



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Live Streaming and archiving of Council proceedings on the internet
Date:	Friday, 22 nd October, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext. 6314)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer (ext. 6316)

Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that the Committee, at its meeting on 22nd January, 2010, agreed in principle to the provision of a system to facilitate the live streaming of Council meetings on the internet, subject to a further report setting out the costs being submitted for its consideration in due course.

Key Issues

The live streaming of the Monthly Meetings of the Council would enable anyone who has access to the internet to watch and listen to the proceedings as they take place. The process of archiving the video footage of the meetings would enable individuals to view past meetings via the internet at any point in time.

The Committee is reminded that, at its meeting on 23rd May, 2008, it adopted a set of recommendations of the Audit Panel in relation to a Code of Governance for the Council. Part of that Code committed the Council to “taking informed, transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny....” It is certainly the case that the live streaming and archiving of Council Meetings would be in line with this commitment. Furthermore, the Council's promotion of a Customer Focus approach commits it to providing the public with as much information as possible about the Council's decision-making processes and the live streaming and archiving of meetings would be consistent with such a customer focussed service delivery.

The Council is in the process of developing a number of strategies around improving services and information for its customers in terms of consultation and engagement. New technology is the link between all these strategies. Citizens want news and information and, in particular, access to services 24 hours a day. The ‘nine to five’ culture of service delivery is a thing of the past and it is vital that the council adopts a digital approach and maximises the use of modern technology to provide the full range of services and information on-line.

However, the Committee will be mindful of the current challenging financial environment and the need to exercise prudence and to challenge costs which are to

be incurred by the Council.

If Belfast City Council decides to proceed with the live streaming and archiving of Council meetings it would be the first Council to do so in Northern Ireland and would be showing leadership to other Councils.

Whilst it remains vital that Belfast City Council continues to develop its progressive approach to the traditional forms of communications, it would now appear to be appropriate for the Council to consider investing more time and resources in new channels of communications, particularly with younger and older audiences which are regarded as harder to reach.

Following initial research, primarily with the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dublin City Council, in respect of their live streaming and archiving systems, it has been identified that there is a diverse range in relation to the type of systems available. The following outlines the options which are available to the Council.

Option 1

The Northern Ireland Assembly, due to its obligation to record meetings of a suitable quality so as to be broadcast by the BBC, operates an extremely elaborate live streaming and archiving system. However, this system, which would cost the Council between £250,000 and £400,000, is extremely advanced and greatly exceeds the functionality which would be required by the Council.

Option 2

The system used by Dublin City Council would seem to be effective in delivering the service. This system provides live streaming of high quality video feed from moveable cameras, providing viewers with on-screen information, including details of the meeting agenda and of individual speakers, and will archive the footage in a manner that can be retrieved and viewed through the Council's website.

The system would be leased from a company which specialises in providing this service. There would be no initial capital cost but it would require an annual leasing charge of approximately £20,000. It would be the responsibility of the company providing the service to update the equipment and to provide maintenance when appropriate. These costs are included within the aforementioned figure. This option could result in an approximate cost to the Council of £60,000 over three years.

Option 3

The Council could also chose to purchase the required equipment up front at an approximate cost of between £40,000 and £50,000. An additional maintenance cost of approximately £10,000 would be payable annually and, depending on advancements in technology, it may be necessary to upgrade the equipment. Furthermore, as this equipment would be owned and maintained by the Council, technical staff will have to be trained and deployed as and when appropriate. This option could result in an approximate cost to the Council of £80,000 over three years.

Option 2 appears to be the most advantageous to the Council and is the method which has been utilised by over forty Local Authorities across the United Kingdom.

Members should be aware that, in addition to the costs outlined in all of the options above, there would be a requirement for a member of staff to be trained and for them to be present to operate the equipment during the Council Meetings.

Furthermore, as a result of the Committee's decision of 22nd January, 2010, provision has been made within the draft 2011/2012 revenue estimates to cover the costs

associated with the implementation of a system which will permit the live streaming and archiving of Council proceedings on the internet.

Resource Implications

Option 1 – £250,000 - £400,000

Option 2 - £60,000 over three years

Option 3 - £80,000 over three years

Provision has been made within the draft 2011/2012 revenue estimates for the costs which would be incurred with the purchase of such a system.

Recommendation

The Committee is requested to consider if it wishes to proceed with the live streaming of Council meetings on the internet.

If so, the Committee is recommended to choose Option 2 as set out in the report as the most effective option available, approve the invitation of tenders and under the scheme of delegation, to delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive/Town Solicitor to approve the successful tender. Tenders will be evaluated in line with both cost and quality criteria and awarded to the most economically advantageous tenderer.

Decision Tracking

Officer responsible – Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

1st April, 2011