

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	2 December 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Installation of Video Cameras in the Council Chamber

Recommendation to COUNCIL: That:

- 1) the Executive Director be authorised to proceed with the installation of fixed cameras in the Council Chamber at a budget cost of £17,000 to be met from the capital programme provision for Rother 2020 ICT investment; and
 - 2) the appropriate amendments be made to the Council's Constitution.
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Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Oliver

Introduction

1. There is a significant amount of background to this issue and for Members' reference reports were presented as follows:
 - a. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 24 April 2017 (Minute OSC16/58 refers).
 - b. Cabinet 8 May 2017 (Minute CB16/99 refers).
 - c. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 October 2017 (Minute OSC17/27 refers).
 - d. Cabinet 6 November 2017 (Minute CB17/37 refers).
 - e. Overview and Scrutiny Committee 27 November 2017 (Call-in item, Minute OSC17/40 refers).
 - f. Cabinet 4 December 2017 (Minute CB17/49 refers).
2. At the Cabinet meeting on 4 December 2017, Members agreed to proceed with the purchase of a conference and audio system (microphones) and presentation equipment (projector and screens) but did not support the purchase of fixed cameras for the videoing of formal Council meetings.
3. Webcasting was not considered as it had been rejected earlier in the process as it was not perceived to be necessary at that time.
4. Cabinet did, however, request confirmation that the camera option could be 'retro fitted' at a future date and this was confirmed.

Filming and Broadcasting

5. Since that time there have been occasions when members of the public, with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Council, have filmed formal Council meetings in accordance with the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Constitution.

6. Although this has not caused any issues with footage being edited the videoing of formal Council meetings by the Council itself would give greater control and confidence over footage of its formal meetings.
7. Furthermore, several Members have expressed the view that video recording and even webcasting of formal meetings should be something that is reconsidered.
8. Officers have had discussions with the provider of the microphones and screens (there is logic in continuing with them as the system was originally developed as a total package) and they have given an estimated cost of £17,000 for the installation of fixed cameras in the Council Chamber. This cost can be met from the Capital Programme Provision for Rother 2020 ICT Investment. There is also an annual revenue cost of £1,200 (not including parts). *There is no provision for this annual cost within the Revenue Budget and compensatory savings will need to be identified.*
9. They have also provided costings for webcasting and, based on 60 hours per year, this would be just under £12,000 for a one year contract. This sum would be substantially reduced if a longer term contract was taken out. There is no provision for this cost within the Revenue Budget. Compensatory savings would need to be identified for the Council to be able to afford to provide webcasting.
10. The Council can, however, place the video recordings of the meetings on the website (at no additional cost) where they can be viewed. It is therefore recommended that given the cost and the potential viewing numbers the option of live webcasting meetings is not pursued at this time.

Conclusion

11. This report has not rehearsed the issues for the installation of fixed cameras in the Council Chamber or for webcasting some meetings, these issues have been well covered in the previous reports referred to in paragraph 1.
12. There is certainly merit in the Council having the ability to visually record meetings, if for no other reason that it gives a 'master' copy of events. If Members are minded to recommend that all formal meetings of the Council be recorded this is considered a change to the Council's current practice and should therefore be a decision for full Council. An appropriate amendment will be incorporated into the Council's Constitution.
13. It is recommended that webcasting of meeting is not pursued at this time due to the costs involved and the potential viewing numbers/benefit received.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

By failing to video record meetings there is a risk footage could be edited and discussions portrayed in a different light from that originally occurring. Also, the lack of publicly available video content could mean the Council may be accused of not being fully transparent or engaged.