

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Strategic Lead - Regulatory****West Dunbartonshire Council: 28 August 2019**

Subject: Audio Streaming of Council Meetings**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To request approval from Council to continue with the audio streaming of full Council and certain committee meetings.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Council is asked to agree:

- (a) that the audio-streaming of Council meetings should continue for all ordinary and special meetings of full Council and the undernoted service committees:
- Corporate Services Committee;
 - Educational Services Committee;
 - Infrastructure and Regeneration Committee;
 - Housing and Communities Committee; and
- (b) that officers should seek the best pricing option with the existing contractor to deliver the audio-streaming requirements of this Council.

3. Background

- 3.1** At the meeting of the Council held on 8 March 2018 when approving the revenue estimates for 2019/20, it was agreed that certain Council meetings be recorded and live streamed to the public as a one year pilot to run from August 2018 at an annual cost of £3900.
- 3.2** Following a procurement exercise to identify the best price for the service, testing of the preferred audio-streaming software commenced in August 2018 in the Civic Space, Dumbarton. After completion of some technical work in the Council Chamber, Clydebank Town Hall to facilitate the new service, the live streaming of council meetings commenced in November 2018. Since that time, 22 Council and committee meetings have been recorded and published via the Council's website.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The key aim of the live audio streaming of the council meetings was to improve accessibility and accountability of decision making to the general public.

- 4.2** The audio streaming software captures the number of listeners accessing the service at any given time and presents this information in various formats which is useful to assess the effectiveness of the audio-streaming pilot. The total number of listeners per month for the period November 2018 to June 2019 is shown in the Appendix to this report. As can be seen from Table 1, the number of listeners per month has been significant but it is noticeable that on those months where full Council meetings have been held, the number of listeners increases considerably given the higher level of public interest in such meetings. Of course, some of these listeners are likely to be Council officers. However, it should also be noted that during the recording of the Council meeting in February and in May there were some connection issues with the audio-streaming server which resulted in listeners being disconnected and then reconnected to the server thus giving a false number of live listeners. That said, the number of archive listeners during these months was also higher than average due to the high level of public interest in listening to these full Council meetings. Following an investigation, the audio-stream provider has acknowledged this issue and has expanded capacity on the server to reduce such issues re-occurring in the future. Officers will continue to monitor the performance of the software and liaise with the provider as required.
- 4.3** Information on the number of live listeners per meeting has been extracted from the audio-streaming analytics and is detailed in Table 2 of the Appendix. As can be seen, the Cultural Committee attracts the least number of live listeners and for this reason it is not recommended that audio-streaming of these meetings should continue. At present, the Council pays for audio-streaming on a monthly basis (£325 per month or £3900 per annum) which represents good value when taking into account the number of listeners per month. However, there are other payment options available to the Council within the current contract which might be more cost effective providing the total number of meetings recorded per annum is reduced. Therefore, if the Council agrees to continue with audio-streaming of its meetings, officers will seek the best pricing option with the current provider.
- 4.4** Complaints have been received from members of the public about some elected members not using a microphone or not directing their speech towards the microphones during these meetings. It is important that all Members recognise that the public have a reasonable expectation to hear all of the contributions made during a public meeting and therefore all Members are asked to use the microphones.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no staff implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

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6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** As previously stated, the current cost of providing the audio-streaming service is £3900 per annum. The current audio-streaming contract ends in November 2019 with the option to extend for a further year. Subject to the decision of Council, officers will seek the best pricing option within the existing contract to meet the audio-streaming needs of the Council.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There are no significant risks arising from the recommendations of this report.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** An EIA was carried out prior to the Council decision on 8 March 2018 to introduce the audio-streaming pilot. There are no negative impacts on any equality groups but continuing audio-streaming does enable persons with disabilities to listen to Council meetings in their own homes providing they have access to the internet.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** Officers from Legal and Finance Services have been consulted on the contents of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The audio streaming of Council meetings fits well with the Council's strategic priority to be open, accountable and accessible. It is clear from the number of listeners that Council meetings and the decisions being taken are now more accessible to the public than before.

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Appendices: Audio Streaming - Analysis of Listeners - November 2018 to July 2019.

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: None.

