

**WEBCASTING – PILOT REVIEW**

**Agenda Item 9(e)**

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**Background Papers:-**

[www.public-i.info](http://www.public-i.info) (Website for service used)

**Financial Implications:-**

£16,235 per annum software and hosting fees with 10 hours new footage per month  
£412 per annum telephone line rental  
£2,000 per annum resource for webcasting meetings

**Equalities Implications:-**

This system will give the opportunity to engage with the public using the website interface regarding current issues affecting the council, broadcast council meetings to the public, and offer the opportunity to the public to engage with us using the same media. The aim of this is to improve social inclusion and community cohesion and to make the decision making process more accessible.

**Legal Implications:-**

There are no direct legal implications. PR will be involved with the system to ensure that any legal obligations are met with regard to broadcasting interviews and filming.

**Options:**

To support the webcasting facility on an ongoing basis and to set aside a budget of £2000 to resource operators for evening meetings.

To support the ongoing provision of the webcasting facility without the budget of £2000 to resource operators for evening meetings.

To remove the webcasting facility from June 2008

**Risks:**

If the webcasting facility continues and the viewing figures decline, maximum value will not be obtained from the facility and it will not achieve its objectives of community engagement. This will be mitigated by sustained and increased publicity of the facility, and wider use of webcasting for different projects, including event coverage for news items, and monthly briefings from the Chief Executive for staff via the intranet and Leader of the Council for the community via the website.

If the webcasting continues without the budget to operate the equipment at evening meetings it may become difficult to support these on an ongoing basis.

If the webcasting facility is removed, this may be a disappointment to those members of the

public who are already aware of the facility and are using the facility. This will also remove an opportunity to improve engagement with the community, and to improve the access to Council decision making.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following the report to cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007, a year long pilot has been conducted to ascertain the value of the facility, and the uses which could be made of it throughout the organisation.

The webcasting project is nearing completion of the year long pilot, and a decision needs to be made as to whether to continue making use of this facility.

To date webcasting is being used for Council meetings, external promotion material, and internal videos. The main use has been to broadcast live Council and Cabinet meetings, and more recently the Planning Committee.

Take up from the public was initially slow, and the progress of the project was slower than expected, due to technical difficulties with the compatibility with the Sound system. However, the webcast meetings are now being publicised more widely, and the viewing figures are beginning to improve.

This facility is becoming more widely used in local government, and national bodies, including a growing number of Essex authorities.

The three most substantial benefits of this facility for Braintree District Council are:

- **Improved engagement with the Community**
- **Improved access to Council decision making processes**
- **Improved internal communication**

## **DECISION**

It is recommended that the Council continue to support webcasting on an ongoing basis, and that a budget be set aside of £2000 to support evening meetings.

## WEBCASTING – PILOT REVIEW

### Introduction

The webcasting project has been ongoing since July 2007. We are nearing the end of a year long pilot to establish the value of using webcasting as a tool to engage our community in the decision making of the Council.

### Objectives of Project

The intended benefits for the system originally included

- **Improved engagement with the community**
- **Improved access to council decision making process**
- **Improved internal communication**

As the projects developed, there were further benefits that became apparent, including:

- **The ability for members who could not attend meetings to watch meetings via webcasting either live or archived**
- **The ability for staff who have sent a report to a council meeting, or who are affected by a decision to watch the debate**

### Pilot

The pilot began in July 2007, with the installation and training on the equipment. A number of tests were carried out and time was spent setting up all of the layouts for meetings, and a number of trial films were made and trial meetings were broadcast.

During September 2007, a “soft” launch took place for the council meeting element of the system. This meant that although the meetings were webcast, they were not publicised, which gave the operators a chance to get used to using the software in a live environment, and testing it with sound recording equipment. There were a number of issues with the compatibility of the Council’s sound equipment, which delayed the hard launch of the facility.

In January and early February, a hard launch took place for webcasting, specifically around meetings which involved widely publicising webcast meetings by:

- Publicity via the website, with links to the webcasts from the home page, and information on the system
- Advertisements in the local newspapers via the Council page
- An article for the Essex Chronicle for the planning committee (which took place on 5<sup>th</sup> February)

A number of webcasting user groups have also been attended to share experiences and gain ideas from other authorities already using the system, and to support the supplier to develop the facility.

The total cost of the project so far has been

Software and leasing of equipment and 5 hours per month webcasting (Ongoing)	£16,100 p.a.
ASDL Line rental and Broadband (Ongoing)	£412.32 p.a.
Power (One off Costs)	£430
Line Installation (One off Costs)	£100
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£17042.32</b>

Promotion, operation and scheduling of webcasts have been completed within current staffing resources. The total number of staff hours spent on the project is estimated at 150 hours. This cannot be used as an estimate for further years as there were a smaller number of meetings, but this also includes set up, training and testing time as well as attendance at user groups.

The estimated ongoing staff time needed to support all suggested elements of webcasting outside of the webcasting of Council meetings is 140 hours.

## Results

There have been 7 live webcasts including, Full Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee to date. Following publicity of the system, via the Council Page in the Braintree and Witham Times, and an article written in the Essex Chronicle, there has been an increase in the number of people watching the live webcast, and the archived webcast for the last two webcasts.

The number of viewers for the webcasts is as follows:

Total	2007		2008	
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Webcasts Viewers	96	137	62	352
Live Webcasts Viewers	20	28	0	35
Archived Webcasts Viewers	76	109	62	296
Live Webcasts	1	2	0	2

NB The difference between the number of live and archived viewers will not necessarily match the total viewers, as the total viewers includes those who have viewed webcasts more than once.

The most popular webcasts were the planning committee on February 5<sup>th</sup> (122 viewers in total) and the Full Council on February 18<sup>th</sup> (95 viewers in total).

The elections in May 2007 were also webcast, outside the scope of this project, and 698 people watched this live or within 5 days of the webcast.

Unfortunately due to the issues experienced during set up, and the timing of the report, there has not been as many live and publicised webcasts as was originally anticipated. However, the

figures are already rising, and from research of other authorities that currently webcast meetings it can be expected that this will continue to rise.

Other projects that have been completed using the webcasting equipment include promotional videos from the World Environment Day, and Crucial Crew 2007. These have subsequently been used in promotional material for these events. A film was also made for January's Members Conference to celebrate achievements in the authority for 2007. This is currently being adapted to show on the BDC website.

The full range of uses for webcasting was not tested, as the core elements that would prove the concept were concentrated on for the period of the pilot.

## **Conclusion**

The results so far are indicating a growing interest in the webcasting facility from staff, members and the public.

There is a wider range of uses for the webcasting system, and to obtain full value, and meet the objectives originally set for the project, wider use needs to be made of the facility.

Resources have been an issue for the project. There was no dedicated resource to the project, and the majority of work was carried out by the ICT team in addition to their regular duties. Due to the nature of the support required for evening meetings, it is suggested that a flat fee of £50 be paid to staff required to webcast evening meetings. With an anticipated average of three meetings per calendar month, a budget of £2000 per annum would be required to support this.

Other projects, such as event coverage, one off films, and monthly briefings could be supported with existing resources from the ICT team, with the support of Public Relations and Law and Governance.

The rise in viewing figures following the publicity of the system suggests that publicity will need to be sustained, and increased to ensure take up of this facility. Different methods of achieving this are currently being investigated, and could include publicising webcasting through documentation we send out currently to customers, and through contact with schools. It is proposed that this could be developed by the group looking at the Communications and Engagement theme within Shaping Up For Excellence.

The change in costs reflects the reduction of the software fees, due to a recent tender carried out for another Essex Authority by the Procurement Hub. Braintree District Council would be able to make use of this framework, and benefit from 10 hours per month for a similar cost to the pilot, which had 5 hours per month webcasting. This would support 3 meetings a month on average.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Council continue to support webcasting on an ongoing basis, and that a budget be set aside of £2000 to support evening meetings.