Annex 1 – Project business case: Council Chamber upgrade 2023/24

This report seeks funding for a corporate project to upgrade the hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber.

20 February 2023

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Reigate & Banstead
BOROUGH COUNCIL
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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 and is overdue for replacement to ensure the continuation of hybrid meetings and webcasting capabilities in the chamber. This report therefore seeks funding for a corporate project to upgrade the hybrid meeting and webcasting equipment in the New Council Chamber.

2. Background

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.

A project brief to replace the equipment was prepared in 2019/20 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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).

3. Project justification: why do we need to upgrade the equipment?

3.1. To ensure our webcasting and hybrid meeting technology is fit for purpose and delivers a reliable service over its lifetime.

3.1.1. The technology is now failing more frequently, including but not limited to:

Figure 1 - A table which demonstrates IT failures relating to the webcasting and hybrid meeting system during the 2022 calendar year.

Event	What failed	Impact
Overview and Scrutiny, 24 February 2022	Remote meeting software cable port failure	Loss of remote participant audio. Meeting adjourned.
Audit Committee, 14 June 2022	Failure of audio in the Chamber	Members in the chamber unable to hear remote participants.
Audit Committee, 7 September 2022	Server connection failed	Loss of live webcast and poor audio quality on recorded webcast.
Extraordinary Council, 22 September 2022	Failure of audio in rear public gallery	Public attendees unable to hear Chamber audio.
Commercial Ventures Executive Sub-Committee, 26 September 2022	Failure of microphone integration software - "The remote site can't be reached'	Temporary loss of audio and automated cameras
Overview and Scrutiny, 13 October 2022	Temporary loss of power to microphones on inner horseshoe (stage right of the upper dais).	Temporary loss of audio for speakers seated on the inner horseshoe. Temporary loss of automated camera tracking to live microphones.
Overview and Scrutiny, 8 December 2022	Failure of automated cameras to display the speaker	The webcast didn't display the speaker.

3.1.2. Therefore, the replacement of the IT equipment in the New Council Chamber is necessary if the Council wants to continue to provide a reliable hybrid and webcasting facility for Members, officers, and residents.

3.2. To maintain the online accessibility and transparency of our formal committee meeting webcasts.

3.2.1. 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."*

3.2.2. 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.

3.2.3. This is reflected in webcasting statistics since 2015, which demonstrates increasing public interest in, and use of, the webcasting service as a means of observing public meetings:

Figure 2 - A table which provides statistical information about the number of views and visits to the Council's webcasting site and video recordings of committee meetings.

Period	Views The number of times a webcast has been played. The view must be for a minimum of one minute.	Visits The number of visits to a page. Robots and web crawlers can sometimes affect the total.
1 Nov 2015 – 31 Oct 2016	2008	3,528
1 Nov 2016 – 31 Oct 2017	1930	4,212
1 Nov 2017 – 31 Oct 2018	1910	3,804
1 Nov 2018 – 31 Oct 2019	5967	13,008
1 Nov 2019 – 31 Oct 2020	3864	10,472
1 Nov 2020 – 31 Oct 2021	6266	16,437
1 Nov 2021 – 31 Oct 2022	6105	21,370

3.2.4. Between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022, the Council's Mod.Gov website, which displays all agendas, reports and minutes for committee meetings, recorded 9,079 visits. During the same period, the Council's webcasting site reached 6,105 viewers. Although a proportion of those visits and views will represent officers and Members of the Council, the variability of views between each meeting suggests that the vast majority are likely to be members of the public. The webcasting therefore represents good value in terms of communicating and engaging with residents, community stakeholders and the press.

3.2.5. The current IT infrastructure in the chamber is overdue for replacement and regularly failing. This project seeks to upgrade the equipment, allowing us to maintain the transparency and openness of our decision-making process and therefore good governance.

3.2.6. In addition, whilst the Town Hall already has facilities for people with disabilities to attend public meetings in person, the provision of hybrid meetings and webcasting facilities further improves the accessibility of our public meetings for people with limited mobility.

3.3. To enable members, officers and members of the public to continue to participate in hybrid committee meetings remotely.

3.3.1. The Council's Hybrid Working Panel meeting on 19 August 2021 made the following recommendation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee –

- *"Maintaining the positive elements of hybrid working in a post-pandemic world was an opportunity to improve delivery of Council services for the benefit of residents."*

3.3.2. With that recommendation in mind, some of the relevant benefits reported to the Overview and Scrutiny and Employment Committees included:

    a. Members with young families and caring responsibilities reported that they had been able to attend more formal and informal meetings when meeting virtually.

    b. Employers had an opportunity to attract candidates from a wider talent pool without the same geographical constraints.

    c. Staff productivity and engagement whilst working remotely had been high.

    d. With fewer journeys to the Town Hall, there were considerable benefits both for the environment, with fewer cars on the roads, and in considerable accumulated time (and money) saved from not travelling to Town Hall.

