

Item: 10

Policy and Resources Committee: 23 November 2021.

Audio Casting – Review.

Report by Chief Executive.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider a review of audio casting arrangements.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, on 19 February 2019, when considering a review of audio casting, the Policy and Resources Committee recommended:

- That the Council should continue to audio cast meetings of its committees.
- That the Chief Executive should purchase replacement audio-casting equipment, including a survey of the Chamber, together with dual user microphones with an electronic voting system, at a cost of £31,000, to be funded from the Capital Fund.
- That the audio casting provision be extended to include meetings of the following Committees:
 - Planning Committee.
 - Local Review Body.
- That a further review of audio-casting be undertaken following a period of operation of one year.

2.2.

That the following meetings are currently audio cast and recorded:

- Development and Infrastructure Committee.
- Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.
- Orkney Health and Care Committee.
- Policy and Resources Committee.
- Monitoring and Audit Committee.

- Planning Committee.
- Local Review Body.
- General Meetings of the Council.
- Orkney's Integration Joint Board and its Audit Committee.

2.3.

That, from 1 October 2021, the Council is no longer able to exclude the public from meetings of the Council, its committees and sub-committees for Coronavirus-related reasons, which has resulted in live audio casting of Council meetings resuming, including meetings not normally audio-cast, in order that the public are able to attend the meeting, by listening to the proceedings live.

2.4.

The options in respect of audio-casting, as detailed in section 5 of this report, with the preferred option being to extend audio-casting to the remaining Committees and Sub-committees, where those meetings are held in the Chamber.

It is recommended:

2.5.

That the audio casting provision be extended to include the following Committees and Sub-committees, where those meetings are held in the Chamber:

- Licensing Committee.
- Harbour Authority Sub-committee.
- College Management Council Sub-committee.
- Asset Management Sub-committee.
- Human Resources Sub-committee.
- Investments Sub-committee.
- Pension Fund Sub-committee, together with Pension Board.
- Police and Fire Sub-committee.

3. Background

3.1.

In 2012, the Council considered several options for online streaming of Council meetings and, in April 2013, subsequently resolved to introduce an audio feed as an alternative to full webcasting. Audio-casting of Council meetings has been underway since June 2015 using an in-house system.

3.2.

In general, audio casting makes Council business more open and accessible for residents and interested parties, particularly for those who are unable to travel to attend a council or committee meeting in person. Since audio casting was first introduced, the media have regularly made use of the facility to broadcast 'clips' of meetings as part of their news coverage, giving their audience a clearer insight of the decision-making process. The facility is additionally useful for staff in monitoring what stage a meeting is at in order to attend in time for a particular item and for improving their understanding of governance and process.

3.3.

As well as live broadcasts, a listen-again service is provided via the Council website. The web-page for the listen-again recordings lists at what point discussion begins on each agenda item, making it easy for people to listen to a particular item of interest and to find the relevant Committee reports.

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- Local Review Body.
- General Meetings of the Council.
- Orkney's Integration Joint Board and its Audit Committee.

3.6.

On 15 September 2021, when considering continued governance arrangements to support decision making of the Council, in light of legislative amendments in respect of public access to Council meetings, the Council agreed that the technological equipment in the Chamber be upgraded to facilitate blended meetings.

3.6.1.

This will allow consideration of how formal council meetings are held in the future; however, regardless of whether a meeting is held in-person, virtually or a blend of both, this report considers public access to formal Council meetings in terms of proposing to widen access through audio casting.

4. Listening Figures

4.1.

Listening figures for meetings live streamed from the Council Chamber before the pandemic (pre-March 2020) tended to fluctuate, with reasonably high numbers for some topical meetings and a lesser number for others. The 'Listen again' facility had consistently higher numbers of listeners pre-pandemic.

4.2.

This has remained the case since live broadcasting stopped in March 2020, when meetings were temporarily suspended due to coronavirus pandemic. In April 2020, Council meetings recommenced, using Microsoft Teams, with meetings recorded, and the recording uploaded to the Council website shortly after the conclusion of the meeting.

4.3.

