



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	The live streaming and archiving of Council proceedings on the internet
Date:	Friday, 20 January, 2012
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext. 6314) Eamon Deeny, Head of Corporate Communications (ext. 6285)
Contact Officer:	Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer (ext.6316)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members may be aware of an article and editorial comment which appeared recently in the local print media which criticised the webcasting of Council meetings and specifically the viewing figures for the January meeting of Council. The article is inaccurate and misleading in that it does not give a true reflection of the value for money of the project.
1.2	Although reports will be brought to the Committee it was felt important, in light of the aforementioned article, to bring Members up to speed on the performance of the webcasts to date. This brief synopsis is intended to provide Members with a more realistic analysis of the value for money when compared with the original intention of Council which was to encourage wider interest among the public, and particularly young people, and would create an enhanced awareness and participation in the civic life of the city.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The contract for the provision of the webcasting solution has been awarded for a period of two years with an option for the Council to increase the term to three years. A report providing Members with the necessary information to make this decision will be brought to the Committee in the Autumn of 2013.
2.2	The webcasting of Council meetings is at a very early stage with only two meetings, namely the December and January meetings of Council, being streamed live. Due to a technical problem affecting the specially designated internet connection, it was not possible to view the Special Council meeting on 5 December. However, the footage was uploaded to the archive and made available for viewing.

2.3	The December monthly meeting of Council experienced extremely high viewing figures which eclipsed by 5 times the 500 viewer average experienced by the 55 other Council's across the British Isles, all of which operate the same webcast solution.
2.4	It is important to note that the webcast solution not only permits viewers to watch the meeting of Council live but also enables them to watch proceedings at a later date through the archive. With this in mind, it is important that Members are made aware of the fact that the live or archived footage of the past three meetings has been viewed approximately 4,500 times. The initial meeting was responsible for approximately 4,000 viewers with the Special meeting of Council on 5 December and the January meeting of Council having approximately 500 viewers.
2.5	Dublin City Council, which operates the same system, currently has an average of 500 viewers per meeting and when they initially launched the solution four years ago for the first few meetings they had similar viewing figures to that of the January meeting of Council.
2.6	Taking all of this into account, it is clear that the webcasting project has had a satisfactory first few months. The newspaper article was extremely unfair and gave an inaccurate picture to readers. Members are advised that the Head of Corporate Communications has already raised concerns with the editor of the newspaper particularly in relation to the editorial comment, the unfair way that the cost was represented and expressing surprise that the newspaper would be anything other than supportive of the Council's efforts to make democracy more accessible to the public.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	n/a

4	Equality Implications
4.1	n/a

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

6	Decision Tracking
Officers responsible: Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer	