Democracy Committee   16 November 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?	**No**

Webcasting Service Update

Final Decision-Maker	Council
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy and Communications
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy and Communications and Orla Sweeney, Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer.
Classification	Public
Wards affected	

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To note the update on the installation of the webcasting service.
2. To recommend to Council the use of the webcasting voting system to ensure transparency and accuracy at meetings.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: Our Corporate Priorities outline the Council's ongoing commitment to the residents of Maidstone. Ensuring that the Council is accountability, transparent and above all involving residents in its decision making. Providing a webcasting service that has the ability to engage with residents is key to this.

• Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
• Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Timetable	
Meeting	*Date*
Democracy Committee	16 November 2016
Council	7 December 2016

Webcasting Service Update

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Council has webcast its Committee meetings since July 2007as a means of ensuring accountability, transparency and increasing understanding of local decision making.

1.2 In June 2016, following a successful procurement and tendering process the Council changed webcasting providers. The contract was awarded to Public-i. As part of the new contract the microphones were renewed as the previous units were no longer serviceable. The installation of the new system took place in September 2016.

1.3 The installation of the new webcasting microsite and microphones has provided the Council with additional functionality as set out in the report. Democracy Committee are asked to consider the use of the new functionality and make recommendations to Council.

2. INSTALLATION

2.1 Public-i was awarded the contract to provide the Council's Webcasting Service in June 2016.

2.2 Installation took place week commencing 26 September 2016 to minimise disruption to webcast meetings and disruption to the town halls meetings diary.

2.3 The installation was successful and staff training was delivered so that webcasting could resume the following week.

2.4 Communication with staff and residents was a vital part of the project. The Communications plan for the webcasting install included a press release, a message on the Council's internet landing page, social media and public notices i.e. agendas and agenda notices.

2.5 Disruption to planned Council meetings was minimised. Only one meeting was affected in terms of the Council's ability to webcast meetings. A soft launch was scheduled for the next available meeting following a successful installation. Councillors were asked to come half an hour prior to the start of the first meetings, for a rolling month, following installation. This was to allow time for them to familiarise themselves with the new units before the start of the meeting. A training session with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen was also arranged prior to the formal, advertised launch.

2.6 The new system can be used to make local recordings such as training sessions or staff/member briefings which will be useful to departments unable to attend events or for those working off site. These sessions would

not be made available publicly. The scope of the new system is impressive and it is intended that full use will be made of it.

ISSUES

2.7 Following installation there have been some minor technical issues which are being resolved.

- The florescent lighting in the Town Hall caused some, unforeseen interference with the picture quality of the broadcast.
- Some viewers have experienced poor sound quality with the broadcast. The sound levels have been increased at the Town Hall.

2.8 Post installation, the Democratic Services team have had the continued support of an Account Manager, technical, helpdesk support 5 days a week and throughout all live webcast meetings. This level of support ensures and teething problems are quickly addressed and resolved. The Democratic Services team has implemented reporting processes to ensure there are both clear lines of communication and responsibility across the team.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

2.9 Public-i's webcasting set up is more advanced than the service previously provided. This reflects advances in technology alongside the demand and expectation from its local authority customer base which continually drives its offer forward.

2.10 Maidstone Borough Council's new webcasting microsite is a more pleasant, user experience. It is easy to navigate and its functionality is professional and encourages further interaction. For example, users can now sign up to an email alert for a live webcast meeting. The new interactive tools include:

- Just in Time Slides - Presentations are now shown live as part of a webcast meeting.
- Agenda points - The viewer can watch a meeting from a specific item on the agenda.
- Speaker profiles – This enables the viewer to go to a specific point in a meeting when someone has spoken. Councillor biographies are work with the system, synched from modern.gov profiles on the Council's internet pages. Officer profiles can also be introduced. This is facilitated by the meeting room being set up to work with the camera positions that have been pre-programmed for each meeting.
- 'Share' icons for each agenda point and parts of the site. This provides the ability to send a particular segment of meeting as a link It could be included it in a Councillor blog post or used it as part of Council communications to provide an accurate response to challenge used in a twitter feed or Facebook page.
- Feedback forms – Residents can sent questions or feedback directly to the Democratic Services team, the form generates an email to a specified email address
- Tag clouds – These appear on the home page. Every time a meeting takes places; key words for the agenda reports are recorded. These

populate the 'tag cloud' and provide an easy short cut to webcast meetings based on a key word.

- Twitter - Twitter is a widely used by local authorities, Government departments and leading organisations across the world as a tool for engagement and to encourage discourse. The new webcasting microsite can incorporate a twitter feed as part of a live broadcast

KEY FEATURE – WEBCASTING VOTING

2.11 As part of the tendering process for the webcasting service it was agreed that it was also an opportune time to renew the microphones as they were no longer serviceable; they no longer held their charge and those that did often had to be passed around the meeting so that speakers could be heard.

2.12 The new microphone units are currently being used in exactly the same way as the previous system i.e. to amplify the sound in the chamber and enable the sound to be broadcast online.

2.13 A key feature, that requires consideration, is voting at meetings using the conferencing functionality of the new microphone units.

2.14 The new conferencing functionality allows Committee members to vote using the buttons on the microphone units which then links to the webcast. The recorded vote is shown as a visual display in the chamber and as part of the webcast.

2.15 The vote can be recorded in two ways:

- Non-named – The number of votes in favour and against is shown only.
- Named – The Councillor's name is shown alongside the way in which he or she voted.

2.16 Maidstone Borough Council Constitution states that 'Unless a recorded votes is demanded under Rule 21.4, the mayor will take the vote by a show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.' (Part 3.1, 21.4.)

2.17 Using the webcasting conferencing system for voting would improve accuracy. Currently, if a recorded vote is requested at Council, it is manually recorded by officers from the show of hands. Voting would also be clearer to those watching or attending meeting.

2.18 A decision would have to be taken by Full Council following a recommendation from the Democracy Committee as it involves a change to the constitution.

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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1   To agree the use of the webcasting voting system to ensure transparency and accuracy at meetings.

3.2   Continue to use a show of hands or a hand recorded vote, if demanded, in line with the Constitution, Part 3.1, 21.4.

4.   PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1   The preferred options are detailed at 3.1. These options make best use of the tools available via the new webcasting and conferencing (microphone units) system and show the Council to be proactive in increasing transparency and encouraging democratic engagement.

5.   NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

5.1   The Recommendations agreed by the Democracy Committee will go forward to Council for decision if they require constitutional change.

6.   CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Our Corporate Priorities outline the Council's ongoing commitment to the residents of Maidstone. Ensuring that the Council is accountability, transparent and above all involving residents in its decision making. Providing a webcasting service that has the ability to engage with residents is key to this.	Head of Policy and Communications
Risk Management		Head of Policy and Communications
Financial	No financial implications identified.	Head of Policy and Communications
Staffing	N/A	Head of Policy and Communications
Legal	The new webcasting	Interim Deputy

	microsite and use of voting system will aid the Council in meeting the transparency requirements. The Constitution will need to be amended to reflect any change to voting.	Head of Legal
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	No detrimental impact on the needs of those with protected characteristics identified.	[Policy & Information Manager]
Environmental/Sustainable Development		[Head of Service or Manager]
Community Safety		[Head of Service or Manager]
Human Rights Act		[Head of Service or Manager]
Procurement		[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]
Asset Management		[Head of Service & Manager]

7.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

None