

REPORT TO: Civic Affairs Committee
LEAD OFFICER: Alex Colyer, Executive Director

28 July 2016

Filming at Public Meetings

Purpose

1. Further to the meeting of 21 September 2013 and the subsequent report to the Committee of 12 November 2015, this amended report seeks to advise the Civic Affairs Committee on the current options available to support recommendations it may wish to submit to Full Council on the filming of the authority's public meetings.
2. This is being submitted to the Civic Affairs Committee for consideration as any changes to the Council's policy on the filming of public meeting may require amendments to the Constitution, which is within the Committee's remit.

Recommendations

3. That support for the introduction of filming and recording of public meetings held in the Council Chamber at South Cambridgeshire Hall is recommended to the full Council.
4. That 3C ICT are instructed to investigate the requirement further, with a preference for Option 1, and with focus on a joined up approach with the partner councils of Huntingdon and Cambridge City.
5. That a sub-committee is formed to received recommendations and guide progress without waiting for the next full Committee meeting.

Reasons for Recommendations

6. To ensure a true and accurate record of meetings.
7. To ensure that the Council follows the latest guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.
8. To ensure accessible, open and transparent local government.

Background

9. The formation of the 3C Shared Services partnership presents the opportunity to review initiatives such as the recording of meetings that may have previously been dismissed due to cost or staffing issues. There is appetite across the three councils to investigate recording and broadcasting with potential economies of scale and reduced up-front costs if taken forward jointly.
10. The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 came into force on 10 September 2012 and

provided greater access to information considered at meetings of the Council's Executive.

11. In June 2013 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a guidance document entitled 'Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works', which acts as a guide for local people in explaining how they can attend and report their local council meetings. A copy of this guidance is attached at Appendix A, which includes a section on the filming of a Council's public meetings.
12. At the meeting of the full Council of 26th September 2013, the Council agreed for the constitution to be updated so bloggers, journalists and anyone attending a public meeting can film, photograph or record events.
13. Councillors also agreed that the Corporate and Customer Services portfolio holder would look into the possibility of streaming public meetings to give even more people access to the debates held in the Council chamber. This resulted in a report being submitted to the Civic Affairs Committee in November 2015 recommending the provision of a locally managed camera system which was rejected.

Options

14. The following options have been identified for the Civic Affairs Committee to consider:

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Option 1

Recommend that the Council contracts with a 3rd party supplier so that an archive for on-demand viewing can be created and, if desired, webcasting be introduced for all/some public meetings, so that the Council can film and stream its proceedings live on its website.

Option 2

Recommend that the Council films public meetings with internally managed equipment and provides a link to the footage on its website after the meeting has been held; the footage is not a live feed but can still be viewed online.

Option 3

Recommend that the Council does not install, contract or provide any specific facility or system and instead re-affirm the right for members of the public to make their own recordings.

Considerations

15. The issuing of the guidance at Appendix A resulted in local authorities across the country reviewing their processes with regard to the filming of their public meetings, due to anticipated increases in the number of people wishing to film or record public meetings as a consequence.
16. A number of Councils in the United Kingdom film and stream their meetings live on the internet (webcasting) and have done so for a number of years, whereas some Councils prohibit the use of any recording equipment without authorisation.
17. Webcasting has resulted in a wide range of benefits for many authorities who provide webcasting. It also brings forward a number of challenges for consideration.

Benefits

Provides a 'true' record of the meeting

More open and transparent government.
Greater accountability
Easier public access
Engagement with residents via increasing use of social media
Effective communication of key decisions
Better officer engagement
Fewer press enquiries, reduction in FOI requests

Challenges

Costs – at a time when severe reductions in budgets are being made.
Staff time requirements to operate the system
Consent – all participants at a meeting will need to give consent to being filmed and any possible future use of the footage.

18. Most pertinently, with the rise in members of the public filming meetings there is the potential for council content being taken out of context, or edited. A true and accurate internal record mitigates this and can be provided to counter any malicious or disingenuous presentation.

19. The Civic Affairs Committee may wish to take into consideration the following paragraphs stated in the guidance document under the heading ‘can I film the meeting?’ which would also apply to our own recordings –

“As a courtesy, attendees should be informed at the start of the meeting that it is being filmed; we recommend that those wanting to film liaise with council staff before the start of the meeting. The council should consider adopting a policy on the filming of members of the public speaking at a meeting, such as allowing those who actively object to being filmed not to be filmed, without undermining the broader transparency of the meeting.”

20. There have been several occasions where it has been difficult to accommodate the numbers of people arriving at South Cambridgeshire Hall to attend meetings that have generated significant public interest. The Civic Affairs Committee may wish to consider the additional opportunity provided by installing a camera system, which will allow over-subscribed meetings to be streamed to other rooms/halls.

21. The Civic Affairs Committee is asked to review the Council’s current process for the filming of its public meetings and determine whether any changes should be recommended to Full Council.

Implications

22. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

23. The current budget programme does not include financial consideration for any webcasting / filming of meetings.

24. Option 1 will require the procurement, installation and maintenance of specialist webcasting service. Research has shown that there is one predominant supplier of local government webcasting and is the ‘supplier of choice’ for most Councils currently offering this service. Two price-plans are available:

- a. **Pay-as-you-go** pricing is available where recording hours can be purchased in blocks of 5 hours at £750 and a single camera with encoder and support can be leased at £3750 per annum. This option is cost-effective where under 50 hours of meetings are to be recorded a year.
- b. **Contract pricing** depends on the final solution sought, but indicative pricing for a multi camera system is circa £15,000 per annum.

In both cases, hardware can be purchased up front to reduce multi-year costs.

25. Option 2 requires the up-front procurement of video recording camera(s), software and editing hardware. Actual costs of this are not currently known - additional 'hidden costs' relate to officer resources needed to operate and manage an internally managed system and could require the presence of an appropriately trained democratic services officer at all meetings to be recorded.
26. Whilst both options above provide the basis of a system that can relay audio and video to other parts of the building to provide overflow arrangements, Option 2 would require the installation of video senders at extra cost, whereas a commercial system as per Option 1 would allow streaming to standard PCs or mobile devices via the existing network.
27. Option 2 would see reduced benefits from pursuing a joined up approach with partner councils - with Option 1 discounts can be obtained from a combined subscription and there is a real possibility that internal resources and knowledge can be shared.
28. Option 3 has no cost.
29. All options described above made above are based on a fixed camera deployment of equipment to the Council Chamber only, other meeting rooms are not considered viable nor is the provision of a mobile service.
30. Any cost information above is provided on a best estimates basis and will require a full assessment of any agreed requirement before the true financial commitment can be determined.

Legal

31. Legal implications are outlined in the main body of this report.

Staffing

32. No impact on staffing numbers but there is a potential increased workload for existing staff, which will have to be managed appropriately. Option 1 is a pre-configured solution dedicated to the task of recording and broadcasting Council Meetings with in-built integration with existing systems such as Modern.Gov; as such, many tasks are automated or with pre-defined workflows that reduce the staff resource implications compared with Option 2.

Effect on Strategic Aims

33. Delivery of a video recording system meets the Authority's Strategic Aim 1 – Engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money.
34. The recommendations in this report follow the guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which seeks to provide greater levels of transparency and public access to the Council's meetings, thereby encouraging more engagement with residents, parishes and businesses.

Background Papers

Filming at Public Meetings, report to Civic Affairs Committee 21st September 2103
Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England)
Regulations 2012.

Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works (DCLG) - June 2013.

Guidance for Members: webcasting (WLGA) – August 2014.

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