

The Highland Council

Ross and Cromarty Committee - 4 February 2016

Agenda Item	6
Report No	RC/002/16

Local Committees – Webcasting

Report by the Director of Finance

Summary

This report seeks a decision on whether the Ross and Cromarty Committee meetings should be webcast and, if so, the funding source/s of the additional costs that webcasting would incur.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's Highland First programme contains commitments to strengthen local democracy including creating new and better ways of involving communities in decisions affecting them and new arrangements to decentralise decision-making by 2017.
- 1.2 Members agreed at the Council meeting on 17 December 2015 that "*each Local Committee should now consider whether they wished to webcast future meetings and if so how they wished to meet the costs involved*".
- 1.3 The new Local Committees, operating with a new Scheme of Delegation, will be:
 - The Badenoch and Strathspey Committee
 - The Caithness Committee
 - The Lochaber Committee
 - The Nairnshire Committee
 - The Ross and Cromarty Committee
 - The Skye Committee
 - The Sutherland County Committee

The City of Inverness Area Committee remains unchanged.

2. Webcasting – demand

- 2.1 The Highland Council's current Webcasting contract ends on 31 May 2016. The services provided include live streaming of meetings and archive facilities. The new contract must be "live" from 1 June 2016 to ensure a seamless transition of service for the meetings in June 2016 and beyond. The tendering process must commence by February 2016.

- 2.2 The current service demand for webcasting is mixed. Appendix 1 details the viewers for all Committee meetings – live and archive – since January 2015. It is not possible to identify who the viewers are but it would be reasonable to assume they include stakeholders such as the press/media and Council officers as well as customers/constituents.
- 2.3 The table below presents the service demand for webcasting for former Area Committees, compared to the overall average. It does show a lower service demand but what is very difficult to predict is the impact on **future** service demand as the Localism Agenda develops.

Committee (January 2015 – December 2015)	Live viewers	Archive viewers
Caithness and Sutherland Area	38	78
City of Inverness Area	52	54
Lochaber Area	15	35
Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area	16	59
Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area	20	47
Average (for area committees)	28	55
Overall average for all meetings	44	71

- 2.4 In addition to accommodating video-conferencing and presentations, service demand for webcasting is *visual*. Indeed, customer feedback is such that the clear preference includes the cameras “point towards” the speaker to identify them rather than *just* a visual view of all Members, Officers etc. attending the meeting.

3. Webcasting – resourcing

- 3.1 Webcasting requires Business Support effort (1.2fte). The costs are estimated at £25,841 per annum. The current position is that this work could be absorbed within the team by filling a vacant post but it is a real cost as without this workload the post would be deleted and savings would be taken.
- 3.2 Given the challenging financial climate, such a saving would be valuable but would be to the detriment of providing webcasting to/of local committees.
- 3.3 An additional mobile webcasting kit will also be required to ensure all Local Committees are webcast. A mobile “kit” includes items such as hardware, cameras and microphones.
- 3.4 Appendix 2 lists the capacity for webcasting Council meetings from local venues. By holding more local meetings than current there are significant concerns about relying on one mobile kit for the whole Council. An additional one-off capital cost of £20,700 is required for a second mobile kit. Additional meetings, and therefore additional “*streaming*” time, also results in additional annual revenue costs of £4,800 in respect of the increased number of webcasting hours required.

4. Webcasting – funding

4.1 As reported at 3.4, if local committee meetings are to be webcast in the way the former Area Committees were webcast the additional costs to be met are:

Year	One-off	Annual recurring(“streaming”)
2016/17	£20,700	£4,800
2017/18 (onwards)	-	£4,800

Note: the Annual recurring cost is based on 8 venues, 4 meetings per venue per year and 4 hours per meeting at current contract prices.

4.2 The costs reported above assume all Local Committees are to be webcast.

If one/some Local Committee/s decide not to webcast, then the **annual recurring** costs for the Council would reduce, pro rata.

4.3 An additional annual cost of £4.8k would require £218 per annum funded by each Ward Discretionary budget. Members will be aware of the potential budget saving of reducing the current level of Ward Discretionary Budgets. Should this happen then any ring-fencing of funds to meet the costs associated with webcasting will reduce the flexibility available to support local groups.

4.4 The one-off capital cost is eligible for investment through the carbon clever capital allowance as webcasting reduces the need for members of the public and others to travel to attend meetings. This capital budget of £1m has £329k unallocated for 2015/16, including £75k not yet allocated on community projects.

4.5 Local Committees have delegated powers to approve funding for carbon clever community projects. This is not however a community project and a decision will need to be made by Resources Committee in due course.

4.6 Another option that would reduce the costs of webcasting is feasible for some venues. This involves recording the meeting by video conference and linking it to our network for webcast. This was the process used for webcasting Committee meetings held in Golspie. However that required the video feed to go to the Council chamber at headquarters for subsequent webcast and it ties the chamber up from other use and requires staff time to manage (/run) the webcast for the duration of the meetings. It would be possible to purchase ICT kit to webcast the live feed without using the chamber. The cost of that is £7K. This option reduces the capital cost and reduces the staff time involved, mainly travel.

4.7 This option is less costly but the quality of the web cast is reduced as the camera recording the meeting is fixed and there would be no focus on individuals speaking, only the Committee as a whole.

5. Options for webcasting the local area committees

5.1 If Members do wish local committees to be webcast, the options are presented below.

Option/ Description	Option 1 As for former Area Committees– live webcasts	Option 2 Live vc (in situ) to live webcast from HQ Chamber	Option 3 Live vc (in situ) to live webcast from another vc location with appropriate webcasting equipment
Capital cost – one-off charge	£20,700	Nil	£7,000
Recurring annual charge	£4,800	£4,800	£4,800
Staff costs	£25,841	£18,304	£18,304
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cameras move to person who is speaking (ie can zoom in). Local and live copy feed to ensure adequate broadcast quality is achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced costs if vc already in situ. Can move Local Committee meeting location to a venue provided vc available. Local and live copy feed to ensure adequate broadcast quality is achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced costs if vc already in situ. Can move Local Committee meeting location to a venue provided vc available Frees up HQ Chamber. Local and live copy feed to ensure adequate broadcast quality is achieved
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost. Opportunity for delivering some savings (in BS) missed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed camera position therefore cannot move/show actual specific speakers 3 locations do not have vc (Nairn, Kingussie and Town House). Ties up HQ Chamber Opportunity for delivering some savings (in BS) missed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed camera position therefore cannot move/show actual specific speakers 3 locations do not have vc (Nairn, Kingussie and Town House). Opportunity for delivering some savings (in BS) missed.

6. Implications

- 6.1 The resource implications are detailed throughout the report. There are no other implications arising from this report at this time although noting that webcasting can reduce travel requirements to meetings.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the current service demand for webcasting.
- 7.2 Members are asked to decide whether Local Committees should be webcast.
- 7.3 If Members do wish Local Committees to be webcast, to agree the preferred webcasting option.
- 7.4 When the views of all local committees are obtained then where these views are that webcasting is to be undertaken, then approval for the capital funding will be submitted to Resources Committee at the earliest opportunity.
- 7.5 Where Members agree that webcasting is to be undertaken the annual recurring cost of £4,800 is met by each Ward Discretionary budget providing £218 per annum.

Designation: Director of Finance

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Appendix 1

Average number of live and archive views for webcasts of Council meetings from January 2015

Committee	Live viewers	Archive viewers
Audit and Scrutiny	38	76
Caithness and Sutherland Area	38	78
City of Inverness Area	52	54
Communities and Partnerships	21	68
Community Services Committee	91	112
Education, Children and Adult Services	76	155
Gaelic	10	19
Highland Council	139	130
Licensing	6	38
Lochaber Area	15	35
Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Area	16	59
NPAC	48	86
Pensions	9	21
Planning Review Body	18	50
Planning, Development and Infrastructure	76	71
Resources	114	127
Skye, Ross and Cromarty Area	20	47
SPAC	45	79
Overall average	44	71

Locations for local committees, VC and web casting capability

Local committee Venues	Does location have VC?	Webcast from this venue?
Town Hall, Wick	Yes	Yes - Mobile
Drummuie, Golspie	Yes	Yes – but VC to HQ and then webcast from HQ required (staff set up microphones and connection, and staff at HQ running/managing webcast)
Court House, Nairn	No	Yes - Mobile
Chamber, Fulton House, Fort William, Lochaber	Yes	Yes - Mobile
Tala nan Ros, Kingussie	No Note: Court House approx. summer 2016, VC will be available	Yes - Mobile
The Chamber, Dingwall	Yes	Yes - Mobile
Town House, Inverness	No	Yes - Mobile
The Chamber, Tigh na Sgìre, Portree	Yes	Yes – but VC to HQ and then webcast from HQ required (staff set up microphones and connection and staff at HQ running/managing webcast)
The Chamber, Inverness	Yes	Yes