



Belfast District Council (Shadow)

Report to	Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Recording of Committee meetings
Date:	28th November, 2014
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext 6314)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Shadow Council, at its meeting in October, referred the undernoted Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Long, to the Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for consideration.
1.2	<i>"In order to increase openness and transparency, so far as is reasonably practicable, this Council will make an audio and potentially video recording of so much of any Committee meeting of the Council as is open to the public and the recordings will be made available to the public at the City Hall and published on the Council's website."</i>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<u>Background</u>
2.1.1	The existing Belfast City Council decided in 2011 to tender for the provision of a webcasting service to allow for the live webcasting of meetings of the full Council.
2.1.2	The Council received only one expression of interest, from Public-I, for the provision of the service. The contract was agreed for the provision of up to 60 hours of broadcasting per year at a monthly cost of £1,500.
2.1.3	The Committee meetings of the existing Council are not held in the Council Chamber but rather are held in private session in the Committee Room.

2.2	<u>Venue for Committee Meetings from April 2015</u>
2.2.1	The first decision that the Committee is required to take is regarding the venue in which Committee meetings should take place.
2.2.2	As all Committee meetings in the new Council will be required to be open to the public to attend, consideration as to the appropriateness of the meeting venue needs careful consideration. Essentially, the options are to continue to hold Committee meetings in the Committee Room and the full Council meeting in the Council Chamber or to hold all meetings in the Council Chamber.
2.2.3	There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. The advantages of holding all meetings in the Council Chamber are that the attendance of the public would be more easily managed with the public attending in the public gallery and more space would be available in that venue for public attendance. If the Committee decides that it wishes to provide for the webcasting of future Committee meetings then the equipment for that is already in place in the Council Chamber.
2.2.4	The disadvantages are that the Council Chamber is not set up to allow for the efficient transaction of business for a Committee. There is not any area in the Chamber which would allow for the necessary interaction between Members and Officers and the seating arrangements are such that parties are separated across the Chamber which could lead to a more difficult situation in which to come to agreement on the many issues discussed at Committee meetings.
2.3	<u>Costs for Webcasting Committee meetings</u>
2.3.1	If the existing contract with Public-I were to be extended on the same terms as the existing contract to cover 5 Committee meetings each month (with the exception of the recess month of July) then the number of total hours contracted for would need to be increased and the estimated additional monthly cost of doing so is estimated at £525 (£6,300 per annum). There would also be some additional staffing costs for a webcast operator and engineer to be present during such meetings, which are normally held in part outside normal contracted hours.
2.3.2	The cost of providing webcasting facilities in the Committee Room is estimated at an annual cost of £20,000 - £25,000 as this would require the installation of cameras and the computer equipment to allow for the webcasting to take place. It is unlikely that the Committee Room would be large enough to allow for the installation of a dedicated webcasting station whilst also setting aside an area for the members of the public to attend and for those reasons this option is not considered to be feasible.
2.4	<u>Audio Recording in Committee Rooms</u>
2.4.1	An estimate has been received for the provision of equipment in the Committee Rooms to allow for the audio recording of Committee meetings on media which would allow for the recordings to be made available after the meeting on the Council's website.
2.4.2	The estimated initial cost of the provision of this equipment is £500 per room (including set up costs). If we were to provide it in only the main Committee Room (Lavery Room) then the annual running costs would be £50. If we were to

	extend the provision to the Conor Room also then this cost would double to £100.
2.4.3	The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 requires the Council to provide for the audio recording of full Council meetings and this requirement is met under our current policy of webcasting the Council meetings. This requirement is not extended to Committee meetings and the Council is under no obligation to record the proceedings of Committees in any way other than through the official minute record.
2.5	<u>Venue for Planning Committee Meetings</u>
2.5.1	Some additional consideration will require to be given as to the venue for meetings of the Planning Committee from April 2015 when the new Council assumes full planning powers. Concern has been expressed by the Senior Planning officials that neither the Committee Rooms nor the Council Chamber would be an ideal location for such meetings to be held, particularly when the Committee is considering applications for major planning applications where there would be detailed plans and architect's drawings to be displayed and where there might be significant public interest in attending. The LCD screens in the Committee Rooms are not of sufficient size to properly display detailed plans.
2.5.2	Officers are currently investigating this matter in detail and a separate report on options will be presented to the Shadow Planning Committee in due course.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The cost of upgrading the webcasting service to allow for the broadcasting and archiving of the Committees' meetings is estimated at £6,300 per annum plus staff costs.
3.2	The estimated cost of providing audio recording equipment in the Committee Room(s) is £500 for purchase and set up plus £50per room annually for running costs.
3.3	No specific budget has been set aside for these costs but, should the Committee decide to proceed with either option, the additional costs could be met from within Departmental budgets.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	None associated with this report.

5	Call In
5.1	This decision is subject to call-in.

6	Recommendations
6.1	<p>The Committee is asked:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To decide upon the venue for meetings of the several Committees of the new Council from April, 2015 – either the Council Chamber or the Committee Room.2. If the decision is to move all the meetings to the Council Chamber, then the Committee is asked to decide if it wishes to webcast the proceedings of the Committee meetings.3. If the decision is to continue to hold meetings in the Committee Room, then the Committee is asked to decide if it wishes to provide for the audio recording of proceedings.

7	Decision Tracking
Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager December 2014	