3.3.3. Whilst not an exhaustive list, as this paragraph is not intended to provide a justification for the much broader topic of hybrid working arrangements, it illustrates the benefits of hybrid meetings provided by the IT infrastructure in the chamber.

3.3.4. In addition, the Full Council meeting on 2 December 2021 voted to support a motion which called for the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State calling for legislation to enable remote voting at committee meetings on the basis that –

- *"Whilst we will always want councillors to be able to meet in person, there needs to be the provision for some to be online, for example if they are vulnerable, have caring responsibilities or difficulties with transport. It is also in line with reducing carbon emissions to zero by 2030."*

3.3.5. This provides a public commitment for the Council to continue to provide hybrid committee meetings for the foreseeable future, as part of delivering the Council's environmental sustainability objectives.

3.3.6. This project will enable that commitment, by ensuring the hybrid and webcasting equipment in the chamber is functional and reliable.

3.4. 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.

3.4.1. This should either reduce or remove the need for a dedicated operator (in addition to the clerk), leading to reduced demand on resources.

3.4.2. Currently, the Democratic Services team supports approximately sixty webcasted meetings per municipal year, requiring two officers: one to clerk the meeting and another to setup and run the webcasting equipment.

3.4.3. On average, the webcasting officer will spend approximately three and a half evening hours onsite after ordinary business hours to test and run the webcasting software in the lead up to and during each evening meeting, which will be taken as 'time off in lieu' (TOIL) during ordinary business hours. This estimate is based on recorded meeting start and end times during the 2022-23 municipal year.

3.4.4. Meeting statistics for the 2022-23 municipal year also indicate that approximately 195 working hours are unnecessarily spent each municipal year running an overly complex webcasting and hybrid meeting system. Based on the 2022-23 webcasting rota and officer pay rates, this would equate to approximately £4,070 (including 'on-costs' to cover the provision of statutory benefits such as pensions and holiday pay etc.).

3.4.5. Whilst a relatively modest saving could be made to the salary budget, the hours saved in unnecessary TOIL could provide a valuable growth in capacity and resourcing in both the Democratic Services and the Mayoral Team to promote the governance and civic functions of the Council.

3.5. 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.

3.5.1. The current arrangements for technical maintenance and support are as follows:

Figure 3 – A table explaining which suppliers are responsible for each part of the webcasting and hybrid meeting IT system in the New Council Chamber.

Aspect	Provider
• **Webcasting software**	• External supplier (A)
• **Hardware**	• External supplier (B)
• **Network**	• ICT (internal)

3.5.2. The current arrangements regularly present operational challenges, such as –

a. Troubleshooting technical errors with three different service providers presents challenges in terms of establishing ownership and resolving the root cause quickly, particularly given most issues arise within 2 – 3 hours of the meeting start time, when the equipment is tested.

b. The Democratic Services team have observed poor quality of technical support at times, however –

c. Managing a supplier's performance and contract is impractical when:

   (i) there is a lack of clarity and ownership of the root cause as a result of dividing responsibility between three service providers; and,

   (ii) ownership of the contracts is shared between Democratic Services and ICT.

d. A single contract for one supplier to manage the technical maintenance and support of both the software and hardware may provide a potential saving instead of procuring multiple contracts for different aspects of one system.

3.5.3. This project therefore seeks to attempt to address these challenges as a by-product of replacing the failing equipment, which will require the procurement of a new contract(s).

3.6. To improve the audio and video quality of our webcasting and hybrid meetings.

3.6.1. As detailed under 3.1, a frequent issue is the failure of the audio in the chamber.

3.6.2. Members, officers, and Members of the public have regularly complained about the audio quality, particularly in the rear of the chamber, on several occasions during 2022 and has come to the attention of Group Leaders.

3.6.3. The audio quality is determined by a variety of factors which are not always the fault of the equipment, such as the proximity and direction of the speaker to their microphone.

3.6.4. However, due to the regularity of complaints about the audio and the need to replace the equipment, this project provides a timely opportunity for the provision of an improved microphone system, room audio system (if necessary), and an onsite acoustic assessment. This will ensure that all equipment-related issues concerning the poor audio quality have been addressed.

3.6.5. In addition, the replacement of the camera system would improve the video quality by enabling a high-definition live video feed. Currently our webcasting video quality is relatively poor.