Between April 2020 and July 2021, there was an average of 34 listeners for meetings recorded, with meetings of particular public interest having had as many as 287 listeners. A summary of the 'Listen Live' and 'Listen Again' statistics is provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

4.4.

As stated above, live broadcasting of Council meetings stopped in March 2020. However, from 1 October 2021, the Council is no longer able to exclude the public from meetings of the Council, its committees and sub-committees for Coronavirus-related reasons. Accordingly, live broadcasting of Council meetings resumed with effect from the General Meeting of the Council held on 5 October 2021.

4.5.

Further, because of restrictions on the number of people able to be physically present in the Council Chamber, some meetings which would not normally be live broadcast, for example the Asset Management Sub-committee on 5 October 2021, required to be live broadcast, in order to facilitate public attendance. This is because the existing technological equipment in the Council Chamber has not yet been upgraded to facilitate blended meetings.

5. Scope of Audio-casting – Options Analysis

5.1.

Following the review of audio-casting reported in February 2019, the microphone system in the Council Chamber was upgraded. On 15 September 2021, the Council agreed to further upgrade the system to facilitate blended meetings, at a cost of £15,000. Implementation of this decision is underway but delayed due to availability of the supplier. It is anticipated that it will be achieved however by early 2022.

5.2.

As it is assumed that the Council would wish to continue with audio-casting, two options are presented for consideration:

- Option 1 – Status quo – continue to audio-cast the meetings listed in section 3.5 above.
- Option 2 – Include all remaining committees and sub-committees.

5.3.

In 2019, officers recommended that the Licensing Committee, the Planning Committee and the Local Review Body be included in the list of committees for live audio-casting, noting that these committees included representations from other contributors who are not Elected Members or Council Officials (namely applicants, agents and objectors) and therefore clear guidance would be provided to them prior to the meeting.

5.4.

The Council subsequently agreed that only the Planning Committee and the Local Review Body be included. Clear guidance is routinely provided to applicants, agents and objectors prior to the meeting and, to date, the meetings have operated effectively, with no issues.

5.5.

It should be noted that business at the Licensing Committee involving non-members of the Council has, in the vast majority of cases, involved the disclosure of exempt information. Therefore, that part of the meeting is not open to the public and would not be live audio-cast.

5.6.

The Council has seven sub-committees which meet regularly as part of the committee meeting cycle, namely:

- Harbour Authority Sub-committee.
- College Management Council Sub-committee.
- Asset Management Sub-committee.
- Human Resources Sub-committee.
- Investments Sub-committee.
- Pension Fund Sub-committee, together with Pension Board.
- Police and Fire Sub-committee.

5.6.1.

The first four sub-committees listed above are scheduled to meet once per cycle during the five Committee cycles in the Council year. The remaining three sub-committees meet quarterly, as the main focus of their work is to receive financial and/or performance information. Additional meetings can be called as and when required, depending on the nature of the business.

5.7.

Other sub-committees which meet as and when required, include the following:

- Community Development Fund Sub-committee.
- St Magnus Cathedral Sub-committee.

5.7.1.

Since May 2017, the Community Development Fund Sub-committee has met on 11 occasions:

- 3 meetings in 2018.
- 4 meetings in 2019.
- 1 meeting in 2020.
- 3 meetings in 2021 to date.

5.7.2.

Since May 2017, the St Magnus Cathedral Sub-committee has met on three occasions:

- 2 meetings in 2019.
- 1 meeting in 2021 to date.

5.8.

Where the remaining Committees and Sub-committees listed above meet in the Chamber, then audiocasting of the meetings can take place, the exception is the College Management Council Sub-committee which meets at Orkney College and where there are no facilities to audiocast. Due to the resource and expertise required to relocate the audio casting equipment to another venue it is not possible to audiocast any meeting that is not held in the Chamber.

5.9.

In the interest of transparency, Option 2, namely to audio cast meetings of the remaining Committees and Sub-committees that are held in the Chamber, is the recommended option.

6. Human Resource Implications

6.1.

