

APPENDIX H

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 31 MARCH 2009

Title:

WEBCASTING REVIEW

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Adam Taylor-Smith]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

This report reviews the success of Waverley's webcasting activity to date and sets out how the service should evolve after the completion of the European Webcasting Project *eParticipate*.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

Webcasting is a tool that contributes to the Council's priorities by in the following ways:

Environment: People can watch meetings from their home or workplace without having to travel to Godalming thus reducing their carbon footprint.

Improving lives: Webcasting allows all residents and businesses to see how decisions are made at a time and place convenient to them.

Value for money: The availability of webcasting helps keep residents and businesses informed about the services for which they pay and see the value of the investment in council services. It also allows access to meetings for a much greater proportion of the community than can attend meetings and events that are webcast.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

Webcasting make an important contribution to equality and diversity, making the council's decision-making processes open and transparent at a time and place convenient to the viewer. There have been a number of occasions when the number of people attending Waverley meetings has exceeded the capacity of the Council Chamber. By webcasting these meetings, people have been able to follow the discussion in an overflow room. Others whose family or work commitments mean that they cannot attend the meeting can watch the meeting later at an appropriate time for them.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

The impact of this report on the budget is summarised in the table below and further information contained in paragraphs 22 and 23.

Webcasting costs	Estimated Costs	Budget	Potential Shortfall
2008-2009	£20,000	£20,000	-
2009-2010	£15,000	£15,000	-
2010-2011	£28,000	£15,000	£13,000

The costs for webcasting in 2008/09 are included within the Revenue budget. The costs for webcasting in a full year (including the costs of the webcast operators) are up to £28,000. Officers will investigate opportunities for increasing income or reducing the costs of the service during the coming year.

Through webcasting meetings, citizens can see how decisions in the council are made. The numbers viewing meetings or documents through the webcasting service significantly increases access or 'attendance' at meetings of interest to them and represents good value for money as a small fraction of the cost of democracy. Webcasting Member or officer training has meant that anyone missing such training (particularly compulsory training) can learn key issues without the expense of organising additional events. During the *eParticipate* project which has been funded by the European Union, the costs of webcasting have been funded by the European Commission, with matching contributions of Waverley officer time.

Legal Implications:

At the end of the *eParticipate* project, the current contract with the technology supplier and the eParticipate Consortium will change to an individual contract with the technology supplier.

What is webcasting?

1. Webcasting (broadcasting over the Internet using the World-Wide-Web) is a transmission of audio and video over the internet. Video cameras in the public meeting rooms capture the live information and send it, via our technology partner Public-i, to anyone that would like to view the meeting. Through the use of an internet connection (either broadband or via a dial-up modem) and the free Realplayer media player anyone can view meetings live or for up to six months afterwards at a place convenient to them.
2. Over 50 UK councils are regularly webcasting meetings and events. Webcasting is much more than streaming video content and as such is significantly more beneficial to the viewer. Contextual content such as meeting agendas and background papers; powerpoint presentations and information about speakers are all available to the viewer giving a similar experience to that which they could have in the meeting room. In addition, they can give feedback whilst on-line via the site or by email to one of the speakers. The software also has the facility for polls and surveys to be directly linked to individual webcasts. Archived meetings are indexed by speakers or agenda points meaning that the viewer can go directly to an issue which is of particular interest to them.
3. From Waverley's point of view, any point of a webcast can be linked into a press release or onto a webcast giving the public immediate access to key issues being discussed such as the Leader's budget speech.

Benefits of webcasting

4. In 2005, the Local Government Association commissioned research by expedita on the benefits of webcasting. In their published report they listed the benefits of webcasting as:
 - PR value
 - Councillors can see themselves

- Makes authorities more accessible
- Reduces the impact of distance
- Meets the expectations from the public (especially the younger generation)
- Drives use of broadband
- Improves communications
- Reduces costs
- Modernisation
- Spread familiarity with technology
- Lifelong learning
- Interactivity/public participation
- Accessibility
- Consistency of delivery
- Social inclusion
- Working from home

Background

5. Waverley started webcasting in 2003 with initial funding provided by the Countryside Agency as part of the Market Town Healthchecks. The technology was used to record discussions by young people in order to get their views on what was important for them in Cranleigh and Haslemere. These meetings were available over the internet and other young people could then complete a survey attached to the webcast to add their views.
6. Since then, the Council has regularly webcast all Executive and full council meetings. In 2007, Waverley began regularly webcasting planning meetings. In addition special Overview and Scrutiny meetings have been webcast along with the Development Control Consultative Forums, and both Member training (e.g. Member Induction, Council and Committee Procedures, Waste and Recycling briefing etc) and officer internal training events (staff briefings, Health and Safety training etc). The joint meetings with Town and parish Councils are also regularly webcast. In 2008 101 meetings, events or training sessions were webcast on 80 different days.
7. Special events have included webcasts of the Waverley Design Awards; special consultation events such as the East Street meeting at the Farnham Maltings and the Post Office Closure proposals; a retail development day for local businesses and the special Councillor Question Time for young people held during Democracy Week.

