

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 20 January 2014

Wards: All

Subject: Evaluation of the council's webcasting pilot

Lead officer: Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance

Contact officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services,
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Recommendation:

That Cabinet recommends that Council should agree to continue webcasting committee meetings held in the council chamber.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. At its meeting on 1 February 2012, Council resolved a) to support in principle the use of web casting and b) to initiate a feasibility report into how this may be put into operation as soon as practicably possible in the Council Chamber for meetings with planning, street management and budget decisions.
- 1.2. At its meeting on 21 November 2012 Council considered the feasibility report and resolved to embark on a year's pilot project to webcast meetings of Full Council, Planning Applications Committee and Street Management Advisory Committee.
- 1.3. It was agreed that at the end of the one year period, the pilot project should be evaluated, and Council should consider whether or not to continue with the project.
- 1.4. This report gives details of the project, and evaluates its success.

2 DETAILS

Set up

- 2.1. Following the resolution of Council in November 2012, formal procurement was undertaken and Public-i were chosen as the preferred bidder.
- 2.2. Public-i were able to use the 'follow-me' microphone and camera systems already in place in the Council Chamber. A separate internet connection was established in the Chamber together with the operating system.
- 2.3. A Democratic Services Officer took responsibility for overall project management, meeting preparation and for managing a rota of staff to operate the webcast equipment during each meeting. The operator, seated at the rear of the chamber, adds agenda points and speaker profiles to the

webcast, addresses any problems as they arise and is available to assist the public with any queries they have.

- 2.4. Prior to the first live webcast, the Democratic Services Officer liaised with the Corporate Communications Team to ensure that the public were aware of the project. All webcasts were publicised in advance via Twitter and Facebook, and in September a short article was included in 'My Merton' magazine. Information on webcasting is available on Merton's website, and on the front pages of the relevant committee agendas.
- 2.5. In order to test out the installation, training, operating procedures and publicising of the project it was agreed that Budget Council would be webcast in early March as a dry run.

Broadcasts

- 2.6. The dry run ran smoothly and the first meeting to be webcast live was Full Council on 27 March 2013.
- 2.7. From 27 March to 12 December 2013, twelve meetings have been webcast; five Full Council meetings, six Planning Applications Committee meetings and one Street Management Advisory Committee meeting. There were some technical errors which prevented the broadcast of Planning Applications Committee in June, July and August. These have been resolved.
- 2.8. The meetings were broadcast live and then an archived version was made available online which was retained for six months.
- 2.9. In October 2013 the Democracy Services team began to use a new agenda management publication system. This automatically synchronises with the webcasting software to minimise the work to be done by the operator prior to the meeting. It has also improved the experience for the user, as when browsing the agenda for a meeting, a link is supplied to click directly through to watch the item on the webcast.

Viewing Figures

- 2.10. The viewing figures for each meeting, showing the number of live and archived viewings each month, are set out in full in Appendix 1. This information was obtained from the webcasting administration site as of 30 November 2013.
- 2.11. The viewing figures show that the 12 meetings that were webcast attracted a grand total of 8358 viewings - 465 live viewings and 7913 archived viewings - in the 9 months from 1 April to 31 December 2013, an average of 928 per month (range 487-1802).
- 2.12. The number of viewings per meeting averaged 696 (range 185-2100), as shown in Table 1 overleaf:

Table 1 – Number of viewings per meeting

Meeting	Live viewings	Archived viewings	Total viewings
Council 27/3/13	0	1500	1500
Planning 18/4/13	14	766	780
Annual Council 15/5/13	26	2074	2100
Planning 23/5/13	43	829	872
Council 10/7/13	70	532	602
Planning 5/9/13	*	504	504
Council 11/9/13	152	403	555
SMAC 18/9/13	7	328	335
Planning 10/10/13	25	363	388
Planning 7/11/13	35	203	238
Council 20/11/13	49	136	185
Planning 12/12/13	24	275	299
TOTAL	465	7913	8358

*Meeting not broadcast live due to technical problems

- 2.13. Further information on viewing figures has been obtained from Google Analytics by Merton's Web Team. These figures show that of 8201 page views of the webcasts during the period 1 April to 3 December 2013, 1203 were by Merton network users. This total differs from the figures used above because it includes the "dry run" broadcast of Budget Council, which was not placed on the website for the public to view; however the link was circulated to officers and councillors so they could view it, hence the figures are included in Google Analytics.
- 2.14. The Google Analytics show that 1203 (14.7%) of the 8201 page views were from Merton network users (i.e. councillors and council officers viewing whilst logged on to the council's network).
- 2.15. Google Analytics also show that 2716 (33%) of the 8201 page views were repeat viewings – the proportion of repeat viewings was slightly higher for Merton network users, at 35%.
- 2.16. Viewing figures may have been skewed by the newsworthy nature of one or two of the meetings. The experience of other councils is that viewing figures decline after a year or two. Merton's viewing figures will be closely monitored over the next two years so that any such decrease will be identified at an early stage.

