

Webcasting – A Survey of Public Sector Activity

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the Short Life Working Group (SLWG) meeting of 22nd October the Group requested a survey of multimedia communications activities; with the emphasis on how other councils use web based broadcasting. The aim is to help inform the approach and preparations for introduction of such services to Argyll and Bute Council.
- 1.2 This paper provides the outcomes of that survey conducted using information from the Local Government Association Knowledge Hub and research of related council and public sector organisation websites.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Short Life Working Group Members:

1. Note the information provided below in response to the action from the meeting of 22nd October 2012.
2. Direct if more detailed research is required into any areas covered by this paper.

3. DETAIL.

- 3.1 The use of webcasting (live and recorded) of meetings and events has developed significantly in the public sector as software and hardware solutions have taken advantage of developments in microchip and web streaming technology. [Kirklees Council](#) has stated the purpose of their webcasting service as :

... just one way to improve citizen participation, increase engagement and improve communications. The intention of webcasting is not only to broaden opportunities to engage, but to allow the public to see how decisions are made at meetings, in a more accessible, open and transparent way

- 3.2 The most prevalent service provider in this field is [Public-i.tv](#) who have a considerable list of public sector customers including in Scotland:
- Highland Council
 - Moray Council
 - Edinburgh Council

And the following other customers noted on their website:



Public-i state that their governmental customers use the service “build trust and demonstrate transparency”.

3.3 Alternative providers include:

Planetstream.net internet TV and secure streaming

Mediaondemand.net (Westminster Digital); who have a few councils in their portfolio including Maidstone Borough Council.

Some councils simply film their own meetings and stream it on their website using a DIY approach with no service provider. For example, Thanet District Council.

3.4 The commonest use of webcasts is to broadcast a range of council meetings including:

- Full council
- Executive/cabinet meetings
- Scrutiny and policy committees
- Area, planning and planning development meetings
- Licensing boards and committees

3.5 Until recently this tended to be a unidirectional broadcast, however the advent of interactive services via social media has led to the development of webcasts which allow customers to comment on proceedings and to have comments moderated and streamed along with the broadcast or a digest of feedback posted after the event.

3.6 Public-i.tv has incorporated such features and packaged it as '[ConnectSocial](#)'. [Cornwall Council](#) use this service and recently achieved the highest number of individuals ever tuning in to a council webcast (4489); albeit the meeting was a high profile one involving a vote of no confidence. They allowed viewers to send comments by live chat, twitter feed and a special speech bubble icon and feedback button on the streaming screen. 242 comments were received from the public during the event.

3.7 The second common use of webcasting is to broadcast notable council events that might be of interest to the public or which disseminate knowledge transfer on an important topic to a larger audience than just those who are able to make it on the day. Examples include:

- Hull City Council's [Lord Mayor's Installation Ceremony](#)
- Fingal County Council who streamed a special Mayor's seminar on [Preparing for \(economic\) Recovery](#)
- Brighton and Hove Council who broadcast a [Drought Advisory Meeting](#) for businesses
- Devon County Council who broadcast a public debate on [Public Rights of Way](#)

3.8 The British Medical Association use webcasting very intensively for educational and guidance purposes, streaming a series of seminars on topics such as:

[Becoming a doctor](#)
[Financial support](#)
[Applying to medical school](#)
[Getting noticed, getting published](#)

It is not difficult to see how this could be translated to council scenarios such as providing guidance for business customers on topics such as trading standards, planning applications, landlords' responsibilities etc. The added benefit of being able to archive such seminars means that they are available as a resource for as long as the information given in the seminar is still current.

3.9 The use of webcasting in schools for public broadcasting is limited; it is more commonly deployed to stream information on the secure internal intranet networks, for example where a visiting lecturer or personality visits one high school, but the talk is streamed to all the other schools in the authority. In the United States the streaming of school governance events is more common, however this is often at the level of the elected school superintendant of schools in a particular county, rather than down to PTA level.

3.10 In terms of public broadcasting from educational establishments involving pupils and young people, examples include:

- Graduation and award ceremonies, such as that at [Cardiff University](#)
- Competitions such as the debating competition held by Year 12 pupils at [Coventry City Council](#) to mark Local Democracy Week
- Youth democracy events, such as Haringey Council's streaming of their [Youth Parliament Election results](#) and of Youth Council Meetings. Kirklees also streams their Youth Council Meetings
- [Highland Council's](#) broadcast of a Summit on Youth Employment

3.11 The commonest issues faced by public organisations doing webcasts are technical issues and take up. Technically, ensuring the quality of the broadcast and that the

camera is on the correct speaker are the fundamentals, however other considerations include:

- Ensuring presentation material (e.g. powerpoint displays) is available and synchronised with the speakers
- Close captioning so the hard of hearing can read what is being spoken
- Indexing of events when they are archived so people can find the elements that they are interested in (some educational webcasts also use a form of keyword search).
- Preparation and testing before each live broadcast – an example of what can go wrong is Fingal County Council's [Mayor's Seminar](#) where the whole mayoral introduction was inaudible because the microphone had not been turned on.

3.12 Given that a prime driver of introducing webcasting is to increase engagement and communication, it is vital that councils maximise their efforts to promote the service and make it available through as many outlets as possible. Some interesting approaches include:

- Allowing local partner and independent websites to embed and stream the content, for example Cornwall Council use 'ThisisCornwall.co.uk' to host their content as it is the most visited website in Cornwall.
- Chester and West Chester Councils package webcasting in with a number of econtact mediums such as an eNewsletter, as part of their ['Talking Together Direct'](#) campaign.



- North Lincolnshire Council has integrated webcasting with their Looking Local digital TV service to make webcast recordings available through the TV as well as PC and smartphones.
- Warwickshire County Council has introduced a thrice weekly 60 second video news update that uses excerpts from webcasts in its recently launched ['Warwickshire News'](#) website. This had over 1000 views in its first week.

- The [South Yorkshire Joint Secretariat](#) authorities have partnered for webcasting so that Police, Fire and Rescue, Integrated Transport and Pensions authorities all share the same platform and hence attract a much wider audience than if they had set up separate streaming sites. It also shares the cost and support effort.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Webcasting (and now interactive webcasting) has become an increasingly standard tool for public sector organisations to use as part of their communication and trust building strategies. This paper details some of the varied methods for which the technology is being used to enhance openness, awareness, learning and involvement of citizens. Also the two common pitfalls of getting it technically right and of promoting the service effectively.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1	Policy	Intended to help inform considerations of the correct webcasting approach for the council going forward.
5.2	Financial	None. Background research only.
5.3	Personnel	None.
5.4	Equalities Impact Assessment	None. However it references the need to consider customers with hearing difficulties.
5.5	Legal	None.
5.6	Risk	None.
5.7	Customer Service	References webcasting as medium for enhancing customer service and involvement.

Background Documents:

Web based research

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