4. Recommended solution

4.1. Summary

4.1.1. To procure a contract for the replacement of the IT infrastructure in the New Council Chamber, including the replacement of the microphone consoles, automated camera system, supporting audio and video software and systems, projector and TV display system, integration of systems to support hybrid meetings and webcasting of meetings, and the replacement of carpets in the chamber (at the discretion of Members and officers).

4.2. Primary objectives

4.2.1. **MICROPHONES:** For the delivery of microphone consoles for 45 Members, plus 5 seats on the upper dais, and 1 lectern microphone –

    a. Users must be able to mute and unmute their microphones via their microphone console unit.

    b. The Chairperson's console must have the ability to override / mute all other microphones (excluding the audio input for the remote meeting software, which can be managed via that software on the Chair's tablet device).

4.2.2. **CAMERAS:** For the delivery of an automated, high-quality image, wide angle (capable of viewing the entire outer horseshoe when zoomed-out) camera system which zooms into, and clearly displays, the active speaker's seat.

4.2.3. **PRESENTATION / DISPLAY EQUIPMENT:**

    a. Meeting administrators must be able to switch the projectors and display equipment on/off centrally. The video/audio should automatically default to the hybrid meeting source, with an option to select an alternative source if required.

    b. Presenters must be able to display their slides either remotely via the virtual meeting software, or via an HDMI input located within the chamber.

    c. The display image must be clear and bright enough to be visible when the lights in the chamber are switched on.

4.2.4. **HYBRID MEETINGS:** Attendees must be able to join meetings remotely in a hybrid meeting environment, whereby (notwithstanding any local device/connectivity issues):

    a. Remote participants can be seen and heard by all attendees within the chamber.

    b. Speakers within the chamber can be seen and heard by all remote participants.

    c. Presenters, either remote or in the chamber, can display their presentation slides to all attendees in the chamber and remote participants, via:

        i. Input: via shared screen in remote meeting software, or via HDMI connection in the chamber.

        ii. Output: via projector and display screens (mirrored display) in the chamber.

4.2.5. WEBCASTING OR LIVE STREAMING OF MEETINGS: Members of the public and press must be able to view, via webcast, streaming service, or recorded video, a live video and audio feed of our hybrid meetings in which both speakers within the chamber and remote participants can be clearly seen and heard.

4.2.6. OPERATORS: The system must be simple enough to be reliably operated by one member of staff, allowing them to clerk the meeting simultaneously without requiring further attention (except when necessary to pause and restart the live webcast / video and audio feed during exempt business).

4.3. Secondary objectives

4.3.1. MICROPHONES: preferably, the consoles should (excluding the lectern mic):

   a. Include ID card capabilities, to correctly display the name of the user to observers and the webcast.

   b. Include recorded voting functionality, which allows the user to either vote for, against or abstain, and for the results to be collated and displayed centrally.

4.3.2. CONTRACTS: where possible, in respect of contractual arrangements for the provision of technical maintenance and support for all associated equipment and software, and with a view to improving the clarity and documentation of the roles and responsibilities and performance management of service providers, to either –

   a. consolidate the contractual arrangements so that one supplier is solely responsible for the quality and maintenance of both the equipment and software (subject to compliance with contract procurement requirements and a fair bidding process); or,

   b. where consolidation of contracts isn't possible, to review existing and any new associated contracts and service level agreements to ensure the roles and responsibilities, troubleshooting reporting processes, and contract performance arrangements are clearly distinguished and effective, so that ownership and resolution of future technical issues is improved; or,

   c. consider alternative options for live streaming instead of webcasting. The benefits, costs and implications of this approach have yet to be fully considered, and would be the subject of a detailed appraisal by the project team during the procurement process when detailed bids are submitted, however the core objective of maintaining the accessibility and transparency the Council's meetings would be the main guiding principle for the decision.

4.3.3. CARPETS: Replacing the IT equipment requires removing the carpet to install new cabling. It may be possible for the existing carpet to be temporarily removed and reinstalled, which would reduce the cost of the project by approximately £20,000. However, it is possible that the process of removing the carpet may cause or require damage to the existing carpet.

4.3.4. The existing carpet has been in place since 2014 and a judgement by Members will be required to determine whether the current condition of the carpet necessitates replacement, or whether it will still be fit for purpose until the next opportunity to replace

it in eight years' time (when the lifetime of any new equipment ends if funding for this project is approved).

4.3.5.   Desktop research indicates that the average lifespan for a medium quality carpet is approximately eight to ten years, which aligns with the expiry of the equipment. This report therefore recommends that the carpet should be replaced at the same time as the equipment is upgraded.

