FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject:	**WEB CASTING COUNCIL MEETINGS**
Meeting:	**FALKIRK COUNCIL**
Date:	**25 SEPTEMBER 2013**
Author:	**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The purpose of this report is to provide information on the potential introduction of web casts of Council meetings. This is in response to a decision at the meeting of Falkirk Council on 26 June where it was agreed that officers should identify costs and possible service providers for a web streaming package for all principal Council meetings. This service would include the facility to archive all 'streamed' Council meetings for reference at a later date, with archive access from the Council's website.

2.   BACKGROUND

2.1   Web casting is the live or recorded transmission of video over the web. Three Scottish Councils currently have web casting arrangements for their meetings in place, City of Edinburgh Council, Moray Council and Highland Council, as do a number of English and Welsh authorities.

2.2   Web casting enables members of the public to access content, in this case Council meetings, where and when they want. Council meetings can be viewed live but most Councils have found that around 80% of web cast visitors view the archive at the time of their choosing rather than the live feed. The number of people viewing the footage, either live or via the archive, is generally low, with more contentious items attracting the most viewers.

2.3   To enable web casting of Council meetings to take place, cameras require to be installed in the Council chamber. These capture live information from Council meetings and send it, via a web casting provider, to anyone who would wish to view the meeting. The public can view live meetings remotely and access the meeting archives via an internet connection.

2.4   General information has been obtained about the implementation, support and technical arrangements for the web casting projects in City of Edinburgh, Moray and Highland Councils and this is set out below. In addition, historic web casts can be viewed for each Council via their websites.

3. WEB CASTING IN ACTION

3.1 All three Councils use the same supplier to provide the web casting equipment and service - Public-i. Public-i is the market leader in web casting in the public sector, with over a decade of experience, and provides a suite of digital tools aimed at supporting the democratic process. The company provides a web casting service to over 70 Councils throughout the UK including Birmingham City Council, Belfast City Council and Cardiff City Council. Public-i provides the equipment and hosts the content on a micro site, with links from the Councils' own websites. The micro sites have an element of standard functionality, therefore giving economies of scale, with the level of sophistication dependent on the package of services procured. In the majority of cases the projects have been led by Democratic Services, with support from other Services as appropriate.

3.2 The features offered by the web casting services vary depending on the specification and the resources committed to the project. For example, some Council's web casts include details about the current speaker and meeting attendees and have links to agendas and reports. The level of sophistication of the archive service also varies from Council to Council.

Moray Council

3.3 Moray was the first Council in Scotland to introduce web casting and broadcasts a range of Council and committee meetings via a static web casting service consisting of three cameras in their Council chambers. Moray provides a simple service with no captions, no linking to agenda documents or presentations, no transcript service or feedback/poll service. This is largely due to cost as these features tend to be add-ons.

Highland Council

3.4 Highland Council operates a dual camera fixed facility in their Council chamber and has also introduced a mobile web casting service which webcasts Area Committees held in various locations outside the Council chambers. The Council also has electronic voting and Councillors log in to their combined microphone and voting assembly with a smartcard. The smartcard also contains their caption profile, so that when they activate their microphone the camera focuses on them and their details are shown on screen.

Edinburgh Council

3.5 City of Edinburgh Council has recently completed a one year trial of web casting, appointing Public-I following a tendering process. It was initially confined to full Council meetings but has now been extended to Petition Meetings. There are four cameras in their main Council Chamber which capture live information from the full Council meetings and send it, via Public-i, to anyone that would like to view the meeting. The cameras are automated and activated when a microphone button is pressed and are pre-set so that when they focus on a particular Member that Member's profile will be shown on the viewing screen.

3.6   The services provided by Public-i include live transmission of Council meetings, plus the archiving and book marking of meetings. This allows members of the public to search the archive library for specific topics, and has the potential to be linked into the online archive of committee papers. Two days after a meeting viewers are able to watch it via the archive, which includes index point that allow viewers to jump to the content/items they are most interested in rather than watching the whole web cast.

