



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**8<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2020**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**WEBCASTING**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the introduction of webcasting and the upgrading of facilities available to Members in the Chamber.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Supports the development of the provision of webcasting within Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, in line with the potential proposals within the Local Government Elections Bill, which deliver upon ‘in principal’ support provided by members previously to broadcast Council meetings;
- (ii) Support the development of webcasting to further assist with the promotion of public engagement and transparency of decision making by the Council;
- (iii) Subject to agreement of 2.1(i) that Members are provided with timely updates into the development of webcasting provision as appropriate;
- (iv) Recommends to Cabinet / Council the development of webcasting for the reasons outlined above and the agreement of funding to support the development.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The findings of the democratic services working group into ‘[support provision for members](#)’ recognised the need to upgrade the facilities available to members in the chamber and to take forward a costing exercise in relation to webcasting facilities.

3.2 Members will recall in 2014 a pilot of webcasting was carried out utilising funding available from Welsh Government. Following cessation of the funding, webcasting was no longer taken forward by council due to the costs associated

with it. At the time there was no legal requirement to provide a webcasting service and the cost of implementing the service outweighed the benefits achieved

- 3.3 Since then, technological advancements and the benefits to be gained from increased public engagement mean that the provision of webcasting has been discussed by members in Council, Scrutiny Committees and Democratic Services. Members have previously provide in-principle support for its introduction, albeit recognising that its introduction requires capital investment and ongoing revenue requirements.
- 3.4 Councils are not legally required to webcast meetings, although it is strongly supported by Welsh Government and is linked to goals in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation. [The Local Government and Elections Bill \(Wales\)](#) includes promotion of webcasting and the requirement for this provision to be mandatory across all public meetings.
- 3.5 The Bill also includes the requirement to facilitate remote attendance at meetings of the Council and this would not be possible through the technology currently available in the chamber.
- 3.6 Most Councils in Wales are already webcasting Committee meetings and RCT is therefore in the minority.
- 3.7 There are a number of benefits achieved through webcasting which include:
- A positive demonstration of accountability and transparency;
  - Encouraging engagement and debate, by creating more opportunities for the public to access meetings;
  - Accuracy of recording of meetings including recording of decisions, voting and attendance;
  - The opportunity to raise the profile of the work of Councillors, and the discussions behind the decisions of Council and its committees.
  - Assists in supporting our paper light approaches to meetings moving forward as some facilities in the Council chamber are currently inhibiting the role-out of a paper-light approach.

If supported this facility could be considered as a key part of the Council's communications channels.

- 3.8 In addition to the above, Members have provided their positive comments to the introduction of webcasting at a number of committee meetings including the Council AGM 2019. Through the results of the members survey conducted in April 2019, which was presented to the Democratic Services Committee in [July 2019](#), members from all political groups of the Council highlighting the demand for the provision of webcasting and taking forward this new service alongside upgrades to the council chamber.

#### 4. **WEBCASTING REQUIREMENTS**

- 4.1 A desktop exercise has been undertaken with officers identifying requirements to deliver upgrades to the council chamber and implement a webcasting provision. The table below outlines the requirements identified:

Requirement	Reason for inclusion in project
Provision of camera and recording hardware	To allow meetings to be webcast and available online for members of the public to view live and access a library of previous meetings. This will allow for greater public inclusion and will enhance engagement opportunities. Additionally, visual equipment provided within chambers to be upgraded, including improved visibility of TV screens.
Provision of upgraded audio equipment	The current audio system with microphones available in the chamber is no longer fit for purpose. There have been specific circumstances where some members have been prevented from engaging in the business of a meeting due to the 'feedback' caused by current. Improved audio equipment will enhance the quality of sound not only in the chamber itself but will ensure that discussions held in the chamber will be clear when broadcast online. An upgrade of audio equipment would also be considered for use in committee room 1 with a view to implement a wireless approach for flexibility in the room set up.
Voting System	The introduction of an electronic voting system will provide transparency with decision making and a clear record of votes undertaken. It will also provide a publicly accessible record of individual members voting and support the smooth transaction of business.
Translation System	The requirement for all webcast meetings to be available bilingual is essential. To ensure full translation

