



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 January, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (ext. 6325)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Gareth Quinn, Development Officer (ext. 6316)

Relevant Background Information

Members will recall that on 1st December, 2009 the Council considered the undernoted Notice of Motion.

Live Streaming and Archiving of Council Proceedings on the Internet

“This Council recognises that there is a need to encourage wider interest among the public, and particularly young people, in the affairs of the Council.

One means of creating enhanced awareness and participation would be to follow the lead set by the Northern Ireland Assembly and authorise the live streaming and archiving of Council proceedings on the Internet.

To this end, the Council directs that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee give consideration to this matter in terms of constraints, benefits and costs with a view to bringing a recommendation to the Council at an early date.”

In accordance with Standing Orders, the motion was referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

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 constraints, benefits and costs of providing such a service are set out below:

Constraints

There is nothing in legislation which would prevent the live streaming and archiving of Council Meetings and the Director of Legal Services has confirmed that there would

be no impediment to such a course of action.

There would be aesthetic implications in the installing of cameras in the Council Chamber.

Benefits

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.

New technology can also assist elected representatives to perform their functions even more effectively. It can enable the organisation to help them become more accessible to the electorate and can ensure that they receive information, updates on Council business and news alerts in a timely and effective manner. There are currently over 50 Council's in England, Scotland and Wales which live stream a range of meetings through their websites. 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 the new channels of communications, particularly in its efforts to reach younger and older audiences which are regarded as harder to reach.

Options

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 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 to £400,000, is extremely advanced.

The system used by Dublin City Council would seem to be effective in delivering the service. This service provides live streaming of high quality video feed from moveable cameras and will provide viewers with on-screen information, including details of the meeting agenda and of individual speakers.

A system such as that used by Dublin City Council could be delivered in two ways:

Firstly, purchase the required equipment up front at an approximate cost of between £40,000 and £50,000. An additional cost of approximately £10,000 would be payable annually.

Secondly, as is the case in Dublin City Council, the system could be leased from a company which specialises in providing this service. There would be no initial capital payment but it would require an annual leasing charge of between £20,000 and £30,000.

In addition to the costs outlined above there would be a requirement for a member of staff to be trained so as to be able to operate the equipment.

Members will be aware that no provision has been made in the 2010/2011 estimates of expenditure to cover the incurring of costs of this nature. Accordingly, the Committee is requested to indicate whether it is prepared to agree in principle to the provision of such a facility. If so, a detailed report will be brought to the Committee for its consideration after further preparatory work has been undertaken and prior to the invitation of tenders.

Resource Implications

Provision has not been made within the 2010/2011 revenue estimates for the costs which would be incurred in the purchase of such a system.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to decide whether it wishes to agree, in principle, to the provision of a system to facilitate the live streaming of the Council meetings. If so, a further report will be brought before the Committee identifying the detailed costs and timescales for the introduction of an appropriate system.

Furthermore, as provision has not been made in the 2010/2011 revenue estimates, the Committee is advised that the installation and implementation of the system would not be possible prior to the 2011/2012 financial year.

Decision Tracking

If the Committee agrees in principle to the provision of a live streaming and archiving facility within the Council then a more detailed report will be brought before the Committee for its consideration.

Officer responsible – Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services.

This page has been intentionally left blank.