

AUDIO, VISUAL & WEBCASTING PROVISION FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

Head of Service:	Gillian McTaggart, Head of Corporate Assurance
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	Yes
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	Current temporary contract for Audio Visual equipment is due to end shortly.
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 – Quotes obtained for essential and additional equipment and installation (Not for publication)

Summary

To consider the proposal and options for the purchase of an audio, visual and webcasting solution for Council and Committee Meetings.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) To award the purchase for Audio, Visual and Webcasting equipment to Auditel .**
- (2) To agree the supplementary purchase of Option 1 – 12 additional microphones.**
- (3) To agree the supplementary purchase of Option 3 - TV Screens.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out a number of options and their associated costs available for the replacement of the Audio, Visual and webcasting equipment currently installed in the Council Chamber and agree what requirements the Committee wish to approve and award the contract to the appropriate supplier.

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2 Background

- 2.1 A report was brought to this Committee on 27 July 2021 to comment on potential options for the replacement of the current system. It was agreed for officers to investigate the preferred options and report back to the Committee.
- 2.2 An officer project working group was subsequently established to consider and review options. The Project Group included representatives from Democratic Services, ICT and Finance. A specification was agreed based on the key objectives and costings have been obtained.

Temporary arrangements

- 2.3 The existing equipment in the Council Chamber has failed and the Council has hired portable solutions until a permanent solution could be obtained.
- 2.4 Face to Face committee meetings returned from 7th May when the Coronavirus Act powers lapsed. By hiring equipment on a temporary basis, it enabled meetings to be webcast live and allowed those who wanted to attend a meeting but were either unable to or prevented from doing so, to continue to watch the Council meetings. It also ensured that Covid Secure measures and social distancing could be complied with.
- 2.5 From May until June the Council initially hired equipment from Auditel at a cost of £10,095. This equipment was expensive due to installation costs and the short notice in placing the order. Feedback on the quality of the sound was good and the system was easy to operate. From July until the 10th December, the Council has hired equipment from VP AV at a cost of £2,075 per month (£11,465 estimated total cost). This provided only 20 microphones and generally the quality of the sound was not as good. The combined cost for hiring both systems until 10th December 2021 is projected at £21,560.
- 2.6 Both trialled systems provide hybrid meeting functionality through integration with GoToWebinar and are adaptable to other platforms. Up to 250 participants/observers can join via GoToWebinar. Audio/video from the Council Chamber is broadcast to the internet and linked to that from approved external participants to enable a full 'hybrid' meeting. The specification includes the use of MS Teams as part of the current migration to 365.

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- 2.7 One of the benefits of hiring two systems was that we were able to evaluate how easy they were to operate and the quality of the sound and webcasting. Overall the feedback from users has been that the Auditel system provided better audio with better amplification. This limited number of microphones has been sufficient for all committee meetings but not full Council when all 38 members and some officers are present. No further equipment has been hired beyond 10th December 2021, however due to ordering and installation lead in times for the new equipment this may be necessary once the contract is awarded. Therefore, there may be a need to agree an additional hire.

3 Evaluation of Options and Procurement

- 3.1 In considering possible future options the Project Group evaluated the two temporary solutions installed and any limitations within the Council Chamber and existing IT infrastructure.
- 3.2 The key objectives from the new system are;
- 3.2.1 Provide good quality audio at meetings
 - 3.2.2 Ensure that the Council Chamber can continue to be used flexibility
 - 3.2.3 Enable the webcast of meetings to provide greater public access to cope with occasions where demand for space is high e.g when dealing with planning matters
 - 3.2.4 Ensure any solution is portable should there be an office move
 - 3.2.5 Ensure compatibility with existing IT systems and MS Teams
 - 3.2.6 Obtain value for money
- 3.3 A specification was agreed based on key objectives listed above in 3.2. Quotes were obtained from three suppliers for the essential and supplementary elements including equipment, installation and servicing and maintenance. The essential elements required included;
- 3.3.1 Provision of 30 microphones, which include headphone sockets.
 - 3.3.2 Consolidation of inputs and outputs into a Digital Signal Processor (DSP) to balance signals, compensate feedback and apply automatic gain control when required i.e. for those that are softly spoken to improve overall audio quality within the Chamber.
 - 3.3.3 A camera tracking system with 3 cameras with associated equipment aligned to the wireless microphones
 - 3.3.4 Install a new HD laser projector for visual presentations

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- 3.4 We will continue to webcast meetings live. Recordings can be maintained in future once meetings are operated through Microsoft teams.
- 3.5 A detailed analysis of the quotes obtained is provided in Appendix 1. The suppliers were also asked to provide supplementary costings for the following additional items:
- 3.5.1 An additional 12 microphones
- 3.5.2 A Voting System
- 3.5.3 TV Screens
- 3.6 Within the costings all suppliers included a £6,000 contingency cost. This was to allow for any unexpected costs in relation to the Council Chamber. At this stage we are not aware of any additional requirements. The tender also includes pricing for two years maintenance and servicing
- 3.7 The Committee are asked to agree the award to Auditel as the cheapest bid and also which supplementary items they would like included. The detailed quotations are listed in Appendix 1 and in summary below.
- 3.8

	VPAV	Auditel	Connected Business
Essential equipment & installation (including contingency)	£95,410	£81,633	£114,293
2 years servicing & maintenance	£6,300	£2,500	Included in above
Total costs with servicing for two years	£102,610	£84,133	£114,293
Option 1: Additional 12 microphones	£9,190.	£5,640.	£18,012.
Option 2: Voting system	£2,470	Included	Included
Option 3: TV screens to replace projector	N/A	£300	N/A
Total costs with all 3 options included	£114,270	£90,073	£132,035

Essential equipment and installation

- 3.9 The quote from Auditel is considerably lower than the other two quotes and the system received good feedback in terms of the quality of the sound and useability.

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- 3.10 In assessing the options the Committee should also note that the lead in times for ordering and installing the system vary from 6 to 12 weeks as outlined in Appendix 1.
- 3.11 The Committee are also asked to consider the maintenance and servicing of the system which has been included in the Table above.

Supplementary Options

- 3.12 Option one – 12 additional microphones. The essential equipment within the specification includes 30 microphones which are generally considered adequate for council meetings. It is only full Council where at least 42 microphones are required to cover all Members and officers attending. The Committee should also note that the Local Government Boundary Review Commission which is currently out to consultation and being reported at this committee meeting, has recommended a reduction in the number of Councillors to 35 as suitable for the size of the Borough in terms of scrutiny and structure.
- 3.13 Option two – voting system. Two of the suppliers included the cost of the voting system within their quote. VP AV has included this for a small additional cost. The voting system would enable the voting results to be displayed.
- 3.14 Option three – TV screens. The Project Group generally felt the layout and light within the Council Chamber was better suited to a Projector Screen. This also minimised the cabling within the Chamber which could represent a health and safety risk. However the alternative is to install TV screens Auditel's quote included pricing for three TV screens. One fixed and two mobile screens.. One 65 inch TV would be fitted in the public gallery and two 85 inch screens fitted either side of the Dias on motorised trolleys. All screens would need to be connected to power and HDMI.

4 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

4.1 Impact Assessment

4.1.1 No formal equalities impact assessment has been undertaken because this does not represent a major service change. There are no touch screen electronic voting systems on the market which incorporate facilities for visually impaired users so in certain circumstances appropriate modifications to process may be required.

4.1.2 This would provide a meeting platform where a larger number of people can attend who either cannot attend or are limited due to the limitations on capacity of the Council Chamber .

4.2 Crime & Disorder

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4.2.1 Not applicable

4.3 Safeguarding

4.3.1 Not applicable

4.4 Dependencies

4.4.1 The ordering and installation of the equipment will take several weeks. The suppliers will require between 6 and 12 weeks to order and install.

4.5 Other

4.5.1 Not applicable

5 Financial Implications

5.1 The provision of audio equipment is essential for delivery of the Council's democratic decision making process. This Council should ensure that any future preferred option demonstrates value for money and is adaptable in its use to address potential changes in the delivery of this function.

5.2 The three supplier quotations range from up to £90,073 to £132,235, with the recommended supplier being the cheapest at up to £90,073 (or £89,773 with TV screens excluded).

5.3 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** As the solution would help manage public attendance in the Council Chamber by providing a webcasting facility, the replacement of the audio and visual equipment can provisionally be funded from a mixture of Contain Outbreak Management Grant, which holds an uncommitted balance of c£60,000, and capital receipts reserves, which hold an uncommitted balance of £2.588m.

5.4 At the time of writing, it remains unclear how much of the Contain Outbreak Management Grant will be available to finance this project, because new demands for use of the grant may arise in the coming months. As such, the grant will only be applied to fund this project if appropriate, and any funding shortfall will be financed from the capital receipts reserve.

6 Legal Implications

6.1 The Council is not obliged to live stream its Council and committee meetings but it is increasingly considered best practice to do so.

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- 6.2 Regulations issued in 2014 require authorities to make available reasonable facilities for members of the public to report on meetings using any communication method, including film, photography, audio recording and social media. The Regulations have encouraged the public to be able to informally film or record meetings and the Council has introduced a formal process to allow this in 2018. However, to date it has been rare for any member of the public to request to film a meeting. Even if webcasting or live streaming were permitted, informally filming and recording would still have to be permitted.
- 6.3 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** There may be some requirement to adapt certain of the Council's procedural Standing Orders so as to facilitate the new arrangements. Officers will examine any potential issues and report back to Members if change is required.

7 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 7.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged: Effective Council.
- 7.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 7.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** none
- 7.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** none
- 7.5 **Partnerships:** none

8 Background papers

- 8.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Strategy & Resources Committee 27 July 2021 Audio & Visual Provision for Council Meetings

Other papers:

- Capital Bid 2019