

The City of Edinburgh Council

10am, Thursday, 3 May 2018

Webcasting of Public Meetings – Motion by Councillor Miller

Item number 8.4
Report number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

Executive Summary

The Council agreed a motion by Councillor Miller in March 2018 calling for a report into the feasibility of extending webcasting, in particular to the Pensions Committee, Licensing Board and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board.

Webcasting of Public Meetings – Motion by Councillor Miller

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the costs of extending webcasting facilities to the Pensions Committee, Licensing Board and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board.
- 1.2 To agree to offer the use of webcasting facilities to the Pensions Committee, Licensing Board and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board.

2. Background

- 2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council began webcasting in September 2012, initially only webcasting meetings of the Council, Petitions Committee and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee from the Council Chamber.
- 2.2 In October 2013 webcasting was extended to the Dean of Guild Court Room which enabled the Council to webcast a range of meetings, including all executive committee meetings.
- 2.3 The Council currently webcasts around 220 hours of meetings per annum and, for example, has webcast 33 meetings so far in 2018. The range of meetings includes the Council, all executive meetings, Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, Planning and Development Management Sub-Committee and the Regulatory Committee. The first meetings of the locality committees were also webcast. The webcasting facility has also been used for events such as the Council budget question time, allowing the public to view the debate and pose questions to a panel of councillors.
- 2.4 On 15 March 2018, Council approved a motion by Councillor Miller recognising the benefits of webcasting and noting that some meetings were held in public but were not webcast. The motion also asked for a report looking at the feasibility, benefits and costs of introducing webcasting for public meetings, including but not limited to the Integration Joint Board, Licensing Board and the Pensions Committee.

3. Main report

- 3.1 The benefits to accountability, transparency and public accessibility of webcasting are clear. Meetings of the Council are public meetings but they can now be accessed at the convenience of the viewer. An archive is kept which contains all meetings since webcasting commenced in 2012. Improvements have also been made to support the public's use of webcasting with presentations, motions and amendments being published on the webcasting portal.
- 3.2 Viewing figures for webcasting are mixed and depend on the both meetings involved and the subjects being discussed. For Council and most executive committees live viewings average 50-100 people but there are meetings with items of exceptional public interest that over 1000 people watch. However, some committee meetings do not have the same level of interest and for some of the committee meetings that were dissolved in June 2017, their live viewing figures could often be as low as 20 and these will also include Council staff.
- 3.3 Archive viewing enhances these figures considerably with individuals accessing the archive months after the meeting.
- 3.4 The cost of webcasting has varied from approximately £35,000 in October 2013 to £26,000 per annum in the last financial year. This includes hiring of equipment in two rooms, a full maintenance and service contract and around 220 hours of recording per annum. Additional webcasting would cost approximately £40 per hour, not including the costs of Council staff time. The webcasting contract with Public i expires in 2018 and a procurement exercise is underway to ensure a consistent webcasting service remains available.
- 3.5 Any decision on whether to extend webcasting should take cognisance of the associated costs compared to the expected viewers. This approach has meant that not all Council meetings are currently webcast.

Pensions Committee

- 3.6 The Pensions Committee is a committee of the Council and the decision on whether the meeting should be webcast is one for the City of Edinburgh Council. However, the Pensions Committee is different from executive committees and exists due to the role of the Council as the administrating authority of the fund under the pension regulations. Under these regulations the Committee comes under external scrutiny from the Pensions Board, made up of representatives of employer and member bodies. The Pension Board representatives are present at Committee meetings and play an integral part in discussion and scrutiny of Committee business. Any webcasting of the Committee would involve the Pensions Board as well as committee members and may, due to the recording of discussion, inhibit discussion and questions. As a result, it is recommended that the Council does not impose webcasting but instead offers the facilities and support to enable the Committee to webcast if it chooses to do so.

Licensing Board

- 3.7 The Council is required by the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 to create a Licensing Board within its area. Its membership is determined by the Council but it is not a committee of the Council and its authority is derived directly from the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005.
- 3.8 The support to the Licensing Board is provided by the Council and this support could be extended to include webcasting. However, the decision whether to webcast the meeting is one for the Licensing Board rather than the Council.

Edinburgh Integration Joint Board

- 3.9 The creation of the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB) was required by the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 and it is a separate entity from the City of Edinburgh Council. Although the support to the EIJB comes from the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian and this support could be extended to include webcasting, the decision whether to webcast its meetings is one for the EIJB and not for the Council to determine.

Other Council Committees

- 3.10 The Council webcasts the majority of its committee meetings. It now webcasts Locality Committees which will continue depending on the location of these future meetings. If the meetings are outside the City Chambers then an additional mobile webcasting facility will require to be purchased.
- 3.11 The Council currently does not webcast committees with limited powers such as the Jean F Watson Bequest due to a low level of public interest or Licensing Sub-Committee meetings. For the smaller committees the benefits were thought to be outweighed by the costs involved. With regard to Licensing Sub-Committee meetings, these are quasi-judicial and involve applicants, objectors and supporters addressing the sub-committee on the merits of their views before a decision is made. It was previously felt that webcasting this meeting would inhibit discussion, reduce attendance by applicants and objectors and increase the pressure on individual members of the public. It is not presently recommended that the Council webcast any more of its committees than it currently does outwith the recommendation on Pensions Committee, the EIJB and the Licensing Board.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 To encourage open and transparent discussion and decision making.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 If webcasting support is offered to the Pensions Committee, Licensing Board and EIJB additional officer resources to provide the webcasting support would be

required. Based on the frequency and length of meetings, costs of approximately £500 per annum for Pensions Committee, £1200 per annum for the Licensing Board and £1200 per annum for the EIJB would be incurred above and beyond current resource costs.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Any risk to the extension of webcasting particular meetings should be considered by the relevant Committee as set out in the report.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Webcasting meetings allows a greater ability for the public to view meetings.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There are no sustainability impacts as a result of this report. Webcasting may reduce travel as people can view the meetings at their convenience.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Officers involved in the support of the Pensions Committee, Licensing Board and EIJB have been consulted on this report.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 The City of Edinburgh Council 24 October 2013 – [Webcasting Next Steps](#)

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11. Appendices
