

 Executive 10 July 2019		Agenda Item No. <h1 style="text-align: center;">15</h1>
Title	Recording & Broadcasting of Council meetings	
For further information about this report please contact	David Guilding, Arts Manager 01926 456230 and david.guilding@warwickdc.gov.uk Graham Leach, Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer 01926 456114 graham.leach@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	None	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Council 20 June 2018 Minute number 15(a), Executive 28 November 2018 Minute 99	
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	28/6/19 28/6/19 28/6/19	Andrew Jones Bill Hunt Chris Elliott
Head of Service	28/6/19	Rose Winship
CMT		
Section 151 Officer	28/6/19	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	28/6/19	Andrew Jones
Finance	28/6/19	Richard Wilson
Portfolio Holder(s)	29/6/19	Moira-Ann Grainger Andrew Day
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Councillor Nicholls & Davison as Scrutiny Chairmen as an exemption to Forward Plan process.		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for the purchase and associated financing for a new Audio Visual (AV) system within the Council Chamber at Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Executive approves purchase of a replacement AV system costing approximately £80,000 for the Council Chamber at the Town Hall and that this is included in the 2019/20 General Fund Capital Programme.
- 2.2 That an options appraisal in association with Link Asset Services, Treasury Advisors for the Council, in order to determine the most cost effective method of financing the purchase.
- 2.3 As a result of the options appraisal should purchase prove to be the most cost effective financing method then the cost be met from the Equipment Renewals Reserve
- 2.4 That the Executive notes there may be a need for additional annual budgetary provision within the Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2020/21 above the current of £2,400 for the maintenance and support for the new AV system;
- 2.5 That as part of this project the new AV system should include the ability to broadcast meetings live, on line, from the Council Chamber.
- 2.6 That Executive approve an exemption to the Code of Procurement Practice to extend the maintenance contract for the current system by six months, to the end of March 2020, to enable the new system to be procured and installed.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Town Hall is managed by the Council's Arts Section and is primarily used by the Council for its public meetings. The Council Chamber is also used for other WDC functions such as planning inquiries which use the AV system to record meetings. The Council Chamber and Assembly Hall are also hired by Royal Leamington Spa Town Council for annual council meetings and mayor making. When rooms at the Town Hall are not in use by the Council's, they are hired for a range of events.
- 3.2 The current AV system has been in use in the Town Hall Council Chamber for over 12 years. When originally installed the system comprised of three operational cameras (two of which could move their focus and track to pre-programmed points in the room and one fixed view camera). The two tracking cameras were based on a pre-set digital ground plan of the Council Chamber and mapped to specific locations in the room where microphones are placed. This had limited value because it required fixed locations and should the microphone be moved or the room set up changed, the camera did not track to the new position. In addition, these two cameras ceased to be operational over five years ago as the technology to support the modes became obsolete and they subsequently failed.
- 3.3 The ability of the AV system in the Council Chamber to record meetings is now limited to a single fixed point camera mounted by the data projector under the public gallery which, while it has a wide angle lens, does not capture the whole of the room. The recording quality of the camera is not sufficient to operate in

low level lighting conditions (for example during presentations to Planning Committee). The audio functionality of the system is restricted because the microphone base stations use a wireless bandwidth that is very narrow and therefore is susceptible to interference from other Wi-Fi networks within the vicinity of the Town Hall and Town Centre. Despite its age, the system remains useable in its current form due to the current support contract that is in place.

- 3.4 The majority of common issues experienced with the AV system can be attributed to the inconsistent volume of those addressing the meeting or users not speaking directly into the microphone so their voice cannot be picked up and amplified. This latter problem may not be fully resolved by introducing a new system and will require a greater understanding of microphone technique by those addressing meetings.
- 3.5 Video recordings that are taken of the Council meetings in the Council Chamber are recorded onto a hard drive from which DVDs are created. These are then held on a master file with Democratic Services for 12 months before being securely destroyed.
- 3.6 The current AV system can be used to transmit a video and audio feed through to the Assembly Hall. This has been used on several occasions when demand to attend Council meetings has been greater than the capacity of the public gallery (a maximum of 35 people). However, upon assessment from two of the industry's leading suppliers the current system cannot be used/adapted to securely broadcast meetings to the internet.
- 3.7 At present, the Council does not have any recording/broadcasting facilities within rooms 21, 18 or 11. In order to enable this either a purpose built system will need to be installed or a small, table-top recording device would have to be used. Democratic Services officers have experimented with the latter option but it will not be of a sufficient standard to broadcast to the public. It is also considered that due to the significantly poor quality of these solutions they will not be appropriate for use by the Council unless in an emergency situation i.e. for an urgent licensing panel when the Council Chamber is unavailable. The addition of more advanced recording/broadcasting facilities in these rooms has not been considered at this stage on the advice of external suppliers, as the associated costs would be prohibitive.
- 3.8 With regard to the Assembly Hall only the microphone base stations can be transferred from the Council Chamber. There is no method of recording either the audio or visuals of meetings that take place in the Assembly Hall.
- 3.9 Before purchasing its own AV solution Warwickshire County Council had experimented by broadcasting their meetings live to the internet via 'Periscope' (a third party social media video streaming platform). It is understood that these recordings were undertaken using a tablet computer. This option was considered by Officers. However, during discussions with WCC and after inspecting their Twitter account, it became clear that they had received multiple complaints from the public regarding the quality of the video. It was not always possible to see the relevant Councillor speaking, it was unclear as to who was speaking. The audio quality was of an extremely poor standard. An example recording of a WCC scrutiny committee made using this technology [is available to view online](#). In addition to this, at least one dedicated member of staff was required to undertake the recording for the duration of the meeting.