Costs

- 2.17. The total cost of the webcast pilot is likely to be £15,191. This comprises £13,851 already paid for the equipment, technical support and software and £1340 of estimated staff overtime costs.
- 2.18. The cost per viewing from 1 April to 31 December is £1.82 (£15,191 divided by 8358 viewings). The cost per viewing for the whole pilot period will be lower because it will include viewings for January and February (Planning Committee meetings on 16 January and 13 February plus Street Management Advisory Committee on 29 January and Council on 5 February).
- 2.19. Indicative costs have been received for a further 12 months at the same cost as the pilot. If the council committed to webcasting for 2 years or longer there would be a discount applied providing payment was made upfront.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Council may opt to end the project at the completion of the pilot project and cease to webcast any committee meetings.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. The webcasting webpage has a feedback button, so users can make comments or ask questions about the project. No comments have been submitted to date.
- 4.2. A survey was placed on the webcasting webpages for all meetings held in November and December 2013. There were no responses to the survey.
- 4.3. A survey was also added to the Council's consultation webpage in November 2013; at the time of writing this report only one response has been received. This is attached as Appendix 2.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. If not extended, the one year pilot project will end on 20 February 2014. The final meeting to be webcast will be the Planning Applications Committee on 13 February 2014.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The likely cost £15k for the next years Webcasting will be met from the budget of Corporate Governance.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There is no legal restriction in relation to webcasting meetings, although where a resolution is passed excluding the press and public because there is to be consideration of exempt or confidential information, this part of the meeting must not be webcast.

- 7.2. In order to ensure the council is compliant with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, a protocol was agreed to ensure members of the public attending such meetings are aware that the meeting is to be filmed. The protocol addressed the situation where meetings are determining an individual's application and where individuals making representations in such matters have concerns about being filmed. The protocol and all other materials advertising webcasting were drafted with and approved by the Information Governance Team and Legal Services.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a legal obligation to ensure that its website is accessible to disabled people who may use a variety of access devices and equipment. Merton's Web Information Manager worked closely with Publici to ensure that all access requirements were met, including compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- 8.2. An Equality Analysis has been undertaken and no adverse impact was found. The Equality Analysis is attached as Appendix 3.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix 1 – live and archived viewing figures for each webcast meeting
- Appendix 2 – response to web survey
- Appendix 3 – equality analysis

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Council 21 November 2012, webcasting feasibility report

Appendix 1 – live and archived viewing figures for each webcast meeting

	April		May		June		July		August		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Total		
	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	Total
Council 27/03	0	352	0	233	0	123	0	277	0	229	0	286	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a			0	1500	1500
PAC 18/04	14	121	0	182	0	127	0	92	0	82	0	99	0	63	n/a	n/a			14	766	780
A/Council 15/05			26	1205	0	323	0	153	0	154	0	100	0	94	0	45			26	2074	2100
PAC 23/05			43	113	0	176	0	143	0	134	0	93	0	91	0	79			43	829	872
Council 10/07							70	176	0	118	0	99	0	67	0	72			70	532	602
PAC 05/09*											0*	332	0	110	0	62			0	504	504
Council 11/09											152	202	0	129	0	72			152	403	555
SMAC 18/09											7	95	0	124	0	109			7	328	335
PAC 10/10													25	240	0	123			25	363	388
PAC 07/11															35	203			35	203	238
Council 20/11															49	136			49	136	185
PAC 12/12																			0	0	0
Totals	14	473	69	1733	0	749	70	841	0	717	159	1306	25	918	84	901			421	7638	8059

*meeting was not broadcast live due to technical error

**data collected on 30/11/13

L - live views, A -Archive views

Appendix 2 – response to web survey

1 respondents accessed the campaign

Step 1:1.00-1:Meetings watched

This multiple response question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Council		
Planning Applications Committee	1	100%
Street Management Advisory Committee		

Step 1:2.00-1:When watch

This single response question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Live as they happen	1	100%
After the event		
Both		

Step 1:3.00-1:Broadcast quality

This single response question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Good		
Fair	1	100%
Poor		

Step 1:4.00-1:Likely to continue to watch

This single response question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	1	100%
No		
Don't know		

Step 1:5.00-1:Other suggested meetings

This open response (Free text) question was answered by respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents

Step 1:6.00-1:Improvements

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
Make what is visible on the main screens to those in the chamber visible on the webcast where possible. Voice/public speaking training for some council officers	1

Step 1:7.00-1:Are you**This single response question was answered by 1 respondents.**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
An officer for the London Borough of Merton		
A councillor for the London Borough of Merton		
A member of the public	1	100%

Appendix 3 Equality Analysis



What are the proposals being assessed?	One year project to webcast meetings of Council, Planning Applications Committee and Street Management Advisory Committee
Which Department/ Division has the responsibility for this?	Corporate Services/Corporate Governance

