



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:

Webcasting: Review of current provision

CMT Lead:

Ian Burns, Acting Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author and contact details:

Andy Beesley, Principal Committee Officer. 01708 432437.

andrew.beesley@havering.gov.uk

Policy context:

Webcasting is a means of making the Council's decision-making procedures open and accessible to its stakeholders

Financial summary:

Any associated costs will be met from existing budget provision

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Championing education and learning for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

Havering Council has been 'webcasting' full Council and Cabinet meetings since December 2009, and more recently 'Havering Community Questions.'

This report proposes that the Council expand its webcasting operation to include the Regulatory Services Committee. In doing so, the Council continues to support webcasting as a means of making its decision-making procedures open and accessible to the wider public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** to the Council that all meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee be webcast with immediate effect, with associated costs being absorbed from existing budget provision.

REPORT DETAIL

Introduction

1. As part of its commitment to improving engagement with local people, the Council commenced the webcasting of meetings of Council and Cabinet in October 2009. It was felt at that time that once experience of webcasting had been gained, it could be extended to cover other Committees, subject to there being adequate capacity within the webspace contract. More recently, meetings of 'Havering Community Questions' have been webcast; indeed it was the most popular meeting in November 2012 with a total of 124 viewers. The webcasting of additional meetings of Councils Committees will continue to help people understand how local democracy works, and allow them to view the process in action at a time and a place that is convenient for them.
2. In total 60 meetings have been broadcast since October 2009. There has been a total of 1042 viewings of live meetings. Significantly more people, 10,624, have accessed the archive webcast. On average 17 people watch each meeting through the webcast and 177 access the archive material.
3. There is sufficient provision within the current contract to increase the volume of webcasting even further. By far, the Council's Regulatory Services Committee attracts the highest number of attendees to its meetings. Indeed, there have been occasions where members of the public have been turned away from meetings as there has been insufficient space within the Council Chamber and the overspill facilities in Committee Rooms 3 A & B to cater for the numbers who wished to view proceedings. In addition, the Committee generates a large volume of calls from interested parties post-meeting which Committee Administration staff have to respond to. Considerable staff time would be saved by directing such queries to the webcast facilities available on the Council's website were it available.
4. To alleviate this pressure on staff resources and to expand the webcasting operation to incorporate one of the Council's most high profile meetings it is proposed that meetings of the Regulatory services Committee be webcast.

Governance Committee, 16 January 2012

5. It is anticipated that the webcasting of all meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee would require approximately 50 hours per annum. There is sufficient capacity within the current contract to accommodate this.
6. Members may be interested to know that neighbouring local authorities, including Epping Forest and Brentwood District Councils, webcast meetings of their equivalents to the Regulatory Services Committee. By increasing the webcasting operation this will not only increase the profile of this Council's Regulatory Services Committee but also enhance the reputation of the Council.

Members' concerns

7. When webcasting of Council meetings was first introduced in 2009, Members raised concerns about their ability to speak freely at meetings, without fear of legal action for defamation, and the possibility that malicious extracts from webcasts could be used against Members and others. To date, there have been no standards complaints received concerning Member conduct following the viewing of either a Council or Cabinet meeting which has been webcast. Members are also reminded at meetings of the Council and its Committees convened under the Local Government Act 1972 they enjoy qualified privilege from action for defamation – comments made in the course of meetings would not be liable to action for libel or slander provided that they were not made with malicious intent. That qualified privilege applies to webcasts as it would to the meetings themselves.
8. A Protocol (based on similar protocols tried and tested by other local authorities) which addresses the rights of members of the public attending meetings who might not wish to appear in the webcast has been in operation since October 2009. The Protocol ensures Council compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

The webcasting of meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee, if approved, will be covered by existing contract provision. Any extra staff costs that would be incurred in webcasting such meetings will be absorbed into the duties of those staff who already attend the meetings.

Legal implications and risks:

The recording and broadcasting of the meetings will result in a clear record of how the committee reached its decisions on the applications before it. This could result

Governance Committee, 16 January 2012

in the recording being used to either attack or defend the Council in any legal challenges against particular decisions.

Human Resources implications and risks:

The webcasting of meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee will be absorbed into the duties of those staff who already attend the meetings.

Equalities implications and risks:

There are no direct equalities implications or risks, however any increased provision for the webcasting of Council meetings is considered to enhance Council compliance with equalities legislation and helps to promote knowledge of local democracy decision-making.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to the Governance Committee, 2 June 2011