- 3.10 The WDC Media team have considered the potential benefits and disadvantages of utilising this technology. It was concluded that while this method will provide some assurance to the community regarding openness of Council meetings the quality of the broadcast will not enhance this or the Council's overall reputation for delivering high quality information.
- 3.11 WDC officers have also considered the ability to broadcast or upload its current recordings via online video sharing sites, such as YouTube. However, due to the recording format currently used this option was also found not to be possible.
- 3.12 As part of the response to a Notice of the Motion in June 2018, Officers held informal talks with two suppliers about the potential to broadcast meetings from the Council Chamber at the Town Hall. Both suppliers advised that there will be a need to update the current system and that there is an additional cost for the broadcast or hosting of the meetings online. In both instances the costs for the period up to January 2021 were over £70,000. The suppliers and exact cost have not been named in the report because this information is considered to be commercially sensitive.
- 3.13 Indicative discussions were also held with suppliers about either upgrading the current system and then transferring this to the new HQ or installing a new system and transferring this to the new HQ. Both suppliers advised against this because the system should be designed for the room(s) it will be used in and by the time the Council technology will have progressed, which could lead to complications in embedding within any wider technology provision within the new HQ. The tendered contract for the new offices includes budget provision for a new AV system so at the point of any future relocation of Council functions the new Town Hall system would become redundant, unless elements of it could be redeployed to other Council buildings. However, given that any relocation of the Town Hall functions is unlikely to be required before 2021 at the earliest it is appropriate to make the relatively modest investment in the new system even if were to become redundant in the future.
- 3.14 No discussions have taken place with the regard to installing recording and broadcasting of meetings from within the Assembly Hall, Room 21, Room 18 or Room 11 at the Town Hall because this will require a new AV system to be installed as well as cameras (either permanently or temporary/transferable between rooms) for which there will be further cost.
- 3.15 Officers have investigated what neighbouring authorities do in terms of broadcasting meetings vis - Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council as well as the other District/Boroughs within Warwickshire.
- 3.16 All of these authorities, apart from Rugby and North Warwickshire Borough Council, broadcast some or all meetings online. In summary, the viewing figures from the authorities we were provided with were variable. Stratford District Council have circa 30 to 90 views per meeting; Solihull, between December 2015 and August 2016 have had between 25 and 250 depending on the subject matter (but average circa 100 views); Coventry City Council were only able to broadcast meetings of Council held in the Council Chamber and normally have around 20 views per meeting but had one meeting with 94 views. WCC were unable to confirm numbers as they were hosted via Periscope, on Twitter and the new system, and at the time of writing, had not been in use for a full cycle of meetings to provide a comparison.

- 3.17 The volume of requests for WDC meetings to be broadcast or recordings from local residents has not been significant. While no direct records are kept, only a limited number of enquiries have been received, via Twitter, asking if Planning Committee is available to watch online but there is no record or recollection of requests for to watch any other meetings within the last four years. The Council has provided 59 copies of recordings of 37 meetings out of a potential 137 meetings that were recorded since May 2015. Nearly all of the recordings that have been provided have been of Planning Committee.
- 3.18 Members will also recall the decision from the former Minister for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, which encouraged members of the public to comment live from Council meetings and clarified the law that the public and press were entitled to record, broadcast, take photos, take notes or comment on social media live from public meetings, so long as it did not interfere with the meeting. The guidance also made it mandatory to make facilities available to enable this to happen. In essence, this was to ensure a reasonable number of chairs were provided as well as a table for leaning on to make notes where practicable. Officers are aware of occasions where this has occurred in Council meetings and this does pose a small risk because individuals could, as they are entitled to, edit and broadcast parts of meeting they wish to for which the Council could not provide contrary evidence. While this risk is minimal it is increasing with the popularity of social media. (This can be mitigated by certain systems – that host the video)
- 3.19 The Executive should also be aware the current support contract for the system will expire in September this year and therefore an exemption to the procurement process is requested to provide cover for the current system until a new one is installed.
- 3.20 The recommendation to carry out an options appraisal is in line with the requirement to subject all vehicle, plant and equipment purchase to an options appraisal to determine the most cost effective method of finance.

