REPORT OF ADMINISTRATION AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

SUBJECT: WEBCASTING

Purpose of Report
Members have previously asked officers to investigate the possibility of webcasting the Authority's meetings. This report sets out the options available, and seeks Members' views on whether the Authority should webcast its meetings in future.

Introduction/Background
In the last two years, a number of requests have been made by members of the public to record meetings of the Development Management Committee. The Authority's Standing Orders are silent on this matter, although we and other local authorities have relied upon the provisions of Section 100A(7) of the Local Government Act 1972 (this having been inserted into the 1972 Act by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985) and which states:

> *"Nothing in this section shall require a principal council to permit the taking of photographs of any proceedings, or the use of any means to enable persons not present to see or hear any proceedings (whether at the time or later), or the making of any oral report on any proceedings as they take place."*

Ultimately, the requests to record the meeting were not followed through, but at the time it raised the issue between officers about the need to secure the authenticity of any such recording had it gone ahead.

Webcasting
One solution is to record meetings ourselves by way of webcasting. A webcast is a live or recorded transmission of a video on the internet. It is not edited prior to broadcast and can be viewed by anyone with access to the internet, both during the live broadcast and for as long as an authority makes it available on their website.

Many public bodies across the country now webcast their meetings via various platforms; a move that has been encouraged by Welsh Government. Those local authorities who currently webcast only broadcast those meetings that they judge to be of most interest to the public, i.e. Council, Cabinet and Planning Committees, although some are now beginning to webcast Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings as well.

It should be clarified from the outset that there is at present no requirement for the Authority to webcast its meetings, although the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill states Welsh Government's intention to introduce a mandatory requirement on all authorities to broadcast their meetings. Therefore, in the interests of being open, accountable and transparent to our stakeholders and, in particular, in making the

Authority's business more accessible to the wider public, it is recommended that consideration should be given to the matter.

Members are, therefore, asked to consider the options available for webcasting meetings, particularly those of the National Park Authority and the Development Management Committee. Sixteen Authority and Development Management Committee meetings (lasting approximately 38 hours in total) were held during 2015/16, and it is on this basis that the options contained in this report have been costed.

Comparisons
Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion County Councils webcast their main meetings, as do the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. All bar Ceredigion use a platform provided by Public-i; Ceredigion use a video platform provided by Livestream. Currently Snowdonia do not webcast their meetings and I am not aware that they have any plans to do so.

Options
There are two main options should Members decide to webcast Authority meetings:

1.   the installation of the necessary equipment in the Authority's meeting room at Llanion Park, or
2.   the use of facilities at an alternative location.

However, Option 1 (webcasting at Llanion Park) can be further split into:

1A.   engaging Public-i as our service provider, or
1B.   using Livestream as the broadcasting platform.

Installation of equipment at Llanion Park
Members will be aware that the Green Room here at Llanion is, in essence, a Portacabin; when the weather is excessively wet or windy it can sometimes be difficult to hear the debate. Officers have spoken with Public-i and, on an initial viewing of the building, have been advised that it could be possible to webcast from the Green Room, but it would be beneficial to commission an audio specialist report in the first instance to determine whether:

(a) insulation/sound-proofing of the building is a likely pre-requisite to any installation of webcasting equipment, and
(b) the cost involved in (a) above would then make webcasting a viable option.

Public-i suggest that a figure in the region of £2,500 would be needed to commission an audio specialist to undertake a site survey of the Green Room. Such a survey would then determine whether the installation of sound insulation would improve the building's acoustics enough to warrant investing in a webcasting system. Although the cost of undertaking any such work is currently unknown, installing a sound/insulation system might be beneficial in any case as other meetings held in the building would benefit in terms of acoustics during inclement weather.

Enquiries are also being made with Portacabin about the possibility of, and costs involved with, sound proofing the Green Room although no details are available at the time of drafting the report.

In terms of equipment, it would be necessary for the Authority to purchase microphones and either purchase or lease the hardware (camera(s) and encoder, etc.) to enable the webcasting to take place. There are also licensing, maintenance, training and other support costs to take into consideration.

