



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 7 SEPTEMBER 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 20
Subject	THE PURCHASE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOLUTION TO WEBCAST COUNCIL MEETINGS
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member(s)	Cllr Joe Harris - Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer(s)	Phil Martin Email : phil.martin@publicagroup.uk Tel: 01993 861201
Summary/Purpose	(i) To consider the introduction of webcasting Council meetings and the relevant solutions available to achieve this. (ii) To enter into a contract with Public-i following a recent procurement for the provision of a webcasting solution to the council (iii) To consider the length of contract specifically associated with the hosting element of the solution.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	That the Council agrees to let a contract with Public-i as per Option One (Dual), for a period of 3 years.
Corporate priorities	The Council aim is to rebuild the council so it can be proactive and responsive to the needs of our residents and businesses in a fast-changing environment, building for the future whilst respecting our heritage.
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Cllr Joe Harris

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council is committed to the principles of openness and transparency in the way that it operates, recognising the importance of giving residents simple and easy access to what is discussed at Council meetings.
- 1.2 The Openness in Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 gives members of the public and press the right to record (either pictures and/or audio recordings) meetings of the Council held in public. Whilst the Council has allowed filming for some time and has a protocol in place such that the Chair has always had the discretion to suspend or terminate any activities that, in his or her opinion, are disruptive, take up prior to the pandemic was low.
- 1.3 Webcasting of meetings involves live or 'real time' audio and/or video streaming of the proceedings over the web so that the meeting can be experienced remotely by residents thus removing the need to physically come into the Council offices. In addition, or as an alternative, a copy of the broadcast can also be made available after the event which is known as 'on demand' availability so providing significant flexibility for individuals to catch up with Council meetings at a time that suits them.
- 1.4 Webcasting usually involves either the use of at least one camera with pan and zoom facilities or the use of several fixed cameras focusing on different parts of the room linked to activation of microphones.
- 1.5 Initially the focus of the project was to look at replacing both the audio units in the Council chamber as well as providing camera facilities to capture the meetings on video so that members of the public could either watch the proceedings live or after the event via the Council's website.
- 1.6 Since the pandemic and the experience of running Council meetings virtually, the view is now to implement a hybrid solution so that Councillors could take part either from the Council Chamber or from an alternative location such as their home, so providing them with a great deal of flexibility in the future.
- 1.7 On the 4th April 2020 as a result of the pandemic the 'Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020' was passed by Government. This temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person thus giving Councils the powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology is in place until the 7th May 2021, however this is currently under review so may be extended or made permanent.
- 1.8 Whilst the current solution enables Council meetings to be held virtually, because the current powers are time bound there are no guarantees that this can continue so an alternative solution is required.
- 1.9 In addition to providing a high quality, flexible solution that meets both Councillors and public needs going forward, it is essential that the system integrates with the existing democratic services system to avoid both duplication and additional work.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1 Following a procurement exercise that was undertaken using the Braintree Framework, to help ensure compliance as well as being an efficient and quick route to the market, Public-i have been identified as the preferred supplier and are the market leaders in this area. Public-i have pioneered live streaming in the public sector since 2001.

2.2 The cost of the solution has been broken down into the following options:

2.2.1 Capital Costs

Option 1 - £78,480.43 (Dual Delegate module)

Option 2 - £94,622.64 (Single Delegate module)

2.2.2 Revenue Costs

Revenue based on 3 years webcasting and support is £32,195 but will be charged annually so will be within the £20K annual revenue budget.

2.2.3 Options/Recommendation

- (a) Option 1 (Dual) ensures that functionality is not compromised when using dual mode. Two members can log into one delegate unit, with each unit having its own push to talk button. Voting can also be cast with each member having to press their own icon before casting a vote.
- (b) The Dicentis system utilises line array microphone technology giving a wider range of audio pick up. This allows the unit to be positioned between two members while achieving the same audio quality as a gooseneck.
- (c) Dual user has the added benefit of being overall cheaper than one unit each. Moreover, it has an environmental benefit as it means using less materials and consuming less electricity.
- (d) In addition to the implementation and equipment required to capture both the audio and video there is an annual cost associated with hosting the content following each meeting. The costs are on a sliding scale and reduce depending on the length of contract.
- (e) As part of the budget setting process for 2020/21 £80,000 capital was built into the budget to cover the purchase and implementation of a webcasting solution along with a further £20,000 to meet the annual revenue costs.

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The solution has been procured via framework so providing officers are satisfied that the solution meets the authority's needs, there are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

None Identified.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The Council could choose not to implement this solution and return to how meetings were held once the current advice to hold meetings remotely changes or comes to an end. It is also possible that the Government may advise that hybrid meetings take place either temporarily – to protect anyone particularly at risk from Covid – or permanently to make democracy more accessible. If this solution is not progressed, it will place the Council at a disadvantage if hybrid meetings become accepted practice and are not aligned with its commitment to greater transparency of Council business.

(END)