

10 March 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Corporate and Improvement Services	Author	Richard Clifford ☎ 507832
Title	Review of Meetings and Ways of Working Update		
Wards affected	Not Applicable		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on the initiatives undertaken as a result of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working undertaken by the Governance and Audit Committee in 2016-2017. It provides an update on how the recommendations from the review have been implemented. It also provides information on potential options for webcasting meetings, which would enable the principles of the review to be carried forward further.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To the note the progress on the recommendations arising from the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working.

2.2 To consider the potential benefits of webcasting public meetings and to consider whether to make a recommendation to Cabinet that this be explored further.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

3.1 At its meeting in July 2016 the Governance and Audit Committee requested that a review of meetings and ways of working be undertaken. This decision was subsequently confirmed by Full Council. Following the completion of the review, the Committee made a number of decisions and recommendations, and the Committee has requested an update on the review, looking in particular at streaming and Have Your Say! and identifying other options that would help encourage public engagement with meetings.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 No alternative options are proposed.

5. Background Information

5.1 At its meeting in July 2016 the Governance and Audit Committee requested that a review of meetings and ways of working be undertaken. This decision was subsequently confirmed by Full Council. The objectives of the review were to:-

- Improve public participation at meetings
- Make public meetings more accessible and engaging for residents;
- Make the way we work more flexible to improve the opportunity for an improved diversity of Councillors;
- Offer Councillors a more efficient way of working through the better use of technology.

5.2. Through 2016 and 2017 the review looked at a number of issues to address these objectives, and the views of Councillors and members of the public were sought through meetings and consultation exercises. These included three public meetings to provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak to councillors and the Democratic Services team about the meetings processes. Following the completion of the review, the Committee made a number of decisions and recommendations, which are summarised below.

- The live audio streaming of all public meetings of the Council, Committees and Panels;
- A trial of the use of digital agendas by the Governance and Audit Committee and the Scrutiny Panel. Following the trial digital (paperless) agendas were introduced to all meetings held in rooms where there were suitable facilities (i.e. the Grand Jury Room);
- Changes to the Have Your Say! arrangements in the Meetings General Procedure Rules to allow members of the public one further minute to speak following a response to their initial comments;
- Revised report templates including an executive summary to allow readers to gain a quicker and easier understanding of the main issues;
- The Governance and Audit Committee trialled a later meeting start time but, following the conclusion of the trial and a consultation exercise with Councillors and officers, did not recommend any changes to the 6.00pm start time for formal meetings;
- Further consideration be given to the introduction of mandatory training. This was considered by the Member Development Group which led to the introduction of a requirement that all Councillors undertake training in GDPR, safeguarding and equality and diversity, and that all new chairmen undertake chairing skills training within four months of their appointment;
- A more proactive approach be taken to promoting meetings through social media;
- Options for improving the room for councillors in the Town Hall (known as the Members Room) be considered further by the Group Leaders.

5.3 At its meeting on 29 October 2019 the Governance and Audit Committee requested an update on the review, looking in particular at streaming and Have Your Say! At its meeting on 26 November it also requested that the review look at issues relating to Councillors' access to Council IT systems and to how Councillors were introduced to or made aware of the Council's ethical governance policies.

Live Audio Streaming

5.4 Live audio streaming (broadcasting) of meetings was introduced in March 2017 using a low-cost solution provided by AudioMinutes. Detailed summaries of listening figures demonstrate encouraging levels of engagement, particularly in respect of high-profile meetings such as the Planning Committee meeting on 28 February 2019 when a peak of 214 live listeners was recorded. The most current statistics are set out in the Appendix to this report.

5.5 Experience gained over the last three years has suggested that the audio broadcasts are becoming more of a necessity, certainly attendance at meetings by reporters has diminished and there have been a number of enquiries when technical issues have caused the broadcast uploads to fail. This has prompted consideration about what the public might want from the Council's meetings arrangements, the way meetings are delivered for the Council and what they are like from the public's perspective, which, in turn, has prompted another look at what benefits webcasting might deliver.

5.6 Preliminary discussions have been held with the market leader, Public-i on the basis of an installation in the Council Chamber, integrating with the existing microphone units, with the following indicative costings:-

1. Lease contract – To provide and install three HD quality cameras, webcasting software, hosting and support for a typical 60-hour contract for any period between one and five years starting at £24k for one year, reducing to below £15k annually for a £72k five year contract.
2. Purchase and installation by the Council of cameras, AV rack, associated equipment, integration with microphones and cabling at a cost of approx. £19k plus
Lease contract - Webcasting software, hosting, support and on-line monitoring for a typical 60-hour contract for any period between one and five years starting at £11k for one year, reducing to below £8k annually for a £38k five year contract.

5.7 The Council Chamber has the considerable benefit, so far as webcasting is concerned, of having fixed seating positions and is the current venue for Council and Planning Committee meetings, which would provide coverage of many (but not all) of the most well attended meetings of the Council. Due to their multi-function character, the Grand Jury Room and Moot Hall are less conducive to a webcasting set up and, as such, may require separate portable equipment with additional resource requirement for setting up, or otherwise delivered on a one-off event webcasting service basis.

5.8 Some of the potential benefits of webcasting would be:

Accessibility:

- Transcription / subtitling technology increases accessibility and engagement for those with hearing difficulties
- Software provides viewer with direct access to presentations being made at meetings,
- Software integrates with CMIS and can be followed from the existing Committee pages on the website,
- Creates a Council meeting presence on YouTube and/or Facebook.
- Enables those unable to attend meetings due to health or accessibility reasons to engage with meetings and decision making.

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Transparency:

- Increases the visibility of decision making,
- Improves public access to Council decision making,
- Provides better context than audio streaming,
- Makes meetings easier to follow and understand,
- Raises the profile of decision-making.

Accuracy:

- The video helps keep the content in context while also providing an accurate and reliable record of the meeting;
- Automatic transcription and sub-titling feature.

Sustainability

- Allows meetings to be followed remotely, reducing carbon emissions from transport in line with the Climate Emergency.

Public-i have indicated that they would be very willing to make a presentation to Councillors and/or senior officers.

5.9 The availability of webcasting facilities in the Council Chamber, which is used as a wedding venue, would be a marketable opportunity and could be an additional income source for the Events Company.

5.10 There are also other alternative webcasting providers, such as Auditel which has some local authority clients, whilst other local authorities have moved away from third party providers, opting to develop an in-house solution. There could also be a potential solution through a third party which would deliver an unsophisticated solution using one fixed dome camera and broadcasting using YouTube. This solution is currently being trialled and further information may be forthcoming in future months. However, it would be important to bear in mind that, whilst this type of solution may possibly integrate with the Council's committee pages on the website (CMIS), it would not deliver important added accessibility benefits of sub-titling.

Digital Agendas

5.11 All meetings held in the Grand Jury Room are now run as digital only meetings. This encompasses all routine meetings of the Council's Committees and Panels, except Full Council and Planning Committee. This means that the assumption is that Councillors will not be provided with a hard copy agenda and councillors will access their papers online through the website or the MyCMIS app. It is accepted that the move to digital agendas has been challenging and involved a considerable culture change for councillors and officers. Some councillors have indicated a preference to continue to receive hard copies of agendas and the Democratic Services team do accede to these requests. There is anecdotal evidence that such requests for paper copies of agendas are increasing.

5.12 In terms of copies of agendas for members of the public, one hard copy is always available for members of the public, but experience has shown that the demand for paper copies has lessened and the members of the public are increasingly accessing meeting papers digitally.

5.13 To facilitate the transition to digital agendas, arrangements were made to provide an ipad on a loan basis to those councillors who required a suitable device. Currently a total of six ipads are out on loan.

5.14 The Democratic Services team have provided equipment such as portable charging points to ensure that councillors are able to power their devices during the course of meetings.

5.15 The table below shows the reduction in the Councillors print budget as a result of the move to digital agendas for most Committee and Panel meetings:-

Municipal year	Final outturn on the Democratic Services printing budget
2015-16	£21,633.72
2018-19	£6,649.26

Meeting Rooms

5.16 In order to move forward and roll out digital agendas further for Full Council and Planning Committee meetings, changes to the infrastructure of the Council Chamber would be necessary. This would necessitate the installation of power points and USB points.