5. Alternative options

5.1.   To not replace the equipment

Loss of webcasting and transparency

5.1.1.   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.

5.1.2.   This would harm the accessibility and transparency of our decision-making process and prevent Members, officers, and members of the public from attending committee meetings remotely.

5.1.3.   Webcasting our meetings helps the Council to demonstrate principle 2 of our Code of Corporate Governance, which concerns "ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement". Choosing not to replace the equipment will harm our ability to demonstrate principle 2 of our Code of Corporate Governance.

Loss of hybrid meeting capabilities

5.1.4.   Choosing not to replace the equipment that supports hybrid committee meetings will result in continued interruption to, and eventually a total loss of, our ability to support hybrid committee meetings.

5.1.5.   Whilst the Executive Meeting Room could accommodate up to 20 people in person for hybrid meetings, it would not be suitable for Full Council meetings (45+ attendees) or Planning Committee meetings (e.g. when there is high public interest in the business of the meeting).

5.1.6.   This would require Members, officers, and members of the public to attend committee meetings in person. As a result, the benefit of hybrid working, as detailed under paragraph 3.3, would be lost.

5.2.   To decommission the current equipment and cease webcasting of meetings

5.2.1.   This option is not recommended, as 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.

5.2.2. As detailed under paragraph 3.2, webcasting our meetings helps the Council to demonstrate principle 2 of our Code of Corporate Governance, which concerns "ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement".

5.2.3. Officers and Members will also not have access to hybrid meeting facilities (except for the Executive Meeting Room, which only supports 20 participants) for other types of meetings.

5.2.4. Lastly, to cease webcasting will likely result either in a loss of democratic participation by residents and public speakers; or an increase in members of the public and press attending meetings in person. Both potential outcomes present costs in terms of harming our governance or managing practical challenges.

5.3. To seek a chamber-sharing arrangement with a neighbouring authority with webcasting facilities

5.3.1. This option is not recommended, as 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.

5.3.2. Whilst the use of Woodhatch Place (Surrey County Council's Headquarters) is located in Reigate and may mitigate the potential for evening meeting clashes, as their current preference is to convene committee meetings during the daytime:

   a. There is no guarantee that either organisation would not seek to change their conventional meeting start times in the future, which would present immediate disruption to the continued use of shared facilities; and,

   b. Licensing and Regulatory Sub-Committee hearings are required to be convened at short notice, which would amplify challenges with scheduling these meetings in consultation with a third party. Furthermore, due to the short notice required to convene these meetings, they typically take place during the daytime to enable the attendance of applicants and officers – which would likely result in a scheduling conflict with Surrey County Council's daytime committee meetings.

   c. Setting up a meeting room and webcasting equipment usually requires at least two hours to complete. The Council's preference is to set up at least 3-4 hours in advance to allow time for any errors to be addressed. Whilst Surrey County Council's daytime meetings would usually be expected to conclude well in advance of the Council's 19:30pm meeting start times, the additional time required to set up the meeting onsite may result in a delay to the start time of the Council's meetings in the event of a longer Surrey County Council committee meeting.

5.3.3. Changing the location of committee meetings to another site may increase the costs associated with travel and subsistence for Members and officers.

5.3.4. It may also be less convenient and accessible for residents within Reigate and Banstead. Officers and Members may also not have access to hybrid meeting facilities (except for the Executive Meeting Room, which only supports 20 participants) for other types of meetings.

5.3.5. There would be no guarantee that the webcast functionality will be supported on our website, as it would have been configured for the host authority's website.

5.3.6. Third party use of another local authority's webcasting facilities may not be permitted contractually by the supplier.

6. Risks

Figure 4 – A table describing the expected risks and mitigating control measures.

Risk description	Mitigating actions/controls
6.1. Supply chain disruption – longer lead-in times for equipment requires additional time between award of contract and project delivery	Early engagement with potential suppliers will identify lead-in times so this can be built into the project plan.
6.2. Competing demand and limited market means choice over project delivery window is restrained	An alternative window has been identified as a backup – during the month of October. There are only two committee meetings scheduled (Overview and Scrutiny and Executive) in October, so disruption will be limited if the work cannot be carried out during summer recess (August).
6.3. Temporary loss of webcasting and hybrid meeting functionality whilst work to replace and test the equipment is ongoing	Work is to be carried out during either summer recess (August) or October (fewer meetings) to minimize the impact on the conduct of meetings. If work commences in October, meetings of Overview and Scrutiny and Executive can be conducted in the Executive Meeting room temporarily until the work is concluded.
6.4. Complete failure of the project to deliver a working solution within the project delivery window, leading to loss of webcasting functionality in the chamber	• Use Executive meeting room and Polycom hybrid equipment for all meetings except Full Council until the chamber is available again. • Full Council meetings to be conducted in the chamber (if possible) without webcasting facilities; or, an alternative venue to be identified (e.g. Harlequin) for temporary use until the chamber is operable again.
6.5. Temporary loss of the chamber - failure of the project to deliver a working solution within the project delivery window, leading to temporary loss of the chamber and unplanned disruption to scheduled meetings	As detailed within the Service Business Continuity Plan, affected meetings to be relocated or rescheduled as appropriate, either: a) In an alternative room in the Town Hall (e.g. Old Council Chamber); b) At Harlequin; or, c) By requesting the temporary use of Woodhatch Place (subject to availability and approval by Surrey County Council).

