

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	4 December 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Resources
Subject	-	Call-in – Council Chamber Audio / Visual Equipment Upgrade

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The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), at its meeting held on 27 November considered the decision made by Cabinet in respect of the Council Chamber Audio / Visual Equipment Upgrade, which had been subject to the call-in procedure. The recommendation and minute arising from this matter will be published as soon as possible, as this Agenda has been published prior to the OSC's meeting. A copy of the original report to OSC (excluding the appendices) and the Cabinet Minute relating to this item is reproduced below.

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**Should the Overview and Scrutiny Committee determine not to refer this matter back to Cabinet, this matter will be withdrawn from the Agenda.**

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Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	16 October 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Resources
Subject	-	Council Chamber Audio/Visual Equipment Upgrade

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**Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That Members reconsider the level of investment considered appropriate and the type of capabilities required of the audio/visual offer within the Council Chamber, in light of the additional information provided and either confirm the original or make a new recommendation to Cabinet.

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## Introduction

1. As Members may recall, back in April the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) received a report on a number of options to upgrade the Audio / Visual equipment offer in the Council Chamber which is now over 10 years old and proving unreliable and inadequate (attached as Appendix A for ease of reference) (Minute OSC16/58 refers).
2. In summary, the options ranged from bare essentials (replacing the microphone system – Option 1) to complete overhaul (replacing projection equipment and installing fixed cameras – Options 2 and 3) to enable the video recording of meetings and potentially webcasting meetings in the future. The costs ranged from £34,000 to £68,000 and on-costs of £12,000 per annum to webcast.
3. The OSC recommended to Cabinet that a complete overhaul be agreed, but that webcasting not be pursued at the current time (the additional £12,000 per annum). The OSC had been advised that purchasing all three options at the

same time would be cost effective, provide enhanced technology e.g. high definition screens and an improved sound system, provide additional flexible usage of the Chamber and generally improve the experience for all who attended Council meetings.

4. However, Cabinet was not supportive of the proposals and expressed concerns over value for money and the procurement process and deferred the decision pending further information (Minute CB16/99 refers). This report provides additional information for Members' consideration, including the results of an all-Member survey and the OSC are invited to reconsider their recommendation made earlier in the year in light of the additional information and either confirm or revise the recommendation.

## **Further Considerations / Additional Information**

### Procurement

5. The proposed minimum spend will activate the Council's Procurement Procedure Rules, and the procurement will be managed through the East Sussex Procurement Hub (ESPH), who manages all large-scale procurement exercises on behalf of the Council. The ESPH is a Procurement Service delivered by Wealden District Council (WDC) creating maximum value for a partnership which includes Hastings Borough, Rother and Wealden District Councils. The ESPH was formed in 2009 and has created revenue and savings in excess of £8million. It also aims to create best practice across its partnership members and make doing business with local government in East Sussex straightforward and more transparent.
6. Due to the specialist nature of the goods / services to be purchased, it is likely that an existing Framework Agreement will be used. Such agreements offer opportunities to secure value for money and reduce the need to follow a competitive procedure where there are limited suppliers.

### Neighbouring Authorities

7. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) webcast the majority of their meetings (hosted via Public-i) including Council, Cabinet, Planning, Scrutiny Committees and the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, all of which take place during the day. Data received from ESCC showing the usage is attached at Appendix B.
8. Hastings Borough Council (HBC) video records all its meetings for viewing after the event – none are streamed live. Data received from HBC indicates that the number of local viewers on the meeting videos from the period 6 March 2017 to 19 September 2017 is 897. Rother would have this capability if all three options were supported, but without the webcasting annual fee.
9. WDC also use Public-i. WDC decided to start webcasting meetings as a consequence of the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 which allows any person to attend public meetings of the Council and film. WDC Members were worried that the recordings would be taken out of context and put on You Tube; a similar concern shared by RDC Members when this was considered at that time. It also addresses the criticism that WDC no longer hold planning committee meetings in Crowborough following

their move to Hailsham. Data received from WDC showing the usage is attached at Appendix C.

10. Lewes District Council (LDC) webcasts its full Council meetings only as these are held at ESCC's County Hall and they use their equipment; this seems to satisfy the LDC Members and there has not been any call to extend it.
11. Eastbourne Borough Council does not webcast any meetings as they are all held in Eastbourne Town Hall which does not currently have any facilities for this. As a result of Member interest, enquiries were made last year into what would be needed to be installed and how much it would cost to do this but in the end it was not progressed, as considered too expensive for little public interest.
12. Currently RDC already has the ability to audio record meetings and publish these on the website, via YouTube. The Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) agreed to audio record all its meetings, and recommended that other meetings where the Bexhill Community Governance Review was being considered be audio recorded to enable interested members of the public to listen to the debates, after the meeting, if they were unable to attend. The listener figures for the various meetings to date are as follows:

CGRSG – 22 February – 90 listeners

Cabinet – 3 July – 10 listeners

CGRSG – 10 August – 18 listeners

#### Members' Survey

13. Without prejudice to the outcome and any final recommendations, all Members were sent an e-mail questionnaire on 29 August to gauge the level of support for upgrading the Council Chamber AV equipment. Members were asked to indicate their support or otherwise as follows:

**Option 1** – replace the existing wireless microphones – cost in the region of £34,000 – SUPPORT – YES / NO

**Option 2** – replace the current projector and screen in the corner of Council Chamber with two mobile screens allowing greater flexibility and use of the room – cost in the region of £20,000 – SUPPORT – YES / NO

**Option 3** – install fixed cameras within the Chamber to provide video capability and possible future webcasting of meetings – cost in the region of £14,000 plus £12,000 per annum to live stream, if webcasting meetings – SUPPORT – YES / NO

14. By the closing date, 15 Members (39.5%) had responded, the results are as set out in the table below:

Option	Number / Percent
1	3 (20%)
1+2	6 (40%)
1, 2 + 3	3 (20%)
1 + 3	2 (13%)

None	1 (7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 (100%)</b>

15. From the results it is clear that the majority of Members are in support of Option 1 (93%) and 60% in favour of Options 1 and 2. Comments made by Members are reproduced at Appendix D.

#### ICT / Infrastructure & Service Desk Comments

16. Specifically regarding the presentation equipment, the current system continually fails to provide reliable service, and having been installed 17 plus years ago, this is hardly surprising. Another issue with the age of the system is its lack of any modern connectivity support. This will lead to increased public dissatisfaction/criticism as well as potential reputational damage when visitors are unable to display via normal technology; put simply, the system no longer meets its base requirements to present.

### **Conclusions**

17. The Council Chamber AV equipment is in need of an upgrade; there is sufficient money within the allocated budget to accommodate all of the options, if considered necessary. Cabinet Members were concerned at the level of investment and specification required and sought further information as set out within this report.
18. From the officers' perspective, there is no doubt that Options 1 and 2 are the minimum requirements for this upgrade and this appears to be the opinion of the majority of Members who responded to the questionnaire; the microphone system is now unreliable and the presentational equipment is also unreliable and out of date. It is acknowledged that the additional spend for fixed cameras to enable the videoing of meetings and the potential to webcast in the future is very much "an optional extra" that may not be required at the current time.
19. In light of the additional information, Members are asked to consider again the level of investment considered appropriate and the type of capabilities required of the AV offer within the Council Chamber and make an appropriate recommendation to Cabinet.

Malcolm Johnston  
Executive Director of Resources

### **Risk Assessment Statement**

Failure to invest and upgrade the AV equipment could lead to increased public dissatisfaction/criticism when the public are attending meetings within the Council Chamber and are unable to hear debates. Ensuring that the Council has adequate facilities for Members who are audibly impaired also ensures accessibility and full participation for all.

**CB17/37. COUNCIL CHAMBER AUDIO/VISUAL EQUIPMENT UPGRADE**  
**(6.1)**

Cabinet received and considered Minute OSC17/27 arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 16 October 2017 that had reconsidered the upgrade to the Audio / Visual equipment in the Council Chamber; the equipment was in excess of 10 years old, was unreliable and no longer fit for purpose. The options proposed were: Option 1: replace the existing microphones only; Option 2: replace the projection equipment and Option 3: install fixed cameras to enable the video recording of meetings and the ability of webcasting meetings in the future. The costs ranged from £34,000 to £68,000, plus £12,000 per annum to webcast.

The OSC had originally considered and recommended a complete upgrade earlier in the year, however, Cabinet was not supportive of the proposals and had expressed concerns regarding value for money, the procurement process and deferred the decision pending further information/investigation. The OSC had received a further detailed report on the procurement process, the systems used at neighbouring authorities, ICT infrastructure and technology advances, as well as the results of a Member survey to gauge the level of support for upgrading the system.

Members were reminded that funding had been set aside in the Capital Programme to fund the Rother 2020 Programme which included upgrading the AV equipment, however this did not include the £12,000 annual licensing fee to webcast live meetings. The OSC had agreed to reaffirm their previous recommendation that all three options be purchased as this would give the Council control over video footage of its Council meetings and the equipment / technology would all be installed at the same time, be the same age and compatible. The OSC had not been supportive of live-streaming Council meetings at a cost of £12k per annum but that this be kept under review.

Cabinet reconsidered the matter and agreed that Options 1 and 2 be supported but not Option 3; it was considered that if fixed cameras were in place within the Chamber there would be pressure to webcast meetings at the additional cost of £12k per annum, which was not considered justifiable. Cabinet requested that as far as possible, the equipment to be installed be compatible with the fixed cameras and webcasting equipment, should the Council decide at a later date and, in particular after the 2019 elections, to introduce fixed cameras and webcasting.

**RESOLVED:** That Options 1: Conference and Audio System Upgrade (microphones) and 2: Presentation Equipment System Upgrade be purchased and installed for the Council Chamber.