Consideration could be given to introducing webcasting alongside digital upgrades to the Council Chamber, to provide power and USB ports to each bench. Indicative costs in 2018 for this was reported to be approx. £12.5k.

5.17 There are a few Councillor seating spaces in the Council Chamber which do not currently have an individual microphone whilst the sloping surface and small dimensions of the bench / desks are challenging constraints in the digital meeting age. In order to facilitate the use of digital agendas in the Council Chamber consideration may need to be given to the purchase and installation of additional microphone units or the entire replacement of the system for a more discreet microphone system to make the desk spaces more usable.

5.18 The infrastructure within the Town Hall can also limit public engagement in the meetings process. The public seating arrangements in the Council Chamber are limited, particularly for Full Council meetings when most of the seating is taken by Councillors. This leaves very limited seating for members of the public and officers at the rear of the Chamber. There is seating for approximately 25 in the public gallery. However, the view from the public gallery is very restricted. In terms of wheelchair access, there is access to the Town Hall from the entrance at the rear of the Town Hall, off St Runwald Street. However, the lift is comparatively small and, without assistance, not all wheelchair users can use it. This need for assistance can also be a deterrent for wheelchair users who wish to readily access the meeting rooms themselves and the restricted space in the Council Chamber when used for Full Council meetings is becoming of increased concern as there is very little capacity to make available even one dedicated space for a wheelchair user wishing to observe or address the meeting.

Have Your Say!

5.19 The Have Your Say arrangements contained in the Meetings General Procedure Rules were amended to allow members of the public a further minute to comment further on any response they may have received in response to their original comments. The aim of this was to make the Have Your Say! element of the meeting more of a dialogue.

5.20 There has been a significant increase in overall numbers of Have Your Speakers at meetings, as shown by the table below, which gives details of numbers of speakers at meetings in 2015-16 municipal year compared with the 2018-19. Cabinet, Council and Local Plan Committee have all seen dramatic increases in the numbers of speakers. Whilst the increase in numbers may in part be a result of a couple of very high profile issues and not be solely attributable to the change in procedures itself, it does indicate an increased public engagement with the Council decision making processes, in line with the objective of the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working project. The introduction of the revised Have Your Say! arrangements has had an impact on the length of the Have Your Say sections of meetings.

Committee Meeting	Number of Meetings during 2015/16	Number of Public 'Have Your Say' speakers	Average Number of speakers per meeting	Number of Meeting during 2018-19	Number of Have Your Say! speakers	Average number of speakers per meeting	Percentage of variance
Cabinet	7	12	1.7	7	38	5.4	218%
Crime and Disorder Committee	1	1	1	2	2	2	67%
Council	6	18	3	5	36	7.2	140%
Governance Committee	5	0	0	6	3	0.5	N/A
Licensing Committee	7	0	0	6	13	2.2	N/A
Local Plan	6	11	1.8	5	37	7.4	311%
Planning Committee	21	87	4.1	17	60	3.5	-15%
Policy and Public Initiatives Panel	-	-		6	40	6.7	N/A
Revolving Investment Fund Committee	4	2	0.5	5	0	0	-100%
Scrutiny Panel	9	7	0.8	9	6	0.7	-13%
Trading Board	6	1	0.2	-	-		N/A
Total	72	139	1.9	78	236	3	45%

Members Room

5.21 Work has continued on options around improvements to the facilities available to councillors at the Town Hall, and in particular the room for Councillors, known as the Members Room. The Councillor Development Group has looked at the issue in some detail. As part of the Council's Building Maintenance programme, there was an ongoing programme of upkeep for the Town Hall. The Group Rooms were the next area of the Town Hall due for redecoration under this programme and a programme of internal improvements is being undertaken to the Group Rooms to bring them up to date. This was overdue, as some of the rooms had not been redecorated for over 20 years. This would include new furniture and increased data and charging points.

5.22 Arrangements to swap the Liberal Democrat Group Room with the Members Room are also underway, which will provide a more private and secure location for the Group Room. The new members room will be equipped with improved catering facilities, including a small kitchen, a wall mounted TV and data and charging points. These works are scheduled to be undertaken in by April 2020.