7. Project timeline

7.1. Phase 1: Project and funding approval (Q3, 2022/23 – Q4, 2022/23)

Figure 5 – A table describing the Phase 1 milestones and actions planned between quarters 3 and 4 of the 2022/23 municipal year. Phase 1 aims to secure approval and funding for the project.

Month	Milestones / actions
November 2022	• Project brief signed-off by Organisation Board.
December 2022	• Soft market testing to develop procurement requirements, identify potential suppliers and scope budget requirement.
January 2023	• Business case signed-off by Organisation Board on 12 January 2023.
February 2023	• Prepare Procurement Engagement Plan (PEP) based on business case and confirm procurement route / timeline.
March 2023	• **Approval of funding for this project at Executive and Full Council in March**

7.2. Phase 2: Procurement (Q4, 2022/23 – Q1, 2023/24)

Figure 6 - A table describing the Phase 2 milestones and actions planned between quarter 4 of the 2022/23 municipal year and quarter 1 of the 2023/24 municipal year. Phase 2 focusses on procuring and awarding a contract to deliver the technical specification to upgrade IT equipment in the chamber.

Month	Milestones / actions
April 2023	• Invite bids from suppliers (allowing a minimum of four weeks between notice of bidding process and submission deadline). • Onsite appraisals from prospective suppliers (if required); and acquire testimonials / appraisals from other clients. • Request indicative project plans from bidders.
May 2023	• Complete scoring / evaluation of bids.
June 2023	• Award of contract; draft and sign contract in consultation with Legal and procurement advisors.

	• Project team meeting with Democratic Services, Facilities Management and ICT to consider deliverables and milestones in draft project plan. • Inform Members and officers about the project (what is happening, why, when etc.) and that the chamber will be unavailable for all meetings throughout October. • Block-book the chamber in October to prevent double-bookings • Prepare draft responses / lines to take with the public in event of public interest in the refit.

7.3. Phase 3: Project planning (Q2, 2023/24)

Figure 7 – A table describing the Phase 3 milestones and actions during quarter 2 of the 2023/24 municipal year. Phase 3 aims to plan the delivery of the project with the successful supplier, in consultation with internal stakeholders such as Democratic Services, ICT and Facilities Management.

Month	Milestones / actions
July 2023	• Project team meeting (1) with appointed supplier, Democratic Services, Facilities and ICT to sign-off: Project Plan, Risk Register and Onboarding Plan (including user acceptance testing and operator training plan).
August 2023	• Project planning – fortnightly meetings (2) • Member newsletter article / Knowledge article reminder to Members and staff about changes to location of Overview and Scrutiny and Executive meetings during October 2023.
September 2023	• Project planning – weekly meetings (4)

7.4. Phase 4: Project delivery (Q2, 2023/24)

Figure 8 – A table describing the Phase 4 milestones and actions during quarter 2 of the 2023/24 municipal year. Phase 4 aims to deliver the project in October 2023, with a return to 'business as usual' in November 2023.

Month	Milestones / actions
October 2023	1 October – 30 October, work to commence in the chamber to: • Remove the carpet (2 days) • Replace the equipment. (10 days) • Replace the carpet. (3 days) • Test the equipment. (1 day)

	• Deliver training for operators. (1 day) • Complete user acceptance testing. (1 day) **Milestone**: agenda publication deadline for Planning Committee on 1 November 2023 is Tuesday 24 Nov 2023. If there is any expected / known delay to project delivery in the chamber, a decision will need to be made about whether to publish the agenda with the New Council Chamber as the location of the meeting (a risk); or change the location of the meeting temporarily to the Old Council Chamber / Executive Meeting Room as required.
November 2023	1 November 2023, Planning Committee – first committee meeting when the equipment is expected to be fully operational.

