

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2020

SUBJECT:	Options to Progress Webcast Improvement Project
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REPORT AUTHOR:	Karl Roberts (Director Place)
DATE:	10 August 2020
EXTN:	37760
PORTFOLIO:	Technical Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Following previous reports, this report provides options to Cabinet for progressing the Webcast Improvement Project with associated costs.

RECOMMENDATION:

Cabinet is asked to make the following recommendations to Full Council:

- 1) To approve a supplementary estimate of £65k (option 2.1 (a)) for the one-off projects cost for the webcasting hardware installation. This equates to a band D equivalent Council Tax of £1.04; and
- 2) Subject to the approval of recommendation (1) to approve the additional on-going revenue costs for annual maintenance and broadband subscription of £21k per annum to be included in the Budget for 2021/22.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As a result of the webcasting issues reported to Cabinet on 8 July and 9 December 2019, a corporate group has been working to specify and prepare a procurement exercise for the purchase of a reliable, fully integrated, fit-for-purpose, and future proof webcasting presentation and conference system. A brief interim report was presented to Cabinet in June 2020. This report is a direct consequence of that interim report. An agreement for a supplementary estimate is required rather than to leave this for consideration in the 2021/22 budget because the latter option leaves insufficient time to tender for a new system and implement it in time to follow on from the existing short contract extension which was agreed in June.
- 1.2 Cabinet was updated on 9 December 2019 of the problems experienced in using more frequently the webcasting service. The last Civic Suite refurbishment was completed in 2015 having had numerous improvements made to the installed AV facilities, including the addition of the webcasting equipment. Alongside the installed systems, a service and maintenance agreement were entered into with the installer. From November 2018 onwards, webcasting has been used to a much greater extent highlighting deficiencies in

the installed system and indicating a number of faults. These problems have prevented Officers from delivering the intended level of service to Councillors, members of the public and the press.

- 1.3 Separately, a wireless conferencing system was purchased in two phases around 2010 to serve the Public Gallery and Committee Rooms, as well as being available for mobile deployment. This system is battery powered and is now obsolete with batteries being unavailable either from the original manufacturer or aftermarket sources. Batteries for the system are now failing to hold charge and are frequently not lasting the duration of meetings.
- 1.4 In respect of staffing, additional resources have been budgeted for to accommodate current arrangements post the 2019 strategic targets. However, this increased level of resourcing would be insufficient to service the webcasting of all of the new Committees (as per option 2c), particularly if that had to be done virtually as opposed to webcasting meetings in the Civic Centre.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

- 2.1 Following a soft market testing exercise, a full and comprehensive performance specification has been written, setting out expected functions and features of an upgraded, reliable, fully integrated, fit-for-purpose, and future proof webcasting, presentation, and conferencing system. Soft market testing has allowed the project group to engage with suppliers and ensure that the specification is realistic and thorough. In line with the specification previously presented to Cabinet, the project group have been asked to present the following costed (including contingency) options to Cabinet. Should Cabinet decide that all Committee meetings should be webcast then an additional post is considered necessary and this additional cost is reflected in the options below.

- a) To upgrade Council Chamber only (Cabinet [until May 2021] and the Overview Select Committee to use the Council Chamber along with Full Council and Development Control, all other Committees including those created post May 21 would not be webcast)

Option a	£k
One-off cost: Hardware install	65
On-going cost:	
Maint/serv	6
Broadcast subscription	15
Total on going costs	21
£128k over 3 years	

- b) To upgrade the Council Chamber only (Cabinet [until May 2021] and the Overview Select Committee to use the Council Chamber along with Full Council and Development Control, all other Committees including those created post May 21 would not be webcast) and to replace the portable wireless microphone system for use in the Committee Rooms (without extending the webcasting function to the Committee Rooms)

Option b	£k
One-off cost:	
Hardware install	120
On-going cost:	
Maint/serv	6
Broadcast subscription	15
Total on going costs	21
£183k over 3 years	

- c) To upgrade both the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms with full webcasting for all Committees

Option c	£k
One-off cost:	
Hardware install	130
On-going cost:	
Maint/serv	6
Broadcast subscription	15
Staff Costs	40
Total on going costs	21
£313k over 3 years	

- 2.2 It should be noted that whilst it is always desirable to bring Council meetings to as wide an audience as possible, it is also necessary to consider the Council's current financial position as a result of Covid-19. Currently any significant unnecessary expenditure should be avoided. As a consequence, the recommended option for Cabinet to recommend to Full Council is that set out in option 2.1(a). This would involve significantly more use of the Council Chamber for the webcasting of some designated meetings with the majority of the new Committees being created from May 2021 not being webcast. This option also does not include the replacement of the current portable wireless microphone system which has reached the end of its useable life. The use of this system will cease once the upgrade to the Chamber has been completed.
- 2.3 The main cost associated with webcasting are staff costs. Experience of operating webcasting successfully requires more than one person to administer the process. A lot of work is required in terms of setting up meetings and then ensuring they operate smoothly both technically and procedurally. To date the operation of virtual meeting has necessitated a combination of overtime and time off in lieu for staff.

3.0 OPTIONS:

1. To accept the officer recommendation; or
2. To propose an alternative option and increase the level of supplementary estimate accordingly.

4.0 CONSULTATION:		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		
Relevant District Ward Councillors		
Other groups/persons (please specify)		
5.0 ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail below)	YES	NO
Financial	✓	
Legal	✓	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	✓	
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		✓
Sustainability		✓
Asset Management/Property/Land		✓
Technology	✓	
Other (please explain)		✓

6.0 IMPLICATIONS:

The ongoing use of webcasting and any expansion to include Committee Rooms will have both financial and staffing implications. Greater use of the Council Chamber is considered to be an appropriate solution to address any issues that arise from section 5 above.

7.0 REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To respond to Cabinet's request for options to be presented on this project, and to allow the project group to progress with procuring an appropriate system.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

[Cabinet report and decision from 8 July 2019](#)

[Cabinet report and decision from 9 December 2019](#)

[Cabinet report and decision from 22 June 2020](#)