

Executive – 4 March 2010

COUNCIL CHAMBER – FACILITIES UPGRADE

Report of the Member Support Services Manager

Statutory Powers: Local Government Act 2000.

Financial Implications: This report sets out proposals to allocate a one-off spend of up to £30,000 from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant for the installation of a better IT system in the Council Chamber. An ongoing revenue cost of up to £5,000 per year will also need to be built in to the Council budget. However, it is anticipated that these monies can be partly recovered through the increased income arising from hiring out the room to external users.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to gain approval to undertake installation works in order to upgrade the current Audio Visual system in the Council Chamber. The manner in which the Council uses and manages its assets has links to all of the Corporate Priorities, but the particular focus of this report relates to CP6 (Value for Money).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive **RESOLVES** that:-

- (i) approval be given to the allocation of up to £30,000 from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant, in addition to a recurring revenue cost of up to £5,000 per year, for the installation of an Audio Visual system upgrade in the Council Chamber; and
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (Community), in consultation with the Head of ICT, the Head of Property Services and the lead Executive Member for Value for Money to determine the final arrangements in order to deliver this upgrade.

Background

- 1 Feedback gained from the results of the public participation questionnaire (which is tabled during Development Control Committee meetings) is increasingly suggesting that the current Audio Visual capability in the Council Chamber is no longer fit for purpose and requires upgrading.
- 2 Typical comments from these questionnaires include: '*The use of better technology to provide clearer and precise photos is necessary*', '*Very poor photographs used and we couldn't hear the case officer presentation*', and '*Poor photos – could do with a microphone and a projector should be put up from a PC so that clear images and videos can be seen*'. Some of these views have also been echoed by a number of Members of Council, who having visited other local authorities, feel that the facilities in the Council Chamber are currently well below average.

- 3 Such identified difficulties are felt to be impeding the way in which the Council presents itself to the public. This also makes it difficult for interested parties to follow what is going on during Committee meetings held in the Council Chamber, especially as many members of the public will not be familiar with the decision making process.
- 4 In addition, these suggested improvements will also increase the marketability of the Council Chamber. In line with the increasing drive to be more commercially minded, there is considered to be potential scope to generate additional income, through attracting external users to hire the room for the purposes of meetings and conferences.

The Proposal

- 5 To coincide with the implementation of the Development Control Systems Thinking Review, it is proposed that a new Audio Visual system could be in place in time for use at the earliest possible Development Control Committee meeting after commencement of the new service working practices.
- 6 At present, officers have deliberately not created any detailed technical specification, but it is suggested that the requirements will include:-
 - two large display screens (no smaller than the present screen held in the Council Chamber), which are capable of displaying either different media content, or running as a pair from a single source and which are clearly visible from all areas of the Council Chamber;
 - the ability to render these screens blank when not in use;
 - small screens on the forward facing dias to allow the presenter and those Member(s)/officer(s) sitting there to see the content being delivered;
 - the opportunity to fix projectors (if used) either to the ceiling or the back of the Council Chamber;
 - the main source of media being from networked (Council supplied) PCs to stream videos and PowerPoint presentations; and
 - wherever possible, the system should integrate with the existing facilities in the Council Chamber (e.g. the Induction loop).
- 7 In compliance with the Council's Financial and Contract Procedure Rules, limiting the cost of this upgrade to £30,000, will remove the requirement for the Council to go through the formal tendering process.

Next Steps

- 8 If Members support this proposal, it is suggested that four local companies be approached on a pre-determined basis. These companies will then be invited to attend an on site consultation and following this, a firm specification will be developed.
- 9 From this firm specification, and within the financial parameters, it is then suggested that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (Community), in consultation with the Head of ICT, the Head of Property Services and the lead Executive Member for Value for Money to make a decision on which of the companies should be used to ensure the delivery of this upgrade, in accordance with the detailed specification.

Risk Assessment

10 The following are the significant risks and opportunities identified:

Opportunity	Issues / Obstacles	Benefits
<p>To enable for different content to be displayed on the two screens at the same time.</p> <p>By providing capability to display different content on the two screens, options will not be restricted in the event of any potential changes to the set up of the Council Chamber.</p> <p>To increase income from external room hirers.</p>	<p>The detailed specification for the upgrade will be somewhat restricted by the limitations of the Council Chamber layout.</p> <p>Any upgrade may result in a new way of conducting presentations and may restrict current practices, especially at the Development Control Committee.</p>	<p>The upgrade will enable all visitors to the Council Chamber to be able to view the screens regardless of where they sit.</p> <p>It is also intended that detailed documents (e.g. maps and plans) will also be more easily visible from two large screens.</p> <p>This proposal will bring the Council Chamber facilities in line with those available at other local authorities.</p> <p>Presentations will be able to be conducted from either side of the Council Chamber.</p>

Conclusion

11 This proposal is in line with the initiative to increase public interest and involvement in the decision making process. With the Development Control Systems Thinking Review nearing its conclusion and the budgetary climate driving the need to maximise income streams for the Council, it is now considered an opportune time to upgrade the facilities provided, to ensure that the Council Chamber is fit for purpose.

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Executive
4 March 2010

Background Documents:

Completed Public Participation Questionnaires submitted by attendees of recent Development Control Committee meetings.