ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

1.	Meeting:	RMBC Cabinet
2.	Date:	26th November 2014
3.	Title:	Webcasting RMBC Meetings
4.	Directorate:	Resources

5.   Summary

This paper considers the introduction of webcasting for Council meetings as a permanent arrangement, following an initial trial during late 2014.

It presents the main issues, a summary of the costs and benefits in the introduction of webcasting.

6.   Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to approve that:

- **RMBC will begin webcasting selected meetings as part of the Council's commitment to improving engagement and transparency in local democracy.**
- **That the webcasting contract is awarded to Public-i at an annual cost of £15k per year, initially for a period of 2 years.**

7. Introduction

The Council is committed to improving engagement and transparency in local democracy and the decision-making process.

As part of this commitment, an increasing number of local authorities now opt to webcast some of their formal meetings in order to provide greater access to the democratic process.

Webcasting uses streaming technology to distribute video and audio coverage of a meeting or event. This footage can be accessed live, or after the event, by anyone with a suitable devide (e.g. laptop, smartphone, tablet) and internet access, anywhere in the world.

The Council trialled the use of this technology to webcast several high-profile meetings which took place following the publication of the Alexis Jay report. Given the significant public interest in these proceedings the Council wanted to ensure as many people as possible could access the discussion and decision-making process. The service was provided by an external company, as the technology and resources do not currently exist in-house.

The webcasts attracted significant viewing figures (below and attached at appendix one). While these cannot be taken to be representative of what could be expected of other meetings, it demonstrates the ability and appetite that exists to access local government through digital means.

A summary of the viewing statistics is attached at appendix one, and the headline figures for each meeting are outlined below:

Cabinet (3 Sept)	1,388	unique viewers
Full Council (10 Sept)	580	unique viewers
Police & Crime Panel (11 Sept)	966	unique viewers
TOTAL	2,934	unique viewers

Significant changes in the rights of individuals to use modern technology and communications tools and platforms to report on council meetings they are attending have also recently come into force (6 August 2014), through the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

Although the Regulations do present a major change to the way in which people can report Council meetings, they also provide an opportunity to those involved to show the relevance and importance of the decisions made by the Council, and the positive and constructive way in which Council business is conducted. They also have a role to play in encouraging greater understanding of, and stimulating greater involvement in, local democracy

7.1 Potential benefits of webcasting

Improving public engagement with and transparency in local democracy and the decision-making process by:

- o Increasing the number of people who can access the proceedings of council meetings, including those who are uanable or do not want to attend in person

- o Creating an archive of council meetings which can be viewed at the convenience of members of the public, and as a matter of public record

- o Ensuring greater equality of access to council information

- o Increasing public understanding of the workings of local government

- o Giving media greater access to report on council meetings and decision-making

- o Provide members of public with a complete context and content of meetings, rather than just those sections selected for media use

In addition:

- o Members not able to participate in a meeting for any reason would be able to view meetings live, and after the event

- o Members would be able to draw on webcasts as a resource for the purposes of tracking debate on particular issues or for the purposes of drawing constituents' attention to relevant parts of a Council meeting

- o It could provide a learning resource (e.g. in relation to citizenship lessons in schools or induction training for both officers and Members)

7.2 Scutiny Review of Standing Orders

The issue of webcasting was discussed at a meeting of Members on October 24th 2014 which was convened to review RMBC's standing orders. The review group considered options for webcasting meetings. It noted that whilst there is no requirement for Councils to webcast meetings, in the interests of openness and transparency it asked that this practice be continued.

The review group also noted that under the recent Openness and Accountable Local Government guidance:

> "…councils and other local government bodies are required to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and audio-record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings." (DCLG, 2014, p5)

It was noted that no prior permission is required to carry out this activity, and that the rules require local government bodies to provide 'reasonable' facilities for any member of the public to report on meetings.

The review group recommended that the following meetings be webcast as a matter of course:

- Full Council
- Cabinet
- Planning Board
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Other meetings could be webcast if it was deemed to be of significant interest.