The job description for the existing post of Committees Assistant, currently vacant, could be amended to include assisting with the increased work associated with audio casting meetings. This could include being present at meetings to undertake the live audio cast, as well as recording meetings and thereafter preparing the sound file for uploading to the Council's website.

6.2.

This proposal would supplement the current arrangement and build in-house expertise and resilience to cover the present arrangement and lessen the reliance on colleagues in IT Services.

7. Equalities Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

8. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

9. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report as the budget is in place for the current provision of audio casting and the resource to facilitate the proposed expansion of audio casting is available in the current budgeted post of Committees Assistant.

10. Legal Aspects

There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

11. Contact Officers

John W Mundell, Interim Chief Executive, extension 2101, Email john.mundell@orkney.gov.uk

Karen Greaves, Head of Executive Support, extension 2202, Email karen.greaves@orkney.gov.uk

Hazel Flett, Senior Committees Officer, extension 2208, Email hazel.flett@orkney.gov.uk

12. Appendices

Appendix 1: Listen Live and Listen Again Figures for the period August 2019 to July 2021.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.

Date	Meeting	Listeners (recording)	Listeners (live)
2021			
Jul-07	Local Review Body		45
Jul-07	Planning		24
Jul-06	Full Council		32
Jun-30	IJB		15
Jun-23	IJB audit		59
Jun-22	Special General	148	
Jun-22	P&R		28
Jun-10	OHAC		52
Jun-10	M&A		21
Jun-09	ELH		20
Jun-08	D&I		27
Jun-02	Local Review Body		20
Jun-02	Planning		9
May-31	Special General		12
May-19	Special P&R		17
May-18	Special D&I		44
May-05	Full Council		17
Apr-28	Local Review Body		20
Apr-21	IJB		12
Apr-20	P&R		16
Apr-01	OHAC		33
Apr-01	M&A		23
Mar-31	ELH		14
Mar-30	D&I		37
Mar-29	Special General		28
Mar-21	Special General		41
Mar-11	M&A	287	
Mar-11	Local Review Body	103	
Mar-10	Special IJB		24
Mar-10	IJB audit ctte		17
Mar-03	Planning		39
Mar-02	Full Council		33
Feb-23	Special P&R		41
Feb-16	P&R		47
Feb-10	IJB		43
Feb-04	M&A		44
Feb-03	ELH		23
Feb-02	D&I		14
Jan-29	Local Review Body		8
Jan-20	Planning		25
Jan-14	Special General	102	

Date	Meeting	Listeners (recording)	Listeners (live)
2020			
Dec-17	Local Review Body		30
Dec-09	IJB		35
Dec-08	Full Council		23
Dec-03	P&R		42
Dec-02	Planning		37
Nov-25	Special General		32
Nov-24	P&R		16
Nov-19	Local Review Body		13
Nov-18	IJB Audit Ctte		13
Nov-12	M&A		37
Nov-11	ELH		21
Nov-10	D&I		19
Oct-29	IJB		23
Oct-28	Special General		11
Oct-25	M&A		5
Oct-13	Special General		18
Oct-07	Planning		33
Oct-06	Full Council		18
Oct-01	Special P&R		12
Sep-30	IJB		28
Sep-25	Local Review Body		14
Sep-24	M&A		48
Sep-22	P&R		38
Sep-17	IJB Audit Ctte		15
Sep-10	OHACE		26
Sep-09	ELH		18
Sep-08	D&I		28
Sep-02	Planning		66
Aug-27	M&A		35
Aug-19	Planning pm		34
Aug-19	Planning am		56
Aug-18	IJB		18
Aug-13	Special General		19
Jul-01	Planning		23
Jun-30	Special General		50
Jun-24	IJB		20
Jun-23	Special General		13
Jun-23	IJB Audit Ctte		5
Jun-16	Planning		40
Jun-11	Special General		70
Jun-04	M&A		20
May-20	Planning		27
May-12	IJB		21
May-05	Special General		65
Apr-16	Special General		95

Date	Meeting	Listeners (recording)	Listeners (live)
	Before lockdown		
	2020		
Mar-23	Special General	17	39
Mar-18	IJB Audit Ctte	11	1
Mar-04	Planