



<b>Signed off by</b>	Strategic Head of Legal and Governance
<b>Author</b>	Alex Vine, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Telephone</b>	Tel: 01737 276067
<b>Email</b>	alex.vine@reigate-banstead.gov.uk
<b>To</b>	Executive
<b>Date</b>	Thursday 23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2023
<b>Executive Member</b>	Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance

<b>Key Decision Required</b>	Y
<b>Wards Affected</b>	(All Wards);

<b>Subject</b>	Council chamber IT upgrade
----------------	----------------------------

<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>To recommend to Full Council an increase of £0.150 million to the approved Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 to fund the upgrade of hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber.</b>
<b>Reasons for Recommendations</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To ensure that webcasting and hybrid meeting technology is fit for purpose and delivers a reliable service over its lifetime (see paragraph 3.1 of Annex 1).</li> <li>2. To maintain the online accessibility and transparency of formal committee meeting webcasts (see paragraph 3.2 of Annex 1).</li> <li>3. To enable members, officers and members of the public to continue to participate in hybrid committee meetings remotely (see paragraph 3.3 of Annex 1).</li> <li>4. Where possible, to simplify or improve the user experience for operators (Democratic Services) so that the system is easier to setup and use, and more reliable (see paragraph 3.4 of Annex 1).</li> <li>5. Where possible, to explore options for consolidation of support and maintenance contracts for both the equipment and software, for the purpose of (a) improving the efficiency of contract management arrangements; and (b) to identify potential savings (see paragraph 3.5 of Annex 1).</li> </ol>

6. To improve the audio and video quality of our webcasting and hybrid meetings (see paragraph 3.6 of Annex 1).

## **Executive Summary**

The Council webcasts its public Committee meetings, to increase accessibility, openness, and opportunities for public engagement. This was initiated in 2014, following guidance from Members, and supported the Council's Corporate Priority within its 2011-2015 Corporate Plan to improve the visibility, accessibility and transparency of the Council.

Minor enhancements were made to the equipment in 2021 to enable its use for hybrid meetings, which has provided further benefits for the accessibility of meetings for members of the public, elected Members and officers.

However, the equipment is now at the end of its lifetime, is regularly experiencing technical failures, and is overdue for replacement to ensure the continuation of hybrid meetings and webcasting capabilities in the chamber.

This report therefore seeks approval of an increase of £0.150 million to the approved Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 to fund the upgrade of hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber.

In accordance with [Procedure Rule 6.1.3 of Part 4](#) of the Council's Constitution, a decision outside the approved budget can only be taken by a meeting of the Full Council.

## **Statutory Powers**

1. There is no statutory requirement for the local authority to webcast or live stream its public meetings.
2. Regulation 4 of The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 places a general duty on the local authority to provide reasonable facilities for members of the public to attend and report on its public meetings.

## **Background**

3. The webcasting hardware and software in the New Council Chamber was set up in 2014 and is now eight years' old. Minor enhancements were made to the equipment in 2021 to enable its use for hybrid meetings, which has provided further benefits for the accessibility of meetings for members of the public, elected Members and officers.
4. A project brief to replace the equipment was prepared in 2019/20 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. The system is now failing regularly, resulting in frequent interruptions to the webcasting and hybrid meeting service. This project aims to upgrade the equipment in the chamber to modernise, improve and simplify our technical and supporting contractual arrangements so that we can provide a reliable webcasting and hybrid meeting service for the next eight years (the expected lifetime of the equipment).

## **Key Information**

## Business case

6. Section 3 ('Project justification') of Annex 1 of this report provides a detailed explanation of the project's objectives and why it is considered necessary to replace the webcasting and hybrid meeting equipment in the chamber now.
7. Section 4 ('Recommended solution') of Annex 1 outlines the recommended solution for delivering the project objectives, which is informed by soft market testing with potential suppliers.
8. Section 7 ('Project timeline') of Annex 1 sets out the proposed timetable for the procurement and project planning, delivery (during October 2023), and return to business as usual (by November 2023).

## Options

Executive has four options:

**Option 1:** to seek approval to an increase of £0.150 million to the approved Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 to fund the upgrade of hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber. This is the recommended option.

**Option 2:** To not replace the equipment – this is not recommended because not replacing the equipment will risk continued failure of the equipment and supporting software, leading to loss of, or continued interruption to, the webcasting and/or hybrid meeting capabilities in the chamber (see paragraph 5.1 of Annex 1).

