

## Webcasting Experiences in other Scottish Councils

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### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the Short Life Working Group (SLWG) meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> November the Group requested a paper exploring the experience of other Scottish Councils in the use of webcasting; specifically on how beneficial this approach has been in terms of democracy and efficiencies.
- 1.2 This paper provides the explanation requested.

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

### 3. DETAIL.

- 3.1 Three Scottish Councils currently have a regular webcasting service aimed at increasing the transparency of decision making and improving engagement and communication with citizens:

- [Moray Council](#)
- [City of Edinburgh Council](#)
- [Highland Council](#).

Telephone interviews were conducted with the officers in each council responsible for the management of the webcasting service. This obtained information on the implementation, support, technical arrangements and outcomes of their webcasting service. A number of live and historic webcasts were also viewed for each council. A summary of findings is provided for each below.

#### MORAY COUNCIL

- 3.2 Moray was the first council in Scotland to introduce webcasting and has a static webcasting service comprising three cameras in their council chambers. Initially these were controlled from a console by an officer but they are now directed automatically depending on whose microphone is active; with the camera defaulted to the chair when no microphone is active. They provide a simple service with no captions, no linking to agenda documents or presentations, no transcript service or feedback/poll service. This is largely due to cost as these features tend to be add-ons.

- 3.3 Moray broadcasts a range of council and committee meetings that are held in the council chambers, but does not undertake VC in to meetings. Prior to each meeting signs are erected to the doors of the meeting alerting attendees that it is being webcast and that by entering the meeting they are consenting for their presence to be webcast. An announcement is also made from the Chair that the meeting is about to be broadcast live. The facility has also been used for training e.g. their lawyers use it to provide webcast training sessions on new legislation that affects the council.
- 3.4 They have introduced a protocol for when the chair can suspend the meeting and discontinue the webcast e.g. if there was a protester. Members did not receive any media training but have adapted quickly to the technology and now largely forget it is there, so it has had minimal impact on behaviours.
- 3.5 The basic nature of the service means that the impact on council officer support is light. Officers from democratic services have to be in a position to fully test the service and the links to Public-i 45 minutes before a meeting is held and they undertake the work to ensure the archive recording is available to the public after the live webcast is complete. The service is robust with main issues being the web network link to Public-i sometimes being dropped.
- 3.6 Moray believe some unexpected benefits have arisen:
- The quality of minute taking has improved as officers can replay the meeting to clarify any issues. Similarly there are far fewer disputes about who said what.
  - The broadcasts are recorded to DVD and this satisfies the Standards Commissions requirements to keep a record of all decision making meetings for at least two years.
  - Officers required to attend for specific agenda items keep an eye on the live feed and so only attend on a 'just in time' basis. Hence they don't spend long times waiting around for their item to come up and are therefore more productive.

### Highland Council

- 3.7 Highland Council has recently introduced a mobile webcasting service in addition to the dual camera fixed facility in their council chamber. The mobile service is used to webcast Area Committees and has three cameras. It has required broadband to each of the area venues to be upgraded to 8Mb via ADSL lines that are separate from the main council network for security reasons.
- 3.8 The mobile equipment is being leased from Public-i and in addition to the cameras and lighting it requires a laptop console, encoding device and sound amplifier, plus many cables and a van to transport it. The set up has to be done the day before to allow full testing; hence Monday meetings are generally avoided where possible.
- 3.9 Seven council officers have been trained (1 day course), to operate the webcasting service equipment and during live webcasts one officer works the control console and one liaises with Public-i to manage the broadcast. Highland do show presentations at relevant agenda items during live webcasts and so they preload the presentations to Public-i. This is particularly important for planning meetings when maps and visualisations are displayed. In addition officers undertake the captioning, indexing and editing duties.
- 3.10 The meetings in the council chamber have electronic voting and so councillors log in to their combined microphone and voting assembly with a smartcard. The smartcard also contains their caption profile, so that when they activate their microphone the camera focuses on them and their details are shown on screen. It means councillors can sit

where they like in the chamber providing they log in. This is not done for the mobile service where voting is by roll call.

- 3.11 The council only publicises the service on its own website and for the first two mobile broadcasts the service had 19 and 22 live viewers and 151 and 173 archive viewers respectively. The service is felt to be important for ensuring remoter areas are demonstrably included in the business of the council. The feeling is that attendees are now more respectful in manner at meetings and the council has a preset message displayed for those agenda items that are not open to the public.

### **City of Edinburgh Council**

- 3.12 Edinburgh are undertaking a one year trial of webcasting using Public-i and were initially confining this to full council meetings, but have recently decided to extend this to Petition Meetings. They have a static webcasting venue of four cameras in their main council chamber and have established a webcasting project board (Chaired by the head of Communication), to manage the trial.
- 3.13 Pre launch preparations included holding briefing sessions for councillors, and a test broadcast of a council meeting so members could see how the system would look to citizens. A webcasting protocol was agreed and the service was publicised via twitter, prominently on their website and articles in newspapers. They also offer text and email alert reminders as to when the next webcast is occurring.
- 3.14 In addition to the usual webcasting preparations and live meeting monitoring, council officers also manage the real time feedback (poll and freetext), generated by the webcasts and emails from watchers of archive footage. Edinburgh also preloads presentations so that these can be triggered at the relevant point in the meeting to display for webcast watchers. Edinburgh also places signs outside the Chamber to make attendees aware a webcast is in progress and the Provost reminds attendees that they are being webcast. A standard message is shown on screen when a voting division takes place.
- 3.15 The main benefit has been that for the first webcast 623 citizens watched live and over 1,000 caught the archived edition. The main complaint has been the silence that occurs to watchers when no microphone has been played, so Edinburgh are investigating playing some form of ambient noise when nothing is being said. There is also less formality about proceedings now in terms of both dress (many male councillors now forgo wearing ties) and delivery in a conscious effort to break down barriers to inclusion.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 All three councils use the Public-i service but with a wide range of technological sophistication. Moray and Highland feel that the gains in democracy and openness justify the investment and Edinburgh are still evaluating their service but have extended the original scope.
- 4.2 There is additional support overhead (increasing with technological sophistication of delivery), but this is offset by having better recorded outcomes, generally more orderly meetings and less time waiting around for attending officers. Further offset benefits can be gained if the service is used for a wider range of activities; such as training. Each council has also provided useful lessons how to implement and run the service should Argyll and Bute Council decide to proceed with the implementation of webcasting.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

5.1	Policy	The paper informs future decisions on the council's multimedia communication strategy.
5.2	Financial	None.
5.3	Personnel	None.
5.4	Equalities Impact Assessment	None.
<b>5.5</b>	Legal	None.
<b>5.6</b>	Risk	None.
<b>5.7</b>	Customer Service	None.

### **Background Documents:**

N/A

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