There are many webcasting providers on the market, although it appears that only two are being used by local authorities in Wales: Public-i and Livestream. As mentioned previously, discussions have been held with Public-i, and the costs involved are appended to this report. I have also made enquiries of colleagues in Ceredigion County Council about their webcasting platform, Livestream, and those costs are also appended.

Apart from the advantages of openness and transparency in the eyes of the public, the benefits of webcasting from the Green Room would include:

- The Authority would be in control of the equipment/facility and Authority meetings would take priority over any other meeting being held in the Green Room;
- The public is used to meetings being held at Llanion;
- Officers do not have to spend more time than is necessary at a meeting (they currently join the meeting when it is their turn to present a report and leave immediately after to carry on with their 'day job');
- No additional travel/officer costs are involved when holding meetings at Llanion;
- The facility could be hired out to other organisations;
- The Authority would retain its hard-fought sovereignty in the eyes of the public;
- Extraordinary Meetings of the Authority would be more easily accommodated;
- An alternative venue would be available (for Pembrokeshire County Council's Cabinet and/or Committee meetings) should the facilities at County Hall fail

The disbenefits of webcasting from the Green Room would include:

- A member of staff would be required to operate the system during the meeting, taking them away from their 'day job';
- The costs involved are greater.

Use of facilities at an alternative location
Officers have been in contact with Pembrokeshire County Council and have ascertained that, in principle, it would be possible for the Authority to use its webcasting facilities as the Council has recently installed additional webcasting equipment in one of its Committee Rooms.

The benefits of webcasting from County Hall would include:

- The facility is already in place
- It is a less expensive option

The disbenefits of webcasting from County Hall would include:

- There would be a lot of officer 'down-time' in terms of travelling and waiting around in the meeting for their turn to present their report;
- Officer costs per meeting would be a lot higher;
- Extraordinary Meetings of the Authority would have to be fitted around County Council requirements;
- Anecdotal evidence from PCC officers states that noise from the weir outside the Committee Room can impact upon the acoustics of a meeting;
- The public perception of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority being a part of the County Council is even greater if the Authority is seen to be webcasting from County Hall;
- The breakdown of costs involved does not account for any increases in hire/service/salary charges.

Financial considerations
A detailed breakdown of the costs involved are appended to this report however, in summary, the costs are:

Option 1A: Purchasing the necessary equipment from Public-i, together with staff operating costs, will amount to some £52,000 over three years (£54,000 if the equipment was leased)

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Option 1B: Purchasing the necessary equipment, using Livestream as the platform provider, together with staff operating costs, will amount to circa £33,000.

There would also be a resource implication in terms of time taken for staff to be trained in using the equipment.

Option 2:   The hire of the County Council's webcasting facility will amount to some £17,500 over three years. However, added to this are the 'hidden' costs of officers having to be away from their workstations for longer (the majority currently join a meeting for the duration of the item(s) that they are presenting only), together with additional travelling time and mileage costs, although the latter would be offset slightly by reduced Member travelling expenses. It also does not take into consideration the loss of productivity as a result of officers waiting around for their turn to present their report(s). The total cost would be in the region of £30,000 over three years for officer 'waiting time', but does not include the lost productivity cost, which is much more difficult to quantify.

Risk considerations
Before further consideration is given to Option 1, an assessment of the sound insulation required is needed. However, even if it was found feasible to webcast from the Green Room, there would be a financial risk in installing expensive equipment in what is still, after all said and done, a temporary building.

In legal terms, the existence of a record of proceedings would reduce the risk of challenge to an Authority decision as it provides a public record on which there can be no dispute. Also, in terms of public perception, there is the possibility that the Authority could be considered less open and transparent than other local authorities by not broadcasting its meetings.

There is also a risk to the Authority of dilution of identity/sovereignty if its meetings are held in the County Council's offices.

Compliance
As noted above Welsh Government has encouraged webcasting of meetings by all County, City and County Borough Councils. In addition, the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill states that Welsh Government intends to introduce a mandatory requirement on all authorities to broadcast their meetings, although it is as yet unclear whether this would include National Park Authorities.

Webcasting of meetings would also present the Authority's stakeholders with a more open and transparent governance and accountability and would improve public understanding of the Authority's decision-making process.

Human Rights/Equality issues
Webcasting would provide the public with easier access to meetings, minimising travel and allowing more flexible viewing times.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal
Holding meetings at a location away from the Authority's main offices would probably increase overall travel costs and therefore increase the Authority's carbon footprint.

Welsh Language statement
The Authority will comply with the Welsh Language Standards with regard to holding meetings.

Staff considerations
Both Leadership Team and the Staff Representatives Group have been canvassed for their opinion on this matter. Whilst officers agree that webcasting meetings would be beneficial in terms of openness, transparency and public accountability, concerns have been expressed about doing so from County Hall. The sovereignty of the Authority is extremely important to staff; they are of the opinion that convening Authority meetings at County Hall would only help to 'blur' that differentiation and the public will begin to regard its meetings as another County Council committee. Officers are keen to ensure that the Authority is seen by the public as a completely separate entity to the County Council.

Conclusion
It would be beneficial to webcast Authority meetings in the interests of transparency, openness, accountability and – above all – public accessibility. The question is "how?".

If Members are minded to webcast from Llanion, it is considered that Option 1A would be the preferred solution as Public-i, while being more expensive:

- are a tried and trusted service provider (being used by the majority of Welsh local authorities who already broadcast their meetings);
- install and maintain the equipment and upgrade if necessary;
- provide technical support throughout the lifetime of the contract;
- link to a committee management system (Modern.gov), although this would come at a cost and would need to be the subject of a separate report to the Authority.

However, some Members have indicated informally to the Chief Executive that they are keen to undertake a trial of webcasting meetings from County Hall. Therefore one possible option is to trial the webcasting of the Development Management Committee from County Hall, Haverfordwest for a 12 month period, with a review to be undertaken thereafter.

RECOMMENDATION:
1. **That Members agree to the principle of webcasting meetings with effect from the 2017 Municipal Year, and**
2. **That Members agree the way forward for enabling webcasting to happen.**

Background Documents
None

(For further information, please contact Janet Evans, Administration and Democratic Services Manager on extension 4834, or by emailing janete@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)

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Consultees: Leadership Team, Staff Representatives Group

	Purchased Hardware	Leased Hardware
Green Room Webcasting (over 3 years) - Public-i		
20 microphones*	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Cost of equipment with 40 hours pa hosted content	£27,360.00	£29,040.00
Installation, training, maintenance and upgrade	£5,000.00	£5,000.00
One member of staff to operate/monitor the system @ £16 per hour - 40 hours	£640.00	£640.00
Total costswith Public-i (over 3 years)	£52,360.00	£54,040.00

* It may be possible to use shared microphones instead, which would bring down this cost

Green Room Webcasting (over 3 years) - Livestream	
20 microphones*	£20,000.00
Cost of equipment	£8,000.00
Electrical and installation costs	£2,000.00
Annual rolling contract with platform provider	£2,250.00
One member of staff to operate/monitor the system @ £16 per hour - 40 hours	£640.00
Total costs with Livestream (over 3 years)	£32,890.00

* This cost has been taken from the quote given by Public-i - there may well be other cheaper alternatives

Webcasting at PCC	Per annum	Over 3 years**
Hire of Chamber @£50 per half day - 16 half days	£800.00	
Webcasting staff @£35 per hour - 40 hours	£1,400.00	
Public-i @£40 per hour (streaming, hosting, monitoring, etc)	£1,600.00	
IT Support @£40 per hour - notional 4 hours	£160.00	
Facilities charge @ £14 per hour	£560.00	
Ante-room @ £30 per half day - 16 half days	£480.00	
Refreshments @ £40 per meeting	£640.00	
	£5,640.00	£16,920.00
Separate PCNPA branded website page - one off fee		£600.00
		£17,520.00

** Does not take account of any increases in meeting room hire charges or officer salaries over 3 year period

Officer travel costs - 7 officers per meeting - 16 meetings pa	Per annum	Over 3 years
Travel for three vehicles @£20.40 per meeting	£979.20	£2,937.60
Less reduced Member travel expenses @ £50 per meeting	-£800.00	-£2,400.00
Additional Staff time over and above meeting at Llanion @a notional £35 per hour	£3,920.00	£11,760.00
	£4,099.20	£12,297.60
Total costs for webcasting at PCC	£9,739.20	£29,817.60