

## **Report to Governance Committee**

**10 May 2023**

### **Review of Webcasting**

#### **Report by Director of Law and Assurance**

**Electoral division: N/A**

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### **Summary**

This report sets out the annual viewing figures for Council/committee meetings webcast during 2022/23 for the Governance Committee to review. It is also asked to review the one-year trial of webcasting Health and Wellbeing Board meetings.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the webcasting viewing figures for 2022/23, as set out at Appendix 1;
  - (2) Review the one-year trial of webcasting Health and Wellbeing Board meetings; and
  - (3) Agree that Health and Wellbeing Board meetings should be added to the list of meetings where there is a presumption that they will be webcast, for approval by the County Council.
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### **Proposal**

#### **1. Background and Context**

- 1.1 Webcasting is important for open and transparent government and a way of increasing access to the County Council's democratic processes. The Council has been webcasting meetings since February 2008 and, prior to March 2020, County Council, Cabinet, scrutiny committees and some Planning Committee meetings were webcast. From March 2020 until May 2021, all formal meetings were fully virtual and webcast to fulfil openness and transparency requirements as the public and press were not able to attend meetings in person.
- 1.2 After May 2021 most formal meetings returned to being held in person but all continued to be webcast until September 2021 when the Governance Committee agreed that webcasting should revert to the pre-pandemic arrangements. This was in recognition of the fact that webcasting is resource intensive, requiring additional staff support, and that some meetings did not have very high viewing figures. Since September 2021 there has therefore been a presumption that all meetings of the County Council, Cabinet,

scrutiny committees and the Planning and Rights of Way Committee will be webcast. Other committees can be webcast at the request of their chairman and vice-chairmen and where there is good reason, such as when matters of significant public interest are due to be discussed.

- 1.3 In May 2022, the Governance Committee agreed that the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) meetings should be webcast for a trial one-year period. This was at the request of the HWB Chairman to help raise the profile of the Board and in recognition of its role as a forum for partners to come together to discuss plans to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of West Sussex.
- 1.4 Public-i provides the Council's webcasting services. This currently provides for 120 hours a year of webcasting as well as the maintenance of the Council's webcasting equipment and archives all webcasts for six years. The Public-i system interfaces with Modern.Gov, the system for managing the democratic process, including the publication of agendas, minutes, decisions, and member information.

## **2. Webcasting 2022/23**

- 2.1 The webcasting figures for webcasting during 2022/23 are set out at **Appendix 1**. Webcasts are available via the Council's website live during the meeting and then from the archive for six years. As an important element in open and transparent local democracy, there is no proposal to reduce the current levels of webcasting, although it is not a legal requirement to webcast formal member meetings that are held in public and where the public are able to attend.
- 2.2 A total of 43 meetings were webcast during 2022/23, with an overall average viewing figure of 188. Viewing figures are for views of at least one minute. It is not possible to determine the length of views beyond this. Overall, more people view archive than live meetings (with the average being 51 for live views and 137 for archive). The list below sets out the average total views (live and archive) by meeting type, ranked from high to low.
  - County Council (average 465)
  - Planning and Rights of Way Committee (average 218)
  - Health and Wellbeing Board (average 210)
  - Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee (average 162)
  - Cabinet (average 144)
  - Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee (average 132)
  - Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (average 129)
  - Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee (average 120)
  - Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee (average 97)
- 2.3 It is possible, but very time consuming, to identify whether the viewers of webcasts have an external or a county council Internet Provider (IP) address. It is not possible to determine whether those with a County Council IP address are officers or members. This information has been provided in Appendix 1 for a sample of meetings held during 2022/23, and for all HWB meetings webcast for the one-year trial. This shows that:

- The Planning and Rights of Way Committee has the highest proportion of external views of meetings (both live and archive)
- For most meetings, a high proportion of live views is by people with a County Council IP address
- For archive views, there is a more even balance between external and internal IP addresses

2.4 The data for HWB webcasts shows that it has relatively low numbers of live views (an average of 19 for the three meetings webcast), but significantly higher archive views (an average of 191). So overall, it has a relatively high number of total views. Across the three meetings, there was a fairly even balance between internal and external views.

2.5 There are two options for the future webcasting of HWB meetings:

- a) To add the HWB to the list of meetings where there is a presumption that they will be webcast, which would require a change to Standing Orders and approval by County Council; or
- b) To consider webcasting HWB meetings on a case-by-case basis, in which case the current Standing Orders would apply (i.e. that other committees can be webcast at the request of their chairman/vice-chairman and where matters of significant public interest are due to be discussed).

2.6 Following consultation with the Health and Wellbeing Board Chairman and the Director of Public Health, the recommendation is that the Committee agrees option a). This does not mean that all meetings are required to be webcast, so would not preclude any future HWB meetings being held at community-based venues which do not support webcasting.

2.7 The total contracted webcasting hours for 2022/23 were exceeded by nearly 10 hours (see details of costs at para 4.1). It is planned that the total hours will be extended to 130 from 2023/24, which should provide adequate capacity for future requirements, based on current webcasting arrangements.

### **3. Consultation, engagement and advice**

3.1 The Chairman of the HWB and the Director of Public Health have been consulted on the outcomes of the one-year trial of webcasting HWB meetings.

### **4. Finance**

4.1 The Council's webcasting contract allows for 120 hours of webcasting per year. Where this is exceeded, there is an additional cost. In 2022/23 this was exceeded by, with additional costs of £533. It is planned that the total number of hours per year within the contract will be extended to 130 to meet future needs. There is capacity within the Democratic Services budget to cover the associated increase in costs. This extension should ensure enough hours to cover the meetings currently webcast, to include the HWB. However, any extension to the number of meetings webcast would require additional funding not currently budgeted for.

4.2 Webcasting is resource intensive, requiring an additional member of Democratic Services staff to attend each meeting. Staff support for the

webcasting of HWB meetings can be met from within existing resources as this is limited to a maximum of four meetings per year.

## 5. Risk Implications and Mitigations

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Lack of openness and transparency	Meetings where matters of significant public interest are due to be considered are webcast
Lack of awareness of the role and work of the Health and Wellbeing Board	Proposal to continue webcasting these meetings
The annual hours for webcasting provided within the webcasting contract are exceeded, leading to additional costs	The total number of hours to be increased, and monitored on a regular basis by Democratic Services and the external webcasting provider

## 6. Policy alignment and compliance

- 6.1 There are no crime and disorder, human rights or legal implications arising from this report. Public health will be promoted through the proposal to continue to webcast HWB meetings. There is a social value to webcasting, through the promotion of local democracy.
- 6.2 In terms of the Equality Duty, it is important for the Council to ensure accessibility to the democratic process for those who would not otherwise be able to attend meetings in person. Webcasting enables people to view/listen to meetings remotely, either live or after the event via the archive. This benefits disabled people, as well as those in communities more distant from Chichester. It also enables people who cannot attend meetings during the working day to listen to/view the archived webcast at a time that suits them.

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### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Webcasting data 2022/23

### **Background Papers:**

None