

REPORT TO: Civic Affairs Committee

12 November 2015

LEAD OFFICER: Alex Colyer, Executive Director Corporate Services

Filming at public meetings

Purpose

1. Further to its meeting of 21st September 2013, this report seeks to advise Civic Affairs Committee on the current technical options available in its consideration of recommendations it may wish to submit to Full Council on the filming of the authority's public meetings.
2. This is not a key decision but has been submitted to the Civic Affairs Committee for consideration as any changes to the Council's policy on the filming of public meetings may require amendments to the Constitution, which is within the Committee's remit.

Recommendations

3. That Full Council be recommended to support the introduction of filming and recording of public meetings held in the Council Chamber at South Cambridgeshire Hall.
4. That the recording of meetings be made available for public viewing after the event and not as a 'live stream'.
5. That Option 3 be adopted as a solution to meet the requirement.

Reasons for Recommendations

6. To ensure that the Council follows the latest guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.
7. To ensure accessible, open and transparent local government.

Background

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. At its meeting of 21st September 2013, Civic Affairs committee made the following **recommendations** to Council:

- To allow members of the public to film its public meetings in accordance with newly published guidance by the Department for Communities and Local Government entitled 'Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works'.
- That Standing Order 21.4 of the Council's Constitution (Recording of Business) be amended to read: -
 "The recording in any format of any meeting of the Council, the Executive, or any committee or sub-committee of the Council or the Executive, is permitted, except: -
 (a) where the Chairman, or person presiding the meeting, rules that filming is being undertaken in such a way that it is disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting.
 (b) where the public have been excluded from the meeting in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 10) during the consideration of exempt or confidential information.

The Committee also **agreed** that:

- It would be inappropriate at the current time for the Council to film or broadcast its own meetings due to the cost of the installation and maintenance of the equipment required. It was further agreed that the situation would be reviewed in 12 months.

Considerations

11. The 'Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works' guidance document includes a section on page 6 headed 'can I film the meeting?' This refers to all public meetings, not solely meetings of a Council's Executive, and states that: -
 "Council meetings are public meetings. Elected representatives and council officers acting in the public sphere should expect to be held to account for their comments and votes in such meetings. The rules require councils to provide reasonable facilities for any member of the public to report on meetings. Councils should thus allow the filming of councillors and officers at meetings that are open to the public".
12. The issuing of this guidance has 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.
13. 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.
14. Here at South Cambridgeshire District Council, we allow the public to film our public meetings. This is consistent with the approach taken by East Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council who also currently allow members of the public to film their respective public meetings.

15. Webcasting has resulted in a wide range of benefits, both intended and unforeseen, for many authorities who provide webcasting. It also brings forward a number of challenges for consideration.

Benefits

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
Provides a 'true' record of the meeting

Challenges

Costs – at a time when severe reductions in budgets are being made.
Staff time requirements to operate the system
Public stage – training requirements for Members and officers alike.
Voting – all votes will be recorded.
Consent – all participants at a meeting will need to give consent to being filmed and any possible future use of the footage.

16. The Civic Affairs Committee may wish to take into consideration the following paragraphs also stated in the guidance under the heading 'can I film the meeting?': -

“The Data Protection Act does not prohibit such overt filming of public meetings. Councils may reasonably ask for the filming to be undertaken in such a way that it is not disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting. 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.”

17. In terms of accommodating members of the public wishing to attend the Council's meetings, fire safety regulations and the size of the public meeting rooms at South Cambridgeshire Hall place limitations on the total number of people allowed in these rooms at any one time. There have been several occasions where it has been difficult to accommodate high volumes of people arriving at South Cambridgeshire Hall to attend meetings involving items of business that have generated significant public interest. Whilst such instances are not commonplace, the Civic Affairs Committee may wish to consider any appropriate measures to ensure that anyone arriving at the Council's offices to attend a public meeting is able to see or hear proceedings should the meeting room be full to capacity.
18. The use of a local 4 camera system with capacity for recording meetings of a possible 8-hour duration (covering extended Local Plan meeting as an example) and for storing recordings until a point in time where it is no longer considered necessary, would provide a viable option which gives the Council the ability to

demonstrate its openness and transparency in delivering the democratic agenda without committing the Council to significant and unjustifiable cost.

19. 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 in light of the guidance document issued in June 2013.

Options

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

Option 1

Recommend that the Council contracts with a 3rd party supplier and that 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 internally films or records all/some public meetings, so that the video and audio feed can be relayed to other parts of the building as an overflow arrangement in circumstances whereby the public gallery cannot accommodate the number of people wishing to attend.

Option 3

Recommend that the Council internally films all/some public meetings 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. This option can also provide a video and audio broadcast which can be relayed to other parts of the building to provide overflow arrangements.

Option 4

Recommend that the Council does not install, contract or provide any specific facility or system and to restate the recommendation of its meeting 21st September 2013, to allow members of the public to film its public meetings.

Implications

21. 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

22. The current budget programme does not include financial consideration for any webcasting / filming of meetings.
23. 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. The average cost of a basic service, to include hosting and maintenance is of the order of £18,000 per annum.

24. The 'hidden costs' relating to officer resources to operate and manage the system are in addition and could require the presence of an appropriately trained democratic services officer at all meetings to be recorded.
25. Option 2 requires the procurement of video recording camera(s) and a basic video/audio extender to other parts of South Cambridgeshire Hall, which would cost in the region of £2,000 including installation and configuration works.
26. Option 3 requires the procurement of a local video recording system. It is this option which has significantly reduced in cost over the last couple of years, improved in quality and provides a relatively affordable entry into the meeting recording requirement.
27. As in Option 1, Option 3 requires that officer time is a consideration but due to the fact that this is not intended to provide a 'live feed', most involvement will be after the meeting and the required workload can reasonably be shared by several officers. The cost of this option is in the region of £2,500 as a one off capital investment. Annual hosts relate to system maintenance and a web presence for the meeting recordings (www.scambs.gov.uk or YouTube) and are likely to be in the region of £500.
28. 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.
29. All 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

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

Staffing

31. No impact on staffing numbers but there is a potential increased workload for existing staff which will have to be managed appropriately.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim 1 – Engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money

32. The recommendations in this report follow the latest 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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