

Agenda Item: 10. TOWN FORUM EQUIPMENT

Report to: Community Committee

Date: Wednesday 11th May 2022

Subject: To consider options for streaming council meetings.

Recommendation:

To receive the research carried out regarding the live streaming of council meetings and consider next steps.

I. Background

Bexhill Town Forum has historically live streamed town council meetings from its inception. Following debates about the Town Forum at a full council meeting, the Town Forum withdrew its streaming services from the town council and later subsequently folded the organisation.

The equipment that the Town Forum was using is owned by Rother District Council. Rother District Council agreed to transfer ownership of the equipment to the town council to continue streaming.

The equipment was collected on 1st February 2022. The 9th Bexhill Scouts kindly agreed for the town council to store this equipment in the Scout Hut, due to the town council not having access to any suitable premises to store this.

The equipment was reviewed and logged on the council's asset register on 21st February 2022.

The speakers and webcams were tested for quality on 28th February 2022. There had been some public criticism of the original streaming sound quality and camera angles. At a meeting on 16th March 2022 the full council voted to ensure that the quality of sound for future streaming was of high quality.

00555 (b) It was **RESOLVED** that this council should film any meetings of the Bexhill on Sea Council which allow the public to be present, and live stream to YouTube. Equipment used should have very good sound quality.

Following this an investigation into the alternative options to provide high quality sound has taken place.

2. Existing Equipment

The existing microphone is a 'shotgun' microphone, which is a directional microphone. It is designed to receive sound from the front and reject sound from sides. Due to the layout of the committee meetings councillors sound is coming from a variety of directions and this explains why quality is low.

3. Future streaming costs (new equipment needed)

In order to live stream with high quality audio output using its own equipment the council has to upgrade the existing microphone.

Individual boundary microphone placed in front of councillors would highly improve sound quality. An audio interface would be required to facilitate this recording. Mics are approx. £98 each + audio interface = £542+vat.

Also, a separate laptop would need to be purchased to run the stream, as the existing laptop would be used for minute taking and reference during meetings.

4. Operating the system

In order to live stream using its own equipment the town council will need a minimum of two persons to operate the system.

Bexhill Town Forum previously charged £150 per full council meeting. Committees were not live streamed. If the council wishes to stream all meetings this could be approximately 35 meetings per year.

Ex-members of the Town Forum have been asked if they would be willing to operate the equipment at similar rates, and in principle they would consider this. This is a cheaper option than employing staff, as training would not be required and they would operate as a contractor to the council.

Alternatively, the town council will need to consider how it will recruit and employ operators of the equipment and what training it will provide and how much it will pay the operators.

5. Financial Consequences

The town council has not set aside a budget for live streaming in the precept funds for 2022-23. The Finance and General Purposes Committee has earmarked £10,000 for 2022-23 for this project. A future budget of £10,000 per year would equate to roughly a 2.5% increase on the current precept, an annual band D amount of 59 pence per year.

6. Risk Assessment

Risk Factors: There are certain risks involved in live streaming which are identified below:

- a) Reputational damage. Inappropriate behaviour or language will have a negative impact on Bexhill-on-Sea town Council's reputation.
- b) GDPR. Care needs to be taken to ensure this legislation isn't breached. This may be difficult in a live environment, especially if members of the public are present

- c) Confidentiality. Certain subjects may need to be discussed confidentially. This may be difficult in a live environment.
- d) Financial. This service is invariably expensive and may not represent best value.
- e) Technical or personnel. There may be failings in technology, equipment or services that prevent streaming or personnel may fail to turn up.

7. Other alternatives

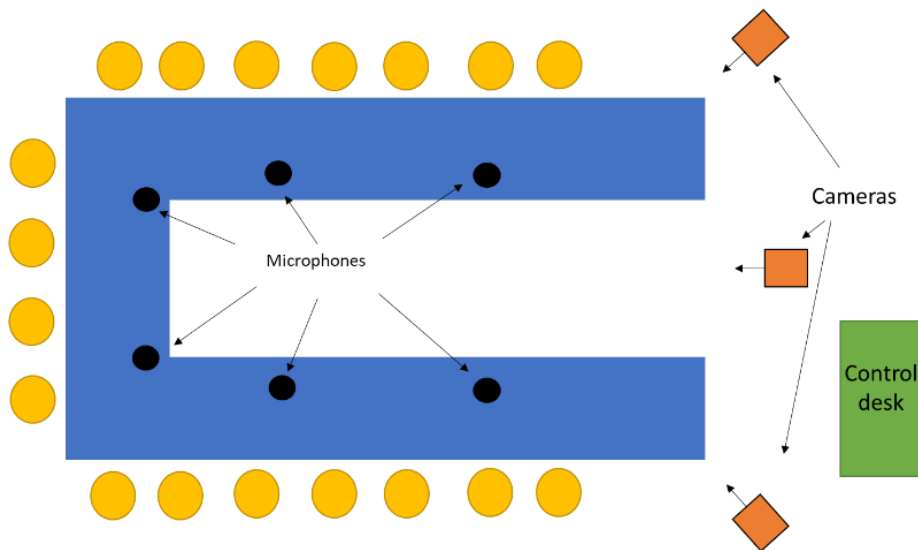
Operating live streaming in-house with ex-Town Forum members or new staff is just one option for the town council.

Filmed meetings could be uploaded rather than streaming live. Costs would be comparable but the council would not have to use a specialist company to do this and would have some degree of editorial control. The council could also ensure that the quality and content was appropriate before posting publicly.

Alternatively, the town council could employ an external contractor to provide all equipment and staff to stream meetings, with liability resting on the contractor to provide a high quality service and maintain their own equipment.

8. Suggested set-up for inhouse streaming

Streaming set-up



9. Researched Costs

Options and costings

Working on the assumption of 35 meetings per annum to be streamed:

Option 1

Do nothing. Cost per meeting £0. Cost per annum £0

Option 2

Professional contractor to provide service and equipment, all risks to remain with contractor. Cost per meeting £1300. Cost per annum £45,400. All equipment and training is taken care of but the cost is high.

Option 3

Use ex-Town Forum colleagues using town council equipment. No training required. Cost per meeting £150-170. Cost per annum approx. £5950
Training and equipment may be less than adequate. Additional equipment costs may be necessary to improve microphone quality.

Option 4

Provide complete service in-house. Cost per meeting £300. Cost per annum £10,500
These costs are based on 2 staff at £25 per hour (including PAYE and pension costs) plus additional necessary training and equipment costs. Inexperience and training could be a factor, annual leave and sickness absence cover should also be considered.

Option 5

Filming and uploading. Using a non-specialist company. Cost per meeting £300. Cost per annum £10,500.

This would be of comparable cost but it would be easier to manage and control the output. A policy would need to specify how any filmed material is edited to avoid accusation of bias.

Option 6

A further option is available to the town council for audio only streaming. Bexhill Radio can provide a live, audio only service for each meeting at a cost of £2.99 per month for an active stream, to record and provide a master copy of stream £5 per meeting. To attend, set up and broadcast £15 per hour. For example, a four hour set up and broadcast meeting would cost £60 per meeting. A total approx. annual cost of £2300.

10. Decision Required

The committee is asked to consider the options and recommend the chosen course of action to the full council in order to recommence streaming of meetings as soon as possible.