Stage 1: Overview	
Name and job title of lead officer	Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services
1. What are the aims, objectives and desired outcomes of your proposal? (Also explain proposals e.g. reduction/removal of service, deletion of posts, changing criteria etc)	Following a motion from Council, to implement a one year pilot project to webcast meetings of Council, Planning Applications Committee and Street Management Advisory Committee. The aim of this project is to increase public participation in the democratic process, enabling them to watch these meetings live on the internet and for six months after the meeting has taken place.
2. How does this contribute to the council's corporate priorities?	The project facilitates public involvement in the council's decision making processes by enabling them to watch webcasts of some committee meetings
3. Who will be affected by this proposal? For example who are the external/internal customers, communities, partners, stakeholders, the workforce etc.	Staff and councillors will appear on the webcast. Members of the public in attendance at a webcast meeting may sit in designated seats if they do not wish to be filmed. Any member of the public, officer, councillor or partner organisation will be able to watch the meeting online live and for up to six months after the meeting.
4. Is the responsibility shared with another department, authority or organisation? If so, who are the partners and who has overall responsibility?	The responsibility rests with the Democracy Services Team. However, the equipment and hosting of the web content is supplied by Publici.

Stage 2: Collecting evidence/ data

5. What evidence have you considered as part of this assessment?

Provide details of the information you have reviewed to determine the impact your proposal would have on the protected characteristics (equality groups).

- There is very little evidence or data that can be collected about webcasting. Many local authorities already webcast some or all of their meetings, but only collect numbers of hits on their webpages. However, the intention is to make local democracy more accessible to the people of Merton, enabling them to watch council meetings without leaving their home. This could be particularly useful for people who would find it difficult to attend evening meetings in person. Work was carried out in consultation with the Web Information Manager to ensure that the webcast webpages comply with the Equality Act 2010 and that all access requirements are met so that disabled people who may use a variety of access devices and equipment can view the webcasts.

Stage 3: Assessing impact and analysis

6. From the evidence you have considered, what areas of concern have you identified regarding the potential negative and positive impact on one or more protected characteristics (equality groups)?

Protected characteristic (equality group)	Tick which applies Positive impact		Tick which applies Potential negative impact		Reason Briefly explain what positive or negative impact has been identified
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
	Age	✓			
Disability	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Gender Reassignment	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Pregnancy and Maternity	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Race	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Religion/ belief	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Sex (Gender)	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Sexual orientation	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.
Socio-economic status	✓				Enable them to access local democracy from home.

7. If you have identified a negative impact, how do you plan to mitigate it?

n/a

Stage 4: Conclusion of the Equality Analysis

- 8. Which of the following statements best describe the outcome of the EA (Tick one box only)
Please refer to the guidance for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments is available on the intranet for further information about these outcomes and what they mean for your proposal

- Outcome 1** – The EA has not identified any potential for discrimination or negative impact and all opportunities to promote equality are being addressed. **No changes are required.**
- Outcome 2** – The EA has identified adjustments to remove negative impact or to better promote equality. **Actions you propose to take to do this should be included in the Action Plan.**
- Outcome 3** – The EA has identified some potential for negative impact or some missed opportunities to promote equality and it may not be possible to mitigate this fully. **If you propose to continue with proposals you must include the justification for this in Section 10 below, and include actions you propose to take to remove negative impact or to better promote equality in the Action Plan. You must ensure that your proposed action is in line with the PSED to have ‘due regard’ and you are advised to seek Legal Advice.**
- Outcome 4** – The EA shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. **Stop and rethink your proposals.**

Stage 5: Improvement Action Pan

- **9. Equality Analysis Improvement Action Plan template – Making adjustments for negative impact**

This action plan should be completed after the analysis and should outline action(s) to be taken to mitigate the potential negative impact identified (expanding on information provided in Section 7 above).

1) Negative impact/ gap in information identified in the Equality Analysis	Action required to mitigate	• How will you know this is achieved? e.g. performance measure/ target)	By when	Existing or additional resources?	Lead Officer	Action added to divisional/ team plan?
2)		•				
3)		•				
4)		•				

Note that the full impact of the decision may only be known after the proposals have been implemented; therefore it is important the effective monitoring is in place to assess the impact.

Stage 6: Reporting outcomes

10. Summary of the equality analysis

This section can also be used in your decision making reports (CMT/Cabinet/etc) but you must also attach the assessment to the report, or provide a hyperlink

This Equality Analysis has resulted in an Outcome [add](#) Assessment

The webcasting project will have a positive impact on all members of the public who wish to access local democracy in Merton, as they will be able to view some committee meetings online.

Stage 7: Sign off by Director/ Head of Service

Assessment completed by	Susanne Wicks, Democratic Services Officer	Signature:	Date: 23.12.13
Improvement action plan signed off by Director/ Head of Service	Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services	Signature:	Date:24.12.13

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