8. Consultation

8.1. Organisation Board, 12 January 2023

8.1.1. The Organisation Board approved a business case for this project at its meeting on 12 January 2023, subject to consideration of the following points:

a. **A chamber sharing arrangement.** This point has been addressed under paragraph 5.3.

b. **Financial sustainability programme**. It was noted that, as part of the Financial Sustainability Programme, the Council is looking at ways to ensure best value is derived from its assets, including its offices and administrative centre. It was queried whether it may be appropriate to hold on the replacement of the equipment in the New Council Chamber. This implication has been considered under paragraph 10.1.

c. **Recycling of replaced equipment**. This point has been addressed under paragraph 10.2.

8.2. Group Leaders, 23 January 2023

8.2.1. Group Leaders received a briefing paper explaining the headline objectives and funding implications of the project at their meeting on 23 January 2023. The paper sought to gauge political support for the proposal for funding approval was sought from the Executive and Full Council in March 2023.

8.2.2. Group Leaders requested that the following options be added to the proposal:

a. **A larger screen for the Chair, possibly installed in the desk, rather than a tablet.**

Provision of a large display monitor linked to a Chair's laptop is considered achievable within the existing funding requirement and can be included as part of the detailed technical specification for the procurement process.

b. **The spotlights on the dais affect the projector screen.**

Group Leaders therefore sought an option for these spotlights to be disabled when the projector screen is in use. This is a programming task which is considered achievable within the existing funding requirement and can be included as part of the detailed technical specification for the procurement process.

c. **The room camera view doesn't display all seats in the chamber.** Group Leaders therefore sought a wider camera angle to enable all Members to be observed at once when the room-view was shown. Wide angle camera lenses which are capable of capturing all seats in the chamber was already included as a requirement during soft market testing. This requirement can also be reflected in the technical specification for the procurement process.

8.2.3. In relation to the business case, Group Leaders suggested that the cost of one member of staff as opposed to two should be included as part of the business case.

8.2.4. The estimated costs detailed under paragraph 3.4 have now been recalculated for one member of staff as accurately as possible, by:

- reviewing the meeting duration statistics for the 2022/23 municipal year to calculate the average number of overtime hours spent setting up and running the equipment for each meeting in the calendar.

- Reviewing the webcasting rota to confirm which officer was assigned to webcasting duties for each meeting.

- Multiplying each officer's hourly pay rate against the number of hours for each evening meeting they were assigned to and calculating the sum of all those costs for the 2022/23 municipal year (including on-costs).

8.2.5. Group Leaders also sought further explanation about how the project would benefit residents. The benefits to residents have been detailed within this report as follows –

    a. **Transparency -** paragraph 3.2 explains that the project aims to maintain the online accessibility and transparency of our formal committee meeting webcasts. This is reflected in increasing viewing statistics (see paragraph 3.2.3) and empowers residents to engage with local democracy and the decisions affecting them remotely and with greater flexibility.

    b. **Accessibility and equality -** This project also supports the achievement of the Council's equalities objectives. Whilst the Town Hall is accessible for residents, Members and officers with limited mobility (see paragraph 3.2.6), some may prefer the convenience of attending meetings remotely. Furthermore, those with parenting or caring responsibilities already benefit from the flexibility to attend meetings remotely (see paragraph 3.3.2.a).

    c. **Environmental sustainability –** paragraph 3.3.2.d explains that the ability to attend meetings remotely results in fewer journeys to the Town Hall for residents, Members and officers, which helps to lower emissions and congestion in the borough, reduces travel and parking costs for meeting attendees, and associated travel and subsistence claims by Members and officers.

8.3. Leader's meeting, 27 February 2023

8.3.1. A draft report was presented to a Leader's meeting on 27 February to consult Executive Members and receive any observations before publication of the report to the Executive on 23 March and Full Council on 30 March 2023.

8.3.2. No specific observations or concerns were raised by Executive Members at the Leaders meeting.

9. Finance

9.1. Costs

Figure 9 – A table outlining the expected costs of the project.

Description	Year 1 £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Year 4 £	Year 5 £	Year 6 £	Year 7 £	Year 8 £	Cumulative total £
Start-up investment/costs	£98,667								£98,667
Delivery Costs	£16,500								£16,500
Implementation Costs	£0								£0
Ongoing Operating Costs [1]	£21,000	£16,000	£17,000	£17,300	£17,600	£18,000	£18,300	£18,600	£143,800
Contingency (10%)	£13,616								£13,616
TOTAL	**£149,783**	£16,000	£17,000	£17,300	£17,600	£18,000	£18,300	£18,600	£272,583 [2]

[1] **Ongoing operating costs –** *are adjusted for the consumer price index by 8% in years two and three, and ~2% annually thereafter.*

Funding for ongoing operating costs is already included within the revenue budget, so no additional funding for this aspect would be required. Additional funding of £150k is therefore recommended for approval, however approval of the recommendation for £150k funding also commits the Council to continue webcasting for the next eight years at an estimated cumulative cost of £144k.

