

Chichester District Council

THE CABINET

9 May 2017

Recording of Committee Minutes - Pilot Extension

1. Contacts

Report Author Nicholas Bennett – Legal and Democratic Services Manager
Telephone: 07860 786052 E-Mail: nbennett@chichester.gov.uk

Cabinet Member Philippa Hardwick – Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance Services
Telephone: 01428 642464 E-Mail: Phardwick@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Cabinet approves a one-year extension to the pilot to audio record and publish the Council, the Cabinet, the Planning Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee meetings online.**

3. Background

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on 22 September 2015, when considering a recommendation from the Cabinet regarding government regulations on openness of local government, it was resolved (minute 43) that:

‘That the Cabinet be recommended to undertake a one year trial of publication of audio recordings of proceedings at the Council, the Cabinet, the Planning Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee meetings.’

- 3.2 The trial completed in January 2017 and all the above meetings were recorded. However there remain some issues with the system provided by the contractor and recordings of two meetings were not capable of being properly heard or accessed after the meetings. Several further meetings required significant officer time to correct problems with recordings so that they could be accessed.
- 3.3 Since those problems Democratic Services officers have worked closely with colleagues in IT and facilities as well as the contractor to overcome these issues, including the implementation of further procedures and changes to the physical layout of related hardware including the Wi-Fi hub. Whilst this has led to a significant improvement in performance, the benefits of the system do not appear to have been fully achieved. Until very recently there remained some lack of confidence in the ability of the contractor to deliver consistent performance. Until those issues were settled officers felt unable to publicise wider awareness of the system.

- 3.4 The benefits of the system remain as set out in previous reports – simple access by the public including persons who would otherwise find it difficult to attend meetings. It enables live broadcast which is of particular benefit for high-significance matters such as certain large planning applications. Some savings in officer time in hand-recording minutes are also being realised and also in investigating complaints about alleged conduct and statements made in meetings.
- 3.5 Against these benefits, the annual cost of the system is £3900 per annum. An increase in set-up time and monitoring time has been required, though it is hoped that as the technology is improved and the problems have been addressed this impact will reduce.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 To extend the trial to increase public awareness of the system during that extension and to assess whether the recent improvements to the system have been effective and whether recording of the Council's meetings is of sufficient benefit compared to the cost incurred.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 Given the problems that have been experienced during the initial trial period more time is needed to enable a full assessment. It is, therefore, proposed that the current trial is extended for one year to January 2018 and during that time the Democratic and Legal Services Manager will undertake a further review of the effectiveness and public use of the system.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 The alternatives considered are whether or not to proceed with the existing contract or alternatively whether to test the market again through a further procurement exercise. The present contract is on a year-by-year basis so all options are open.
- 6.2 The views of IT and Facilities have been sought and the clear opinion is that having put significant effort into installing and improving the systems, several of which changes have been achieved only recently, an extension to the pilot is the best way forwards at this time.
- 6.3 The market for systems of this kind is relatively young and changing to another system at this time is likely to lead to similar issues of integration with any other product.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 Funding of the contract will be £3,900 per annum funded from existing budget. The costs of the microphone system have been dealt with separately and are not relevant to this contract as the sound system would remain in place whatever recording system is used.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Members were all invited to attend microphone system demonstrations to allow them involvement in deciding the initial specification of the future system.
- 8.2 Colleagues in Democratic Services, Facilities and IT have been part of the group testing the system through the first pilot period.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 An audio record of the Council's main meetings published online will allow local people to have access to, and an understanding of, the Council's decision making processes. Those who find it difficult to attend meetings, due to disability, caring responsibilities, work commitments or access to transport, will be able to benefit. Due to the technical problems above the system has not yet been actively marketed to the public.
- 9.2 Having an audio record on file may work to reduce the number of people who attend meetings even further. Alternatively, the number of residents listening to recordings is very low. To this point the information on use is limited, however 8335 minutes of meeting time has been recorded – though only 101 listeners have used the system, for an average listen time of only ten minutes. The number of listeners includes officer and member hits so the public use of this system has been very low indeed. At the end of the one year pilot the Council would need to assess the value of audio recording meetings to assess whether it should be continued or not.

10. Other Implications

Crime and Disorder	No
Climate Change	No
Human Rights and Equality Impact Those who find it difficult to attend meetings, due to disability, caring responsibilities, work commitments or access to transport, will find the audio recordings beneficial.	Yes
Safeguarding	No
Other	No

11. Appendices

None

12. Background Papers

None