**Option 3:** To decommission the current equipment and cease webcasting of meetings – this is not recommended because it would result in a loss of hybrid meeting capabilities (requiring members and officers to be present in the chamber for all meetings) and webcasting functionality, effecting the accessibility and transparency of meetings for members of the public, press, Members and officers (see paragraph 5.2 of Annex 1).

**Option 4:** To seek a chamber-sharing arrangement with a neighbouring authority with webcasting facilities - this is not recommended because it may result in scheduling conflicts and require additional consultation between partners when planning their annual calendars of meetings, particularly when meetings are rescheduled or convened at short notice; and it may result in an increase in travel and subsistence costs and be less convenient for Members, officers and members of the public (see paragraph 5.3 of Annex 1).

## Legal Implications

9. Paragraphs 1 to 2 of this report explain that there is no specific statutory requirement for the Council to provide a webcasting or hybrid meeting service.
10. If funding for this project is approved, appropriate continuity measures are planned to ensure that public meetings remain accessible and transparent in accordance with the law whilst work is undertaken to replace the equipment in the chamber. These measures are outlined under Section 6 ('Risks') of Annex 1.

## Financial Implications

### Capital Programme

11. The approved Capital Programme does not include capacity to implement the proposals in this report . It is therefore necessary to seek approval from Council to an increase of £0.150 million to the approved Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 to fund the upgrade of hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber.

### Revenue Budget

12. The capital expenditure will be funded through prudential borrowing; the estimated borrowing cost for this capital investment over a five-year term is £0.024m.
13. In addition, this project commits the Council to ongoing operating costs (for licensing of the webcasting software) which is estimated to cost up to £0.123 million over the eight-year lifetime of the equipment. These costs will be funded within the service's current revenue budget.
14. Further details are provided at Section 9 ('Finance') of Annex 1 to this report.

### **Equalities Implications**

15. Equalities implications are detailed under paragraph 10.3 of Annex 1.
16. In summary, this project supports the equalities objectives of the authority by promoting accessibility of our public meetings for Members, officers and members of the public. It also enables parents and carers to participate in meetings they would otherwise be unable to.

### **Communication Implications**

17. Communication implications are detailed under paragraph 10.4 of Annex 1.
18. In summary, a decision not to fund this project may have a negative impact on public awareness and transparency of the work of the authority. However, there are also communications challenges in terms of funding this project outside of the agreed budget for 2023/24 in the context of the Financial Sustainability Programme and other competing demands during a cost-of-living crisis.

### **Environmental Sustainability Implications**

19. Paragraph 10.2 of Annex 1 considers the environmental sustainability implications of this project, including the impact of hybrid and webcasting meetings on travel and subsistence and recycling and disposal of the redundant equipment.

### **Risk Management Considerations**

20. Section 6 ('Risks') of Annex 1 considers the risks of delivering the project and how these will be mitigated, such as supply chain disruption, market competition, and temporary or complete loss of chamber facilities.

### **Consultation**

21. A business case seeking approval for the project was supported by the officer Organisation Board at its meeting on 12 January 2023, subject to funding approval by the Executive and Full Council and consideration of their comments, which are addressed under Section 8 of Annex 1 to this report.
22. Group Leaders received a briefing paper explaining the headline objectives and funding implications of the project at their meeting on 23 January 2023. Their comments and amendments are also addressed under Section 8 of Annex 1 of this report.
23. No specific observations or concerns were raised by Executive Members in relation to the draft report presented at the Leaders meeting on 27 February 2023.

### **Policy Framework**

24. The webcasting service was introduced in 2014 as an important part of delivering a corporate priority within the 2010 – 2015 Corporate Plan, as follows –  
*“The Council will be more visible to its residents in future and operate in an open and transparent way. We will communicate effectively and actively encourage resident involvement in the development and delivery of our services and improvement schemes.”*
25. Whilst the priorities within the Corporate Plan have changed since 2011-2015, the provision of a webcasting service continues to support the Council’s demonstration of good governance under principle 2 of its Code of Corporate Governance:  
***Principle 2 - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.***  
*Local government is run for the public good, organisations therefore should ensure openness in their activities. Clear, trusted channels of communication and consultation should be used to engage effectively with all groups of stakeholders, such as individual citizens and service users, as well as institutional stakeholders.*

### **Background Papers**

None.

Annex 1 – Project Business Case: Council Chamber IT Upgrade