4. **Policy Framework**

4.1 **Fit for the Future (FFF)**

The Council’s FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.

The FFF Strategy has 3 strands – People, Services and Money and each has an external and internal element to it. The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council’s FFF Strategy.”

FFF Strands		
People	Services	Money
External		
Health, Homes, Communities	Green, Clean, Safe	Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Improved health for all Housing needs for all met	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Area has well looked after public spaces All communities have	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Dynamic and diverse local economy Vibrant town centres

Impressive cultural and sports activities Cohesive and active communities	access to decent open space Improved air quality Low levels of crime and ASB	Improved performance/productivity of local economy Increased employment and income levels
Impacts of Proposal		
The broadcasting meetings will enable members of the public to watch their elected representatives in action as well as enabling them to watch live debates on key matters.	None	None
Internal		
Effective Staff	Maintain or Improve Services	Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> All staff are properly trained All staff have the appropriate tools All staff are engaged, empowered and supported The right people are in the right job with the right skills and right behaviours	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Focusing on our customers' needs Continuously improve our processes Increase the digital provision of services	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Better return/use of our assets Full Cost accounting Continued cost management Maximise income earning opportunities Seek best value for money
Impacts of Proposal		
<i>Less impact on technical staff at the Town Hall in resolving technical issues with AV system</i>	This will increase the digital provision of service to the community	At this time there are no financial implications.

4.2 **Supporting Strategies** – This report does not impact on any of the supporting strategies for Fit for the Future.

4.3 **Changes to Existing Policies** – The report does not propose any changes to current policies.

4.3 **Impact Assessments** – This is not considered necessary at this time but will be completed as part of the business case if recommendation 2.2 is approved.

5. Budgetary Framework

5.1 The report is in line with the current budgetary framework.

5.2 In order to determine the most cost effective method of financing this purchase an options appraisal will be carried out.

5.3 Should purchase be determined as the best option then the cost will be financed from the Equipment Renewals Reserve which currently has an unallocated balance of £975,000. However, it should be borne in mind that if all the items in

the current approved Equipment Renewals schedule are acquired then at the end of 2023/24 this reserve will be overdrawn by approximately £153,000.

- 5.4 There is currently an annual maintenance budget of £2,400. The maintenance costs for a new system are likely to exceed this. The new system would be under warranty for xx months after installation and any maintenance or servicing costs within this period are likely to be minimal. However, once the on-going costs have been established through the procurement process there may be a need to increase the budget in future years and reflect any increase within the Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2020/21 onwards.

6. Risks

- 6.1 There are no direct significant risks associated with the recommendation with the report as at present there are no legal requirements to record or broadcast all Council meetings, however the failing of the system does not present the Council in the best possible way or enable participation in the debate.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1 The Council could decide not to invest in a new AV system for the Council Chamber now but this could lead to further public embarrassment and bad publicity.
- 7.2 The Council could consider moving some of its public meetings away from the Town Hall to other locations which could provide broadcasting/recording facilities as standard. However, there will be additional costs to consider which are not currently budgeted.
- 7.3 For rooms 21, 11 and 18 the Council could utilise a small recording device, however, this has been tested in some Licensing & Regulatory Panels when the Council Chamber has not been available and have provided mixed results and are not of sufficient quality to broadcast.
- 7.4 During the process of producing this report, Stratford District Council has moved to using their current equipment to broadcast live via Youtube. At this stage this process has been discounted by officers because the WDC equipment will need to be upgraded to enable this and officers have not been able verify the costs of this approach.

8. Background

- 8.1 Following a notice of Motion at Council in June 2018, the Council resolved that officers should bring a report Executive by no later than November 2018 that details the feasibility and impact of:
- (1) with immediate effect all meetings of Council, the Executive, Committees and sub-committees be recorded (either audio or audio and visual wherever possible), with the exceptions of (2) below;
 - (2) any matter where the press and public are excluded should be recorded but not broadcast and any private deliberation by a Committee/or Sub Committee (for example the deliberations of a Licensing & Regulatory Panel) should not be recorded;
 - (3) officers investigate the potential for making these meetings available on line either live or as recordings; and

(4) all meetings of Council, Executive, Committees and sub-committees being broadcast live (either audio or audio and visual) and recorded as soon as it relocates to its new headquarters and the associated costs of this are built into the budget for the relocation of the Council.

8.2 Since the motion was submitted to Council in June Council, Executive, Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee have all resolved that their meetings held in the Council Chamber should be recorded. The Planning Committee, Licensing & Regulatory Committee and the Licensing & Regulatory Panels already had this arrangement in place. This leaves the Standards Committee, which had not met since June 2018, and Employment Committee, for which the item is included on the agenda for December, to consider such a proposal.

8.3 While the Executive considered a report in November 2018 and agreed on taking no action the system has continued to decline and there is a strong desire from members to ensure that debates in the chamber can be clearly heard by all present.