eParticipate – European Project

8. Waverley was chosen as the UK partner in a market validation project under the European Commission's *eTen* programme and has played an active part as mentor and contributor to the project's success. The Project, called *eParticipate*, was designed to help Local Authorities use webcasting to re-engage citizens in their democratic processes and improve transparency in decision-making.
9. The initial project, from 2004-2006, involving local authority partners in Spain, Slovakia and Ireland was very successful and was the *eTen* project of the year in 2006. The European Commission then agreed additional funds to deploy the service across Europe and the project now has local authority and business partners in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Spain, Italy, France, Denmark, Ireland and the UK. eParticipation is seen by the European Commission as a key strand of eInclusion. The project was also asked to present to the EU Ministerial Conference *ICT for an inclusive society* in Riga

in 2006. The conference concluded that eInclusion offers key opportunities to meet both social and economic challenges. They believed an inclusive society is in everyone's interests and technological innovation should help eliminate or surmount any barriers that lead to social, economic or digital exclusion.

10. During the European Project the costs of Waverley's webcasting have been reimbursable from the European Commission and matched with Waverley resource contributions which have mostly been of officer time. In the deployment phase of the *eParticipate* project, new webcast services have been launched by local authorities in France, Italy, Denmark, and Spain.
11. Details of the project can be found at www.eparticipate.eu.
12. The *eParticipate* project has supported and funded the launch of the Making Waves on-line project; and has been funding the development of service related videos which make the council more accessible than just written text. Recent videos produced include a short video on reporting housing repairs and one on Waverley Training Services. Examples of others planned include
 - What happens to a planning application when it is received in Waverley;
 - and how benefit applications are processed.
13. As part of the webcasting project, Waverley made its service available to the Surrey Police Authority for their first webcast of one of its public meetings in February 2008. It also hosted a second meeting for the police authority in February 2009.

The provision of webcasting services

14. Waverley is working with the leading UK supplier of webcasting technology, Public-i. Public-i specialises in creating effective and innovative technology products to help Local Government and other public sector organisations to communicate and engage with their citizens
15. The contract with Public-i currently runs from 1 March each year and the service includes:
 - Licenses for the public-i webcaster for the mobile system (D600) in the Council Chamber, and the portable webcast unit (R600)
 - Access to the Public-I Media document system and content management system
 - A personalised microsite for Waverley in the same style as Waverley's own website
 - A Public-I Messenger Support platform
 - Live monitoring of Waverley webcasts and trouble shooting where problems may occur
 - Archiving, indexing and publishing of 25 hours of webcasts a month
 - 6 months of archiving each webcast available 24 hours a day 7 days a week
 - Storage of webcasts archived after six months (reinstatements available for an additional fee)
 - A Feedback facility
 - Other linked e-participation tools including surveys, polling and e-petitions

- Participation in the quarterly Public-i User Group

16. During the *eParticipate* project, Waverley has received a discounted rate for the service and purchased most of the equipment used for webcasting. It receives an additional discount in recognition of the fact that Waverley has chaired both the UK and European User Groups since 2006.

Some usage statistics

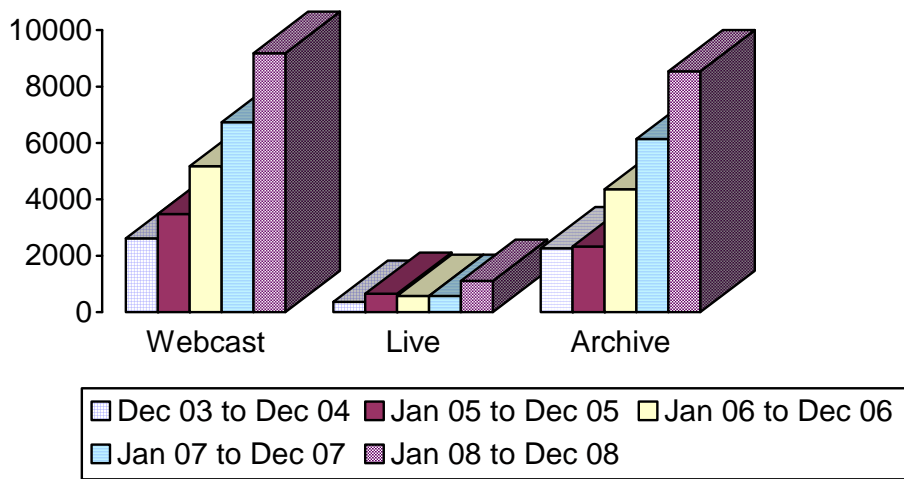
17. In many ways, quantitative statistics tell only part of the story since making the council more open and transparent carries significant additional benefits for the local community. Knowing that it is possible to see how a decision is made and the arguments that have been put forward for and against a particular issue give greater confidence in local democracy.