Use of alternative live streaming services instead of a webcasting service has yet to be fully considered (see paragraph 4.3.2c), and may present potential savings in relation to the ongoing operating costs.

[2] **Cumulative total cost -** *the estimated revenue budget borrowing costs (interest and MRP) for this capital investment are £0.024m over 5 years.*

9.2. Financial benefits

Figure 10 - A table outlining the potential financial benefits of the project.

Description	Year 1 £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Year 4 £	Year 5 £	Year 6 £	Year 7 £	Year 8 £	Cumulative total
Total Revenue Budget – additional income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Revenue Budget - cashable budget savings [3]	-	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	-	-	-	(18,800)
TOTAL	-	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	-	-	-	(18,800)
NET	-	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	(4,700)	-	-	-	(18,800)
Total Revenue Budget – additional income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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[3] *Projections are based on one supplier being to provide the technical maintenance and support as part of a 4-year contract, based on soft-market testing. This saving is therefore subject to the achievement of paragraph 4.3.2a, if that is determined to be the best course of action by the project board (according to the primary objectives of this project listed under section 4.2); and, subject to the Head of ICT offering the residual funding as a revenue budget saving during the annual service and financial planning process. No savings are projected in year 1 as costs for the existing technical maintenance and support contract would overlap with any new contractual arrangement.*

However, as detailed in paragraph 4.3.2c, the use of alternative live streaming services instead of a webcasting service has yet to be fully considered, which may present more substantial potential savings in relation to the ongoing operating costs detailed under Costs Figure 9 – A table outlining the expected costs of the project..

Potential savings because of a reduction in resourcing required to run less complex system (see paragraph 3.4) of approximately £4k are subject to the outcome of a decision by the Pay Review Panel in relation to any future vacancies arising from normal staff turnover. This potential saving is therefore not included in Figure 10.

10. Other considerations

10.1. Financial Sustainability Programme

10.1.1. This project requires a significant investment to deliver the project, at a time when the Council is delivering its financial sustainability programme. In view of this, one alternative option is to continue using the existing equipment, however the impact of doing nothing is considered under paragraph 5.1. This is not recommended as the equipment has passed its expected lifetime, is beginning to fail, and will eventually fail completely, leading to either an immediate loss of transparency or significant disruption to replace the equipment at short notice, which may not result in the most cost-effective procurement outcome.

10.1.2. The project has the potential to deliver modest revenue budget savings of £4,700 per annum to provide better value technical maintenance and support of the equipment. However, until the benefits of this project have been confirmed in Autumn 2023; and service and financial planning for 2024/25 has commenced, there can be no guarantee that this saving will be realised.

10.1.3. In addition, the expected benefits of this project are to deliver a less complex webcasting and hybrid meeting infrastructure which requires only 1 operator (the clerk) rather than two. This reduction will translate to fewer hours reclaimed as TOIL by Democratic Services Officers to operate a webcasting system at evening meetings. This saving in officer hours will allow us to reallocate resources, leading to increased capacity (in the Democratic Services or Mayoral Team) to support additional work.

10.1.4. Further potential savings may be also identified as part of the procurement process in terms of the ongoing operating costs, which is already funded as part of the annual revenue budget at a cost of approximately £21,000 per annum. The implications of this potential saving is detailed under paragraph 4.3.2c, and is conditional on a decision by the project team based on the primary project objectives detailed under paragraph 4.2.

10.2. Environmental sustainability implications

10.2.1. As detailed under paragraph 3.3.2, the continuation of hybrid meeting capabilities will support the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy by enabling Members, officers and members of the public to participate in meetings remotely, therefore requiring less travel and leading to lower carbon emissions.

10.2.2. A large quantity of obsolete IT equipment will be surplus to requirements because of this project, and therefore disposal of this equipment may have a negative environmental impact if it is not disposed of correctly.

10.2.3. This presents an environmental challenge, which is proposed to be overcome as part of the contract specification during the procurement process. A requirement will therefore be included in the contract specification for the appointed supplier to dispose of any redundant IT equipment responsibly, using a specialist recycling service. This obligation will include a requirement to report on the disposal (and recycling, where possible) to the project team, as part of the contract management plan.

10.3. Equalities implications

10.3.1. The intended outcome of this project is to maintain our webcasting and hybrid meeting service, which improves the accessibility of our public meetings for people with limited mobility.