Mandatory Training

5.23 The Member Development Group considered the recommendation of the Governance and Audit Committee that further consideration be given to mandatory training. This led to the introduction of a requirement, adopted by Council, that all Councillors undertake training in General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), safeguarding and equality and diversity, and that all new chairmen undertake chairing skills training within four months of their appointment. Council also approved a sanction whereby a Councillor's allowance could be withheld if they did not complete the mandatory training.

5.24 All new Committee Chair appointed in 2019 and 2020 have completed Chairing Skills training within four months, in line with the policy. In terms of GDPR, safeguarding and equality and diversity, the Council has sought to provide this through a series of traditional briefings in 2018 and then through online training. Where Councillors can demonstrate that they have undertaken similar training elsewhere, for example at another public authority, that is deemed to meet the requirement. The table below demonstrates the number of current councillors who have completed training on each of these subjects:-

GDPR	43
Safeguarding	44
Equality and Diversity	26

The online course on equality and diversity was released significantly later than the courses on GDPR and safeguarding. The Member Development Group has been monitoring levels of compliance with mandatory training and will consider further methods to increase take up.

5.25 At its meeting on 26 November 2019, the Governance and Audit Committee reviewed the Council's ethical governance policies. In the Committee debate issues about how Councillors were made aware of these important policies were raised, given that they set out standards of conduct and behaviours for Councillors and imposed requirements upon Councillors. The Committee recommended that this issue form part of this review. The Ethical Governance policies were adopted by Full Council at its meeting in December 2019, and all Councillors were provided with copies as part of the Council Summons. In addition, the Monitoring Officer writes to all Councillors annually reminding them of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies and providing links to the relevant policies. The visibility of the policies could be raised by including a direct link to them from the Councillors' page on the Council's intranet, Colin. Going forward it is suggested that the Ethical Governance policies be specifically highlighted as part of the induction process for new Councillors. The Governance and Audit Committee usually undertakes training on Code of Conduct issues at the start of the municipal year and this could be extended to cover issues relating to the ethical governance policies.

Promotion of Meetings through Social Media

5.26 The Council promotes its meetings through its Twitter account. A tweet is sent when the agenda is published, with a link to the meeting page containing the agenda. A reminder is sent on the day of the meeting reminding residents of the ability to attend and speak under Have Your Say!

5.27 As an indication of the benefits of using social media, the table at Appendix 2 gives figures for meetings of Planning Committee through 2019. The level of engagement varies from meeting to meeting, but it is notable that tweets are routinely viewed several hundred times, and a tweet relating to a meeting in February 2019 generated 43 clicks on the link to the Committee page on the website.

Access to IT systems

5.28 The Council provides all Councillors with Microsoft 365 accounts which enables access to the Microsoft Office suite (Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, SharePoint and more) through a single password. Microsoft 365 is a "cloud" service which means it can be accessed from any web browser or on any device without the need to log in to a "corporate device". Microsoft 365 also works on any device and is always up to date; meaning it is a secure and accessible productivity tool. Councillors also have access to information about meetings including meeting agenda packs through the Committee pages on the website, or through the My CMIS app on a laptop or device. Most information is publicly available through the website, although access to information which has been classified as not for publication can only be accessed via logging into CMIS.

5.29 Councillors are enabled to use either company devices or their own devices to access Council systems and IT security and policy is designed to be compliant and robust but also light touch; aiming to avoid locking down systems or services to the point where functionality is compromised. This approach provides challenges and relies upon each individual user (whether Officer or Councillor) taking responsibility for the systems they use and the data they access.

5.30 The Council's approach and focus on 'Cloud' and 'proportionate security' is advanced when compared to other organisations in the sector and we are regularly commended by partners who are impressed by the Council's focus on making digital tools available and adoption of new capabilities. The Council has invested in training and adoption resources over the last few years and will continue to do so.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 An EIA for the Council's decision making processes is available on the Council 's website at the link [here](#) or by following the pathway www.colchester.gov.uk / How the Council works / Equality and Diversity / Equality Impact Assessments / Corporate and Improvement Services / Decision Making and Meetings.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The Review of Meetings and Ways of Working supports the "Encourage belonging, involvement and responsibility in all the borough's communities" strand of the [Strategic Plan 2018-21](#). Improved public engagement with the Council's decision-making process indirectly supports all Strategic Plan priorities.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The financial implications relating to webcasting and introducing charging points and USB points to the Council Chamber are set out in the body of the report.

9. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

9.1 Environmental and sustainability benefits arising from the Review of Meetings and Ways of Working include:-

- A significant reduction in the production of printed agendas, together with associated benefits from the reduction in car journeys to deliver agendas to the Town Hall, and to deliver agendas to Councillor's homes.

- Audio streaming of meetings allows members of the public and Councillors to listen to meetings remotely, rather than travel to meetings at the Town Hall, reducing emissions from car journeys. These benefits are likely to be increased by webcasting.

10. Standard References

10.1 There are no particular references to the consultation or publicity considerations; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

Appendices

Appendix 1; Audio minutes listening statistics

Appendix 2: Engagement with Tweets relating to Planning Committee

APPENDIX 1 - AudioMinutes Listeners March 2019 to February 2020:

Month	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Live Minutes	1761	421	981	1933	6813	1167	589	1570	1047	2020	1693	907
Archive Minutes	4065	1214	774	2766	7266	2395	1735	1213	1228	6251	2833	1710
Total Minutes	5826	1635	1755	4699	14079	3562	2324	2783	2275	8271	4526	2617
Live Listeners	120	51	82	106	379	69	88	50	33	117	60	32
Archive Listeners	653	287	146	559	1327	589	400	333	266	1113	395	271
Total Listeners	773	338	228	665	1706	658	488	383	299	1230	455	303
Ave Live Duration	14.68	8.25	11.96	18.24	17.98	16.91	6.69	31.40	31.73	17.26	28.22	28.34
Ave Archive Duration	6.23	4.23	5.30	4.95	5.48	4.07	4.34	3.64	4.62	5.62	7.17	6.31
Peak Live Listeners				111	Planning Committee 4 July 2019							
Most Listeners				550	Council 5 December 2019							

Bold Font – denotes highest score in category

Key:

Live Minutes - the number of minutes streamed live to listeners during meeting webcast

Archive Minutes - the number of minutes of audio played from the meeting archive

Total Minutes - the sum of the above

Live Listeners - the number of listeners connected to live webcasts

Archive Listeners - the number of listeners connected to the meeting archive

Total Listeners - the sum of the above

Average Live Duration - the average time spent listening to live meetings

Average Archive Duration - the average time spent listening to audio from the meeting archive

Other Background Statistics

Time spent at meetings 2018 to 2019:

- Planning Committee - 32 hours 5 minutes
- Council meetings – 16 hours 40 minutes
- Cabinet – 17 hours 3 minutes

Cost of printing Council Summons December 2019: £1,178

Cost of hiring in Marks Tey Radio for meetings in the Moot Hall: £980

Appendix 2

Engagement with Tweets relating to Planning Committee sent from Colchester Borough Council twitter account.

Planning Cttee	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Reach	1202	976	679	976	829	1175	900	1036	876	794	1080	820
Engagement	12	5	6	5	10	10	20	13	4	5	9	7
Link clicks	6	0	5	4	6	9	20	12	2	5	6	6
Reach	1179	1302	1054	1693		1052	870	1257	1074	1373	1385	931
Engagement	6	10	6	17		7	7	18	9	12	6	6
Link clicks	4	6	4	14		3	6	13	6	6	0	5
Reach	972	1327	1029	1512		855		814	960		1008	1103
Engagement	9	14	5	2		6		9	14		3	20
Link clicks	3	8	5	1		6		5	8		3	13
Reach	746	2006		1261				938			550	
Engagement	12	65		6				14			3	
Link clicks	6	43		3				9			1	
Reach	866										777	
Engagement	10										7	
Link clicks	8										4	

Reach: Number of times tweet was viewed on a users timeline
Engagement: Number of times tweet was opened
Link Clicks: Number of times the link contained in the tweet was clicked.

