Renfrewshire Council

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To: Council

On: 25 June 2015

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Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

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Heading: **Webcasting of Council Meetings**

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1.   **Summary**

1.1   The Council at its meeting held on 1 May, 2014, following a one-off trial webcast of its meeting held on 27th February, 2014, agreed to a one-year pilot to webcast all Council meetings. Webcasting began with the meeting of the Council held on 9 October 2014 and subsequent meetings held on 18 December 2014, 12 and 26 February, 23 March, 30 April 2015 have been webcast. A tender was negotiated with Public-i (who provide webcasting services for around 98% of councils that use web-casting) for the pilot.

1.2   The purpose of this report is to provide details of suggested benefits and related costs of webcasting of Council meetings and to seek the Council's agreement to continue with webcasting.

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2.   **Recommendation**

2.1   To approve the continued webcasting of Council meetings and to note that further reports will be brought back to Council to consider the roll out of webcasting to Board meetings.

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3.   **Background**

3.1   Alongside social media, the webcasting of council meetings is quickly becoming a well-established part of local government processes.

At the time of the Council agreeing to the one-year pilot, only three other Scottish councils – Moray (since 2005), Highland (since 2008) and City of Edinburgh (since 2012) – webcast their meetings. However, since then Glasgow and Aberdeen City Councils have begun to webcast their meetings, Edinburgh has extended webcasting to meetings other than Council, and East Ayrshire and East Renfrewshire Councils are in the process of obtaining quotations in relation to webcasting their meetings. In addition, Dumfries and Galloway Council broadcasts live audio of their meetings and meetings of the Scottish Parliament and its committees are broadcast via Parliament TV.

3.2   Webcasting of meetings allows members of the public who may not be able to attend Council meetings the ability to view proceedings. Accordingly, webcasting enhances the democratic process and offers a cost-effective way of reaching large audiences, improves public engagement, openness and transparency about how the Council carries out its business, and increases trust in the decision-making process.

3.3   Figures obtained from Public-i indicate that to date the number of people who have viewed the Council meeting webcasts (both live and in archive) is 5369, an average of 767 per meeting. These are unique and not repeat viewings. This compares with an average attendance at Council meetings by members of the public of 4.

3.4   Webcasting allows meetings to be streamed live and archived over the internet with relevant contextual information (agendas, reports, speaker names etc). This allows members of the public to search the archive library for specific topics. Webcasting also enables members of the public to access content where and when they want. Council meetings can be viewed live but most councils have found that around 80% view the archive at their convenience rather than the live feed.

3.5   Webcasting can be used with social media to further promote public engagement.

3.6   Outwith Scotland, the Department for Communities and Local Government has issued guidance which emphasises that local authorities should, by default, be open to members of the public filming the public elements of meetings. The Welsh Local Government Association has also highlighted the advantages to its members of webcasting meetings and its use to foster transparency and encourage more people to participate in the local democratic process.

3.7   The annual fee for an off the shelf product typically costs around £16k per annum. A tendering exercise would require to be undertaken.

3.8   The sound system in the chambers, because if its age unreliable and is no longer supported by the manufacturer, neither is it compatible with webcasting meetings as it does not allow for the cameras to follow relevant speaker microphones. Accordingly, two members of staff require to be present to operate the webcasting equipment. This system is in the process of being replaced and the new system will incorporate automatic camera follow. This will reduce the resource implications of webcasting meetings.

3.8   Should the Council agree to continue with webcasting, consideration will be given to rolling this out to some Policy Board meetings but this would only be done following further consultation with members.

Implications of the Report

1.   **Financial** - the cost will be met from existing resources.

2.   **HR & Organisational Development** *- none*

3.   **Community Planning –**

4.   **Legal –** a protocol has been developed to deal with data protection issues.

5.   **Property/Assets** *- none*

6.   **Information Technology** *- none*

7.   **Equality & Human Rights**

        (a)   The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8.   **Health & Safety** *- none*

9.   **Procurement – a tendering exercise will require to be undertaken.**

10.   **Risk** *- none*

11.   **Privacy Impact** *- none*

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Background papers: e-mail dated 1 June, 2015 from Public-i re live and archive viewings

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