10.3.2. The continuation of hybrid meetings also supports parents or people with caring responsibilities to participate in meetings remotely which they would otherwise not be able to attend in person.

10.3.3. This project also involves replacing the induction hearing loop in the chamber, which will ensure people with hearing disabilities can continue to observe and participate in our public meetings.

10.4. Communications implications

Externally

10.4.1. A decision not to fund this project will likely result in either an increase in public attendees and members of the press attending committee meetings in person (particularly for matters of increased public interest, such as meetings of the Planning Committee and any planning inquiries); or a loss of accessibility of public meetings and therefore public awareness and accountability of the work of the Council.

10.4.2. A decision to fund this project at an additional cost of £150,000 to upgrade the webcasting and hybrid meeting equipment in the context of a living-cost crisis and other competing needs may present some communications challenges. However, this project will provide residents with transparent and accessible meetings for the next eight years, at a cost of approximately £1 per resident (based on population data for the 2021 census), enabling residents to participate in local democracy and hold their representatives to account. Funding a considered and planned project now may also present better value for money than reacting to a complete loss of the existing equipment in the short term (see paragraph 10.1.1).

10.4.3. The project business case has identified and considered how key external stakeholders will be informed as appropriate, as follows:

Stakeholder	What is the impact	How will this be managed
a) **Members of the public**	Members of the public attend the chamber for the conduct of committee meetings, either attending remotely or in-person. This relies on the maintenance of the IT infrastructure in the chamber, to ensure the continuation of hybrid and webcasting functionality.	Committee agendas and forward plans will be amended to reflect any temporary relocation arrangements, to ensure public attendance and transparency is maintained. Whilst live webcasting is unavailable and where possible, recordings of hybrid committee meetings conducted in the Executive Meeting Room will be uploaded to our website after the meeting.

Internally

10.4.4. The project business case has identified and considered how key stakeholders will be informed and consulted as appropriate, as follows:

Team/organisation	What is the impact	How will this be managed
a) **Democratic Services**	This team is the primary user of the equipment in the chamber. This project should therefore consider the operational impact on the team's ability to continue operating hybrid and webcast meetings.	The project delivery and procurement process is to be led by Democratic Services, which ensures their requirements are considered.
b) **ICT**	This project affects the ICT infrastructure in the New Council Chamber. ICT must therefore be consulted throughout the project to ensure (a) there is wider operational knowledge of the setup in the chamber; and, (b) that the project considers ICT's security and network requirements.	A project support officer to be nominated by the Head of IT is requested to attend project team meetings, ensuring IT are consulted throughout the project.

Team/organisation	What is the impact	How will this be managed
c) **Planning / property**	The Town Hall is a grade II listed building. As the refresh of the IT infrastructure in the chamber involves the replacement of cables, carpets and wall brackets, it is proposed that the planning and property department are consulted as appropriate.	Planning and property officers to be consulted by the Project Manager during: • the procurement phase, as part of the development of contract requirements; and, • the project planning phase, as part of the design and layout planning with the supplier. - to ensure any deliverables are sympathetic and of minimal impact to the character of the chamber.
d) **Facilities Management**	The Facilities Management team supports the building and general provision for staff welfare, such as car parking, caretaking, security, cleaning, meeting rooms, staff facilities, vending and waste disposal. The IT upgrade in the chamber requires the removal and replacement of carpets in the New Council Chamber.	A Facilities Management officer is invited to attend the project team meetings to provide advice and guidance on behalf of the facilities management team. It is also considered appropriate that the purchase and installation of a new carpet in the chamber be arranged by the facilities management team, if a new carpet is required.
e) **Members**	Members use the chamber for the conduct of committee meetings, either attending remotely or in-person. This relies on the maintenance of the IT infrastructure in the chamber, to ensure the continuation of hybrid and webcasting functionality.	• Group Leaders will be consulted and updated regularly (at the start and end of each phase) on the project at Group Leaders' meetings. • Committee Chairs will be consulted by the relevant committee clerk(s) on temporary arrangements for the relocation of meetings during the project delivery phase. All Members will be briefed on the project in June 2023, immediately following the award of a contract (via all-Member email and a newsletter article).

Team/organisation	What is the impact	How will this be managed
f) **Officers (Management Team and Heads of Service)**	Officers use the chamber for the conduct of committee meetings, either attending remotely or in-person. This relies on the maintenance of the IT infrastructure in the chamber, to ensure the continuation of hybrid and webcasting functionality.	The Service Manager will report to the Project Sponsor (Head of Service) on progress following each project team meeting. Management team and Heads of Service will be briefed on the project immediately following the award of a contract.