

Briefing Notes

Committee name: Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 26th February 2018

Responsible officer: Democratic Services Manager, Rosalind Reeves
Responsible member: Cabinet Member Corporate Services, Councillor Roger Whyborn

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed. If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the Officer indicated.

Council Chamber sound system

Background and story so far

There is considered to be general agreement amongst members that the Council Chamber sound system is in need of renewal. There are limitations of the current equipment which is now over 12 years old and no longer manufactured and it is not cost effective to carry out anything other than ad hoc repairs as required. Some £75,000 has been put into the draft budget for full Council, being at the high end of what other councils have spent on similar projects. (A Cabinet Member working group has met twice on this subject. In between those two meetings an invitation to tender (ITT) has been developed by CBC, and is now returned by suppliers. Suppliers have been asked to produce a pricing schedule on the basis of a list of essential items and to also provide quotes on a list of features that might be desirable at some point in the future. The tenders will be evaluated on both quality and cost.

At the time of writing bids have not been evaluated and scored so no purchase decisions can be finalised but the bids do give some order of magnitude and enable some prioritisation.

Priorities:

If the most expensive options were purchased an expenditure well above the budget figure is expected to result. This would equip both the Council chamber and Pittville room with a fully wireless integrated system, together with new audio-visual projection equipment, also enabling state of the art webcasting, digital voting, audio-visual recording, and full integration with modern.gov system support and maintenance back-up . However the quantum of this does not seem to be a prudent use of council resources, so some prioritisation is in order.

The working group was able to give clarity on the priorities as follows:

- The working group whilst not able to comment in detail on the pricing of the optional items gave a very clear steer that the council should concentrate its efforts on the 'essentials' as set out in the ITT.
- It was clear that the base system would probably cost in excess of £40,000.
- They had already made clear that a good quality assistive listening package was essential and that recording of meetings, at least audio-recordings was highly desirable.

Wider soundings indicated a strong preference from some members to include webcasting, particularly in recognising the potential for this media to reach hitherto unreached groups, especially those who are not politically engaged. This is possibly even more the case with recordings than live streamings. There is the further potential to make this facility available for outside groups who use the Council chamber if facilities support was available.

It is worth repeating part of Exeter City council's response to us as follows:

"We find that we never really have more than 15-20 people watching a broadcast at once when it's a committee meeting but after a few days, the viewing figures are generally around 2000 views. We live streamed a Scrutiny Committee on the 9th Nov which has currently had 1,600 views here: An Extraordinary meeting of the Council on the 12th Oct has now had more than 6,000 views.... Another Extraordinary meeting was held on the 19th July which has now had about 8.600 views:"

Direction of travel:

I am therefore minded to recommend to Cabinet that we prioritise spending as follows:

- Provide new hardwired conference audio system to the Council Chamber as per the ITT specification, with all necessary system control, sound mixing and amplification,
- Provide 'Assistive Listening' solution to the Council Chamber and Public Gallery in order to comply with the Equality Act.
- Installation and commissioning, including training.
- Simple –though potentially expandable - webcasting and audio-visual recording system.

I am also minded to recommend putting aside the (c£25K) balance of £75,000 for the following:

- The system in the Pittville room is currently fully functional, but at some point in the next few years will require renewal, particularly if it sees increased usage in the future.
- Likewise the visual (projector) system is fully functional, but will soon require renewal.
- Support costs for webcasting and up to 5 years of maintenance contract.

This will give us a good quality and fit-for-purpose system in the chamber with assistive listening, and well as introducing to Cheltenham the ability for both local media and the general public to see and hear electronically what goes on in Council meetings without attending.

This has been very successful at Exeter City Council, and is also in use elsewhere in the county. This approach gives a route forward, and importantly reserves funds for the renewal of other systems, as in the Pittville Room and the visual projection system, at whatever point needed.

Next Steps:

This briefing note will sent to Cabinet on 6th March 2018. A full report will be brought to Cabinet once the evaluation of tender bids is completed.

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Cabinet Member (Corporate Services)

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