3.7   In terms of officer resources to support the project within the City of Edinburgh Council the main areas are:

- Before each meeting Committee Services add the meeting, agenda and reports to the web casting micro site provided by Public-i and following the meeting check that all points in the meeting are correctly indexed
- During a meeting officers are required to ensure that the live web cast is streaming correctly. This includes overseeing the automated microphone and camera system and moving camera angles and replacing microphones as required. In Edinburgh this is done by their facilities/events team.

3.8   Pre launch preparations included holding briefing sessions for Councillors, and a test broadcast of a Council meeting so Members could see how the system would look to citizens. A web casting protocol was agreed and the service was publicised via twitter, prominently on their website and via articles in local newspapers.

3.9   For the first web cast in Edinburgh, 623 citizens watched live and over 1,000 caught the archived edition. This is increasing, with the most watched items tending to be those which are the most contentious.

4.   FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

4.1   While web casting may open up Council meetings to more people, the total number of people accessing Council web casts tends to be very low, therefore the cost per view could be considered to be relatively high. Some Councils in England have had negative media coverage about the benefits of this expenditure at a time when public budgets are under pressure.

4.2   There is no record of any requests from the public for the Council to web cast its meetings and as yet no work has been undertaken to estimate the likely uptake of this service. Falkirk Council's meetings are not generally attended by many members of the public, although they are held during the day so it may be difficult for some people to attend.

5.   OUTLINE COSTS

5.1   Costs for the service vary depending on what is specified by individual Councils, however as a guide the cost for the pilot year in Edinburgh was £30,000, £17,000 of which will become ongoing costs if the pilot is extended. This covers a full archive facility, as requested at Council on 26 June.

5.2 Exact costs for implementing a similar project in Falkirk are not available as any procurement would be subject to tender. Costs are obviously variable depending on the scale and scope of the coverage, including the potential for additional functionality as noted in section 3, and the number of hours broadcast.

5.3 Examples of factors that would need to be taken into account include:

- Determining which meetings might be covered by a web casting service as the cost is dependent on the number of hours covered.
- The location of the meetings covered. If the meetings covered were held in different rooms then there would be additional set-up costs.
- Any issues with the Council's accommodation and systems. For example, the current audio system used is analogue rather than digital and may need to be upgraded. Similarly the light levels in the Chambers are relatively low and may need to be enhanced. This would incur additional costs.
- Officer time to operate the system at meetings, plus the requirement for officer training.

5.4 Should the Council decide to proceed then, as noted at 5.2, a procurement exercise would be required. This would include site visits to identify any issues with the Council's audio systems and meeting room accommodation. In advance of this it is not possible to advise Members of an exact cost but the above information provides an indication.

5.5 No funding has been allocated for a web casting project so should the Council decide to proceed, funding would have to be identified within the Council's own resources.

6. OTHER ISSUES

6.1 In terms of the legal position, Elected Members are governed by the Code of Conduct and meetings of the Council take place according to the Council's Standing Orders. The web casting of meetings would also be governed by these standards and rules. Members would participate in meetings which are web cast, as they would in meetings which are not web cast, with due regard to the constitutional requirements of the Council.

6.2 The Council is a Data Controller in terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 and if it were decided that web casting of meeting should be taken forward then a protocol should be agree prior to the first Council meeting to be web cast. This will assist the conduct of web cast meetings and discharge the obligations of the Authority under the Data Protection Act 1998.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Three Councils in Scotland are currently broadcasting their public meetings. All three Councils use the Public-i service but with a differing range of technological sophistication. Costs for the service vary depending on what is specified by individual Councils, e.g. the number of hours broadcast.

7.2 Indicative costs are provided in section 5. but these are subject to revision dependent on procurement, site visits etc. Additional support from officers is also required and this would increase depending on what the package is delivering. This additional support has not been costed at this stage.

8.   RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1   **Council is asked to:**

8.2   **Note the information provided about service providers and potential costs for a web streaming package with archive facilities;**

8.3   **In the light of the above, consider whether officers should be asked to develop a detailed costed options paper for Members to consider including additional support costs.**

....………………………..

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Date: 4 September 2013
Ref: ABD0913CB
Contact Name: Caroline Binnie - Ext: 6051

<div align="center">LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</div>

1.   None