



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:	Webcasting: Review of current provision
CMT Lead:	Ian Burns, Assistant Chief Executive
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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
Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been carried out?	Not required

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

At its meeting on 16 January 2013, the Governance Committee deferred consideration of a report addressing the review of current webcasting provision pending further detailed information. That information is now included within the main body of this report, with a recommendation to Members on how they wish to proceed with this matter.

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. Table 1 below provides details of the viewing figures for those meetings.

Table 1 Viewing figures

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>No. of meetings</i>	<i>Live viewing figures</i>	<i>Archived viewing figures</i>	<i>Total</i>
Cabinet (Ask the Cabinet)	31	432	5104	5536
Council	21	508	4019	4527

2. 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. It is considered that 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. This would be consistent with the strong message from the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government that Councils should be as open and transparent in their decision-making as possible.
3. The terms of the contract, 120 hours of webcasting per annum is allowed for. In 2011/12, 49 hours were used for the webcasting of meetings, leaving 71 hours unused; the figures for 2012/13 seem unlikely to be significantly

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different. There is therefore considerable capacity within the contract to expand the webcasting operation.

Regulatory Services Committee

4. 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 3A & 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.
5. In the 2011/12 calendar year there were 24 meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee totalling 38 hours; there is therefore more than sufficient capacity within the contract to cover all meetings of the Committee. In addition, the webcast providers have advised that there is some leeway within the operation of the contract to enable the Council to slightly exceed the number of hours specified, by up to 10%. There is no budget provision to expand the webcasting operation beyond contained within the terms of the current contract.
6. To alleviate pressure on staff resources and to expand the webcasting operation to incorporate one of the Council's most high profile meetings it is suggested that meetings of the Regulatory services Committee be webcast.
7. In the previous report to Committee, it was suggested that only certain meetings of the Regulatory Services Committee. However, having listened to the concerns raised by Members at the meeting, staff now recommend that all meetings of the Committee be webcast.
8. 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 (including, in Epping Forest, their Area Committees that deal with planning issues). 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

9. 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.

10. 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.

There is no budget provision to expand the webcasting operation beyond that contained within the terms of the existing contract.

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 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 and 16 January 2013