

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

meeting date: TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2024
title: BROADCASTING OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: MAIR HILL - HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & REBECCA HODGSON – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND CIVIC OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Committee's views on the broadcasting of Council and Committee meetings and the varying options available.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - Community Objectives – to be well connected with the Community and be open and accountable in our decision making.
 - Corporate Priorities – ensure that our services are accessible to all and that we deliver services to meet customer needs.
 - Other Considerations – updating and improving Council assets for public benefit.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At present there are no facilities in the Council Chamber or Committee rooms to enable the recording or live streaming of meetings.
- 2.2 The current Beyerdynamic wireless conferencing system is now prematurely showing signs of poor audio connection due to battery depletion. Changing the batteries would restore the systems original capability albeit the microphones are now older and less responsive. However, the manufacturer decided to withdraw from the conferencing market in 2021 and the decision included the provision of new and service replacement parts, so they are no longer available.
- 2.3 Where a local authority meeting is open to the public, any person attending is already permitted to report on the proceedings. Any communicative method can be used to report on the proceedings, including the internet, to publish, post or share the results. This does not however, include items that are exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 2.5 Some authorities record and/or live broadcast their Council and Committee meetings and make these available to the public on their respective websites, although there is no legal requirement to do so.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 states that to fulfil the Council's goal to be a well-managed Council we will 'ensure that our services are accessible to all and that we will deliver services to meet customer needs.'
- 3.2 Whilst Members of the public are able observe Council and Committee meetings, recording and/or broadcasting meetings would make meetings more accessible and available to be watched a later date if they were recorded and made available for a prescribed time period. This may also be a useful tool and enable the review of discussions if required by the Council or Member.
- 3.4 Committee will recall that during the Corona Virus restrictions all Council and Committee meeting took place by zoom and were available for the public to watch simultaneously. Whilst this is a different approach to the broadcasting of live in person meetings, it is to be noted no significant issues were experienced with the public viewing the meetings online.
- 3.5 Committee should also note that whilst previous governments removed the requirements to allow hybrid meetings, the current government has committed to reconsider the issue with an evidence-based approach following a request from ADSO and LLG. If Committee were to agree to televising meetings being explored further than it would be sensible to ensure that any system was compatible with hybrid meetings and so future proofed.
- 3.6 To comply with the 2015 equality act (formerly the DDA act), Hearing Impairment Systems should accommodate for both T-Coil and Bluetooth hearing aid users. The Chamber does have a functioning hearing loop however there is currently no Bluetooth connectivity.
- 3.7 The Democratic Services Team have enquired with a number of local authorities to determine their provision and ask for their recommendations and findings.
- 3.8 It was found that many authorities in Lancashire either record and publish the recordings, or live stream their meetings using a variety of methods. However, there are some authorities remaining that do not visually record their meetings, and this is mainly due to cost.
- 3.9 The various options put available have been explored and a summary of the options and approximate pricing are provided at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.9 It is difficult to determine which of the systems would be the most reliable. Whilst options 1 to 4 would include technical support, feedback from some authorities has suggested that technical issues are not uncommon, and one authority has switched webcasting provider due to ongoing technical difficulties.
- 3.10 It is also difficult at this stage to determine the impact of the various options on the workload of Democratic Services officers. Feedback from some authorities has suggested that even some of the higher cost options are not as simple as 'pressing play' and require additional input and configuration from officers during meetings. Currently, the Council has two Democratic Services Officer who combined amount to resources of 1.5 FTE. It would therefore not be feasible in the long-term for both officers to attend all meetings to facilitate manually recording meetings.

- 3.11 A number of authorities and providers have offered to demonstrate their systems to officers and Members. This would provide valuable insight into the operation and functionalities of systems.
- 3.12 The costs associated with the installation of recording/broadcasting equipment is not included in the five-year capital programme and any ongoing costs are not included in the revenue budget.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – the costs associated with installing recording and/or broadcasting equipment is not included in the capital programme, the ongoing costs are not included in the revenue budget. It is not possible at this stage to predict the impact on the workload of Democratic Services staff.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – no significant risks identified.
- Political – Member’s comments and votes on decisions would be publicly available.
- Reputation – no significant risks identified.
- Equality & Diversity - To comply with the 2015 equality act (formerly the DDA act), Hearing Impairment Systems should accommodate for both T-Coil and Bluetooth hearing aid users. The Chamber does have a functioning hearing loop however there is currently no Bluetooth connectivity.

5 RECOMMEND THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Consider if the Council should further pursue the recording and broadcasting of meetings.
- 5.2 Subject to 5.1, consider the options provided at Appendix 1, and authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to investigate those options further and report back to Committee.

Marshal Scott
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Rebecca Hodgson
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

For further information please ask for Rebecca Hodgson, extension 4408