

25 January 2022**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, INVESTMENT AND GROWTH****INVESTMENT IN REMOTE MEETING AND LIVE STREAMING TECHNOLOGY
AT COUNTY HALL****Purpose of the Report**

1. To present to Committee a business case for the investment in Remote Meeting and Live Streaming technology at County Hall, to replace outdated and unsuitable equipment to deliver better and more efficient Council Meetings utilising the latest technology.

Information

2. It is widely recognised that the recent coronavirus pandemic has brought about a significant evolution in the way that the Authority conducts its various operations. This has led to the accelerated digital transformation of our services and the introduction of a hybrid working model in July 2021.
3. There have been radical changes to the way that meetings are hosted and attended. This means that more meetings are being attended virtually, for example through Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and the public have become use to engaging remotely with democratic processes during the pandemic. Through being able to host meetings in this way it has been made possible for virtual meetings to happen and they have become more accessible for attendees. All meetings continue to be live streamed via YouTube to enable greater public participation and going forward this will be necessary regardless of the format/setting. Nottinghamshire County Council was actively exploring the possibility of broadcasting meetings before the pandemic struck, with a report being agreed at Full Council in December 2018. In addition to this Nottinghamshire County Council was one of a number of councils that responded positively to a Government consultation on granting Local Authorities the power to hold more meetings remotely. It was identified through this consultation that there would be travel savings arising due to a reduced requirement for Members to travel to meetings.
4. Prior to the pandemic and throughout however, Nottinghamshire County Council was only able to introduce a temporary solution in both the Council Chamber and the Rufford Suite (both at County Hall, West Bridgford). These solutions were never intended for long term use and they present significant challenges to both physical and virtual attendees of the meetings and compromise their quality. The current technology challenges means that when meetings are live streamed it is difficult for viewers to follow and identify who is speaking. The video and sound feeds are not of sufficient resolution and quality to be fit for purpose. A solution for the Committee Rooms B and C, as well as other civic rooms has never been implemented, thereby significantly reducing the number of rooms that can be used for this purpose.

5. Due to this the IT Team, working in partnership with colleagues from Democratic Services, were tasked with exploring options for a new system for our Council Chamber, Rufford Suite and Committee Rooms. Colleagues from IT have been working with the key users of these rooms to identify what their requirements are and to specify the right level of equipment needed.
6. Over the course of the recent pandemic the Council has struggled with the continued use of this temporary equipment which has impacted the ability to hold remote (virtual) meetings. High profile meetings with local and regional partners have been disrupted due to equipment malfunctioning, and the need for replacement kit and equipment to be found at short notice. This will continue to be the case until a permanent solution that is fit for its intended purpose can be procured.

Proposed Solution

Council Chamber & Rufford Suite

7. It is proposed that the recommended solution is implemented at a cost of £335,269.53. This includes, for both the Council Chamber and the Rufford Suite:
 - Large wall mounted displays to enable virtual attendees to be seen by people physically present and for the presentation of information.
 - Tracking cameras that are able to detect who is speaking and zoom in on them, to enable external participants and viewers of live streams to see who is speaking.
 - Individual microphones that can be assigned to each physical participant via their ID badge so that their name appears (to external participants/viewers) when they speak. They also have buttons for voting.
 - Speakers to allow virtual participants to be heard clearly; and
 - The solution will support integration with YouTube which is the platform used for Live Streaming Council and Committee meetings.

Committee Rooms B & C with Ancillary Rooms with a Civic Function

8. To date none of these rooms have been allocated with kit and equipment to enable virtual meetings, severely limiting the number of rooms that can be used remotely for a Civic purpose. Furthermore, colleagues in our Children and Adult Social Services would wish to be able to use these rooms for remote child protection conferences and for meetings with the public.
9. These rooms are all too large for the standard NCC specification that is currently being deployed so they require additional equipment, such as additional cameras and microphones, in order to function properly.
10. The provision of Remote Meeting Technology in Committee Rooms B and C will provide meeting rooms that are easily accessible from the reception at County Hall. This is advantageous as it means that external attendees and members of the public can be included.
11. The cost of providing the technology necessary in these rooms requires additional funding of £102,072.20 which includes a 3-year support package and all licence fees.

Reasons for Recommendations

12. The recommended solutions provide the best balance between user requirements, cost, functionality and integration with our corporate ICT infrastructure.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

14. If both of the proposals are endorsed, then funding of £437,341.73 will be required. Work is ongoing to determine the level of works that are required, if any, to make additional physical changes to the rooms, such as the provision of additional power sockets. Should additional works be required then these will be assessed as part of the Investing in Nottinghamshire (IiN) and general maintenance budgets.

Human Resources Implications

15. All costs associated with the implementation and delivery of the solutions proposed in this report are included in the costs established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Economic Development & Asset Management Committee:

- 1) Endorses the allocation of £335,269.53 from the capital programme to support the investment in Hybrid Meeting and Live Streaming technologies to facilitate meetings in the Council Chamber and the Rufford Suite; and
- 2) Endorses the allocation of £102,072.20 from the capital programme to support the investment in Hybrid Meeting technology to facilitate meetings in Committee Room B, Committee Room C and in the Independent Members Office.

Matthew Neal
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For any enquiries about this report please contact: James Lewis, Project Manager, Transformation Delivery Team, Tel: 0115 9773516

Constitutional Comments (AK 14/01/2022)

16. This report falls within the remit of Economic Development and Asset Management Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (GB 12/01/2022)

17. The cost of the works set out in this report totals £437k and will be fully funded from grant. It is proposed, should Committee approve the report, that approval to vary the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee capital programme will be sought as part of the 2022/23 Budget Report to Full Council in February 2022.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Policy Committee Report – Smarter Working - Hybrid Working Strategy for the County Council (15 July 2021)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All