

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	24 April 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Resources
Subject	-	Council Chamber Audio/Visual Equipment Upgrade

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That Members views are sought on the level of investment considered appropriate and the type of capabilities required of the audio/visual offer within the Council Chamber and an appropriate recommendation be made to Cabinet.

Introduction

1. The current wireless microphone system in the Council Chamber is fast approaching 10 years old, and as Members are no doubt aware, is becoming unreliable and in need of replacement.
2. In addition, as previously reported to Members, as a result of changes in legislation, in particular the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, the Council is keeping under review the audio and video recording of formal Council meetings.
3. This report outlines the key considerations around these issues and seeks a steer from Members with regard to the level of investment considered appropriate and the type of capabilities required of the audio/visual (AV) offer within the Council Chamber.
4. The Council has already set aside funding within the Capital Programme to fund the Rother 2020 programme, which includes the upgrading of the Council Chamber AV equipment.

Considerations

5. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 allows any person to attend public meetings of the Council and report on the meeting, using any communication methods, including the internet, to publish, post or otherwise share the results of their reporting activities, during or after the meeting; this can include the filming, photographing or audio recording of proceedings.
6. Since the introduction of the new regulations there has been relatively few meetings which have been videoed and/or audio recorded, both openly, with our full knowledge and assistance, and covertly, without prior knowledge, only coming to light subsequent to the meeting; the meetings involved that we are aware of being Cabinet, full Council and Planning Committee meetings.
7. When Members first considered the new regulations in autumn 2014, concerns were expressed at the potential for editing and subsequent misrepresentation of the discussions and decisions made at meetings and to this end it was suggested that the Council reconsiders video or audio recording its meetings for publishing after the meeting and/or webcasting live meetings, as they happen.

8. In autumn 2015 Members considered the matter again, in light of previous concerns and it was agreed that audio or video recording of public meetings would be kept under review, mostly in recognition of the costs and lack of demand for such a service. Whilst meetings have been recorded, both openly and covertly, as outlined above, there has been no instance of these recordings being used in any way, to our knowledge, to misrepresent Members.

Options

9. Due to the continued unreliability of the microphone system, officers had an exploratory meeting with a leading supplier in the field in February this year and considered the options for a replacement microphone system.
10. At the same time, the opportunity was taken to have exploratory discussion and obtain indicative prices for a complete overhaul of the AV equipment in the Council Chamber. The following paragraphs set out the options and indicative costs:
11. **Option 1: Conference and Audio System Upgrade** – to replace the current wireless microphones with a Bosch Dicontis wireless microphone system, which is easy to use, with 25 wireless microphones (allowing for 1 between 2), including the necessary Wireless Application Protocol, battery packs and chargers. A digital signal processor would also be required to handle the various AV inputs and outputs. This system has recently been installed by Hastings Borough Council within their new Chamber and from first-hand experience and talking to staff operating the system it seems to work well. Benefits of installing new microphones include improved clarity/hearing for Members, officers and the public.

Total cost to deliver Option 1 – £34,000

12. **Option 2: Video/Presentation System Upgrade** – to install two TV screens either side of the top table on moveable trollies together with installing 4x output plates around the room to allow the screens on their trollies to be moved to other locations in the room. The installation of moveable TV screens will allow for presentations/other media content to be accessible from various locations within the Chamber to allow greater flexibility and use of the room.

Total cost to deliver Option 2 – £20,000

13. **Option 3: Camera & Webcasting Encoder Installation** – as part of a complete modernisation of the room and to future proof it to capture content locally (video) or start to stream in the future, cameras with an encoder (computer) could be located within the system. The installation of cameras within the Chamber will mitigate against the risk of content being taken out of context by members of the public and enable the Council to keep a genuine record of meetings with the cameras and content copyright to Rother District Council.
14. Should the Council wish to live stream (webcast), licences would be required to turn on the camera control (mic activation) and streaming software. Estimated 100 hours of hosted content per annum based on the frequency and variety of meetings, budget figures for this would be £12,000 per annum

with the potential for discounts for longer term contract periods. This would allow the Council to webcast live meetings allowing interested parties to watch meetings as they happen remotely, rather than travelling to the Town Hall.

Total cost to deliver Option 3 – £14,000 one off cost plus £12,000 per annum to live stream

15. As can be seen above, the minimum spend just to replace the microphones will be £34,000. Should the Council decide to include Option 2, the total spend rises to £64,000 and should all three Options be procured at the same time the spend rises to £78,000 plus £12,000 per annum should meetings be webcast. There is likely to be a reduction in these costs if the Council were to purchase all three options at the same time.
16. There is no choice but to replace the microphones (Option 1), however, Members' views are sought as to whether Options 2 (presentational equipment upgrade) and 3 (cameras) are pursued at the same time.

Procurement

17. The proposed minimum spend will activate the Council's Procurement Procedure Rules, and the procurement will be managed through the East Sussex Procurement Hub where it is expected that a Framework Agreement can be used.

Conclusions

18. The Council Chamber AV equipment is in need of an urgent upgrade; there is sufficient money within the budget to accommodate all of the options contained within this report. Members views are sought as to the level of investment considered appropriate and the type of capabilities required of the AV offer within the Council Chamber and an appropriate recommendation be made 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.