18. There has been a steady growth of viewers since the webcasting started. In 2008, there were just under 9,200 viewers of whom around 12% watched the meetings live and the rest afterwards in archive. There were 6,440 unique visitor IP addresses recorded and of these 3,886 were return visitors. By contrast between May 2008 and January 2009 there were, on average, of 8 people in the public gallery watching meetings in person.

19. On average, according to the Google Webalizer data, there were around 2175 visits per month to view the webcasts and associated documents over the past year. This compares to an average of round 42,000 visits per month to the main Waverley website.

20. The growth in viewership is set out below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Annual Webcast viewers 2003-2008.



	Total Webcast viewers	Live	Archive
Dec 03 to Dec 04	2619	359	2260
Jan 05 to Dec 05	3484	655	2331
Jan 06 to Dec 06	5175	577	4355

Jan 07 to Dec 07	6733	576	6135
Jan 08 to Dec 08	9185	1108	8535

21. The most popular meetings are the Planning meetings with just around 60% of all viewers watching these meetings in the past year. 12% watched Executive meetings and 11% watched Full Council meetings. These figures do not take into account meetings when overflow rooms were also in use for meetings when there was a higher level of interest.

Financial Implications

22. The *eParticipate* project comes to an end in September 2009. This means the service will be provided for six months at the reduced rate relating to the European project and six months at the standard contract rate. The costs for the service provided by Public-I are set out in (Exempt) Annex 1. In addition to these costs there are webcast operator costs to be added at £40 per meeting. The funding due from the European Commission for the project enabled the net budget to be reduced to £15,000 for 2009/2010 and the costs of webcasting in 2009/10 can be contained within this budget.
23. The costs for a full year leasing contract based on the current contract hours (up to 25 per month) would be £24,750 plus staff costs of £3,250. However given that Waverley has purchased the equipment as part of the European project, it could decide to pay for the capital costs of upgrades and replacement as required from the capital programme reducing the annual costs to £21,000. Other options for future consideration would be deciding whether to opt for fewer monthly hours which would reduce the contract accordingly. It is possible that additional income could be received for specific activities that may be webcast to reduce the budget requirement. It is proposed to review these options and update Members during the budget process when this item will be considered against other pressures on the budget.

Future developments

24. As well as progressing the initiatives set out in the report including additional service related videos and enhancing Making Waves on-line there is the opportunity to do more with the webcasting technology including video profiles of councillors; video profiles of portfolio holders on areas of responsibility; taking advantage of the e-petitions facility linked and more interactivity during the webcasts and opportunities for 'talking heads' during consultation activities. Other meetings such as the Top Youth Council or Tenants Panel could also be webcast if required. In addition, if the service were taken up by other partners such as the police authority and other LSP partners, the costs could be shared.

Conclusion

25. The Webcasting facility is an important communication tool helping to inform and connect with the community. The experience of the *eParticipate* project is that webcasting helps demystify council decision-making and encourage greater participation in local community activities. The cost of webcasting represents a very small percentage of the cost of democracy but enables

much greater access to decision making. The evidence of viewership and participation to date underlines how many more people are able to see the workings of the council. With the technology in place, the Council is able to extend the access to other services and support the development of information provision in an attractive and engaging way. Webcasting also provides an opportunity for councillors who are unable to attend key training events or meetings to view these activities at a later date.

Recommendation

It is recommended that

1. the successful partnership achieved through the *eParticipate* project and Waverley's contribution to this successful European project be welcomed;
2. officers review elements of the webcast contract with the technology provider, the possibility of upgrading the audio facilities in the Council Chamber to improve the 'listening experience' both in the Chamber and on the webcast and make suggestions for optimising use of the system in the future; and
3. the financial implications of continuing the webcasting project beyond March 2010 be examined as part of the next budget review.

Background Papers (SDCS)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Iain Lynch

Telephone: 01483 523203

E-mail: Iain.Lynch@waverley.gov.uk

Comms/exec/2008-09/309