Given the restrictions of Committee Rooms 1 and 2 (the high ceilings and lack of microphones make for poor accoustics) the review group recommended that the only the Council Chamber be set up to webcast. It also asked that options for fixed microphones in the public gallery (controlled by the Chair) be explored (this is being done as a separate piece of work).

7.3. Options and Costs

There are 2 broad options which RMBC can choose from when considering webcasting meetings.

7.3.1 Option 1: Buy in a 'Ad hoc' webcasting service

Under this model we would have no equipment or expertise in-house. Instead we retain a third party to come in, with equipment, as and when needed (this is the option which has been exercised during the trial meetings in September 2014).

- Pros – no burden on RMBC resources, professional presentation, known to work. This is a good solution if the number of meetings to be broadcast is very low.

- Cons – very expensive in the long term. Ad hoc webcasting services wil cost between £500 and £2,500 per meeting depending on the sophistication of the service/equipment used.

The review group (mentioned above) discussed the current costs of ad hoc webcasting and agreed that it was financially unsustainable to continue to operate in this way.

For these reasons this option is not recommended.

7.3.2 Option 2: Use a permanent solution

Under this model we would install and operate permanent hardware (cameras and audio - this can be owned or leased) but the webcasting mini-site, presentation, archiving etc is managed by a 3rd party.

- o Pros – professional presentation and cheaper than an ad hoc service (Option 1). This is a proven model across Local Government and appears to be the solution most commonly employed across the sector.

- o Cons – will require attention from RMBC staff at every meeting to be webcast. The cameras are automated and will pan and zoom to each speaker based upon integration with the Chamber's microphone system. This means the cameras do not need 'operating' but a RMBC member of staff will be required to initiate/terminate each webcast and be available should the webcasting company detect any issues with the broadcast.

Colleagues in RMBC Procurement and ICT have issued a formal invitation to tender for this work and two bids were received – Citizen's Interactive Broadcasting Ltd and Public-i. Each supplier took a different approach to the solution.

Citizen's Interactive Broadcasting (CIB) Ltd – this company's proposal called for RMBC to purchase outright the basic requisite hardware (audio/visual equipment) and web hosting and then a CIB employee would be attend each meeting to do the actual 'filming'. CIB's quote is £37,125 over 2 years, the bulk of this charge relates to staff time in filming the meetings.

Public-i – this company's proposal calls for RMBC to lease the hardware which is then monitored remotely by Public-I with some intervention from RMBC staff to start/end the webcast. Public-I's quote is £30,187 over two years.

RMBC Procurement and ICT scored the two tenders based upon quality. The Public-I offering is more mature, sophisticated and feature-rich than CIB's. Public-I is the market leader in this area and holds the majority of contracts for local government webcasting managed services. In addition Public-I include several 'add-ons' that will be useful to the Council.

In conclusion the Public-I offering is the cheaper of the 2 bids and offers the solution that most closely fits RMBC's needs.

7.4 Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve that:

- RMBC will begin webcasting selected meetings as part of the Council's commitment to improving engagement and transparency in local democracy.
- That the webcasting contract is awarded to Public-i at an annual cost of £15k per year, initially for a period of 2 years.

8. Finance

The cost to RMBC is £15,000 per annum with an initial contract of 2 years.

9.   Risks and Uncertainties

Webcasting of meetings will add extra responsibility and increased workloads for Secretariat, Town Hall, ICT and Communications and Marketing staff at a time when headcount is reducing and there is no capacity to take on extra work. The detailed arrangements for day-to-day management of the webcasts is yet to be determined but it is envisaged that workload will be shared across the teams listed above.

10.   Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Discussed elsewhere in the report.

11.   Background Papers and Consultation

- Scrutiny review: Standing Orders (24.10.2014)
- Corporate ICT, Information Governance & Web Strategy Board (13.11.2014)

Contact Names

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