	services are available it will be important to identify the compatibility of any current equipment with any new hardware required for webcasting. It is recognised that potential new equipment may be required in order to support the translation service going forward with webcasting.
Charging points	In order to promote a paperless approach, adequate charging points would be required to support all e-devices.
Chamber furniture	The current layout of the chamber would need to be considered in order for new equipment to be implemented and supported to its full potential. Replacement or reconfiguration of furniture may be required to accommodate webcasting. The layout and the desks utilised have not been updated since the inception of this Council in 1996 and are no longer considered fit for purpose for a number of reasons. Seating was updated in 2008.
Portability	The equipment should have the ability to be portable or transferred to another location with planning time. The additional acquisition of wireless audio units for committee room 1 would also ensure a fully portable system that would be able to support meetings away from Clydach Vale if required.

4.2 There would of course be initial capital costs to supporting the technology listed below and any necessary changes to the chamber configuration.

4.3 Implementation of a webcasting solution will incur an on-going subscription cost to acquire the necessary system and estimated costs could be in the region of £15-£20,000 per annum.

## **5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The provision of a webcasting service would promote democracy and encourage public engagement. By removing potential barriers for members of the public to attend meetings at the chamber, webcasting opens up opportunities for wider public engagement and transparency.

## 6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Following the previous discussions of Council and the Democratic Services Committee an Officer Working Group has been established, comprising a number of different directorates who meet regularly to discuss proposals. The Chair and Vice Chair of Democratic Services Committee are updated regularly on developments.
- 6.2 A desktop review has been carried out with other local authorities to identify the level of webcast provision currently. This has identified that 18 out of 22 Local Authorities currently webcast.
- 6.3 The opportunities offered by web-casting have been considered by members as part of the business of full Council, Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee, formal meetings of Chairs & Vice-Chairs.
- 6.4 Promoting public engagement in the democratic processes, including webcasting, has also been discussed in the recently introduced business meeting between the Head of Democratic Services and Political Group Leaders.

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 Webcasting is an important tool to build upon public engagement progress already made in recent years and will further promote democracy and transparency with decision making in the Council. Initial estimates gauge that the cost to implement the outlined requirements are in the region of £150,000 and, subject to approval, will be funded from existing resources set aside to support the Council's digital aspirations.
- 7.2 In addition, estimated on-going subscription costs as detailed in paragraph 4.1, subject to approval of this way forward, will need to be built into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 7.3 There is no indication yet, if any financial support will be provided by the Welsh Government to support the delivery of the priorities for reforming local government identified with the Local Government Elections Bill Wales. However the Welsh Local Government Association is pressing the case that the mandatory introduction of webcasting across all public facing meetings, **should be supported by the necessary funding.**
- 7.4 Should these proposals be supported, it would be necessary to consider amendments to the Council's Rules & Procedures and wider constitution to facilitate the introduction of webcasting into the democratic business of the Council.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Bill](#) outlines a mandatory requirement for Local Authorities to provide a webcasting service.
- 8.2 If members agree to the implementation of webcasting it will require amendments to the Council's Constitution. Therefore a report will be presented to the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee for consideration, before endorsement by Council.

**9. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 9.1 The provision of webcasting would link to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to 'living within our means' and an 'efficient and effective Council', ensuring transparency with our decision making process for the benefits of our residents.
- 9.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for public engagement through webcasting links to the future generations wellbeing goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities. This proposal would further support the ability of this council to involve communities in key decisions.

**10 CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 Although Councils are not currently legally required to webcast meetings, it is strongly supported by Welsh Government, and is linked to goals previously identified in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation. In addition the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill includes proposals for mandating of webcasting and remote attendance in the future.
- 10.2 The provision of webcasting, has received cross-party support in the Council for the reasons set out, in particular for supporting positive engagement with the public going forward.
- 10.3 If Members support the development of the provision then timely updates will be provided to the Committee.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**JANUARY 2020**

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members**

Democratic Services – 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019.