggest that the grant would fund a 2 year pilot for a hosted solution, based on annual costs of around £18k per annum, but this is dependent on a number of factors (e.g number of hours for webcasting, number of cameras and the sophistication of the hardware provided).
- 7.2 The costs are indicative only and include support and up to 90 hours of broadcasting content per year. This is based on the broadcasting of 4 Council meetings per year, 12 Executive Committee meetings and 12 Planning Committee meetings.
- 7.3 Members may wish to take a view on the extent of broadcasting meetings or to limit webcasting e.g. to meetings of a particular committee as part of a pilot. This would have a bearing on costs. Group Leaders are being consulted on this aspect.

- 7.4 A webcasting hosted solution is recommended as this includes equipment upgrades.
- 7.5 Beyond year 2 there would be a demand for revenue funding of approximately £15k per year for a hosted solution should the Council decide to continue with webcasting.

8. Staffing and Members

- 8.1 Staff resources will be required to prepare for each meeting in setting up equipment to record and checking the links to the provider prior to the meeting, inputting relevant documents on the web page prior to the meeting, ensuring the equipment is operating correctly during the meeting. Following the meeting, placing the recording in the archive on the Council's site with all relevant matters being time linked etc for the meeting. Staff within Democratic Services will need to undergo training to undertake these additional roles in liaison with ITC Staff
- 8.2 In addition, there may be additional demands on the Translation Unit to service meetings and arrange translation of proceedings for the purposes of webcasting
- 8.3 The introduction of webcasting is likely to have a significant impact on Members and it would be necessary to invest considerable effort into ensuring buy-in and overcoming any potential concerns or difficulties that they may have. Webcasting could have impact on the governance of council meetings. Webcasting providers include training as part of the implementation and this would have to be tailored to take account of member concerns and needs. It would also be necessary to put in place member an on-going training programme and this would entail costs particularly if it was extended to cover media training and presentation skills.

9. Risks

- 9.1 The risk associated with not installing any system will be that the Council may find itself in a position where the potential for enhancing public access is lost, possibly at the same time when other Councils in Wales are moving forward.
- 9.2 There is no doubt that the Welsh Government is strongly encouraging authorities to embrace this concept.
- 9.3 The risk with providing the system is mainly around funding, particularly at this time when the Council budget is under severe pressure. Grant funding is available to initiate a 2 year pilot, and towards the ends of the pilot period, it is recommended that a review be undertaken to establish whether the webcasting of meetings had been successful in promoting local democracy and public engagement. Following consideration of the review the Council would decide whether to continue with this service for the ongoing provision of webcasting for the following year(s).

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the Democratic Services Committee recommends to Council:

- To proceed with the Webcasting of meetings for a 2 year pilot period in order to utilise Welsh Government funding, taking account of comments in para. 7.3 on the extent of broadcasting.
- To authorise the Interim Head of Democratic Services and ICT Manager to procure the necessary equipment based on a hosted solution.
- To note the position in relation to remote access as detailed in section 4 above.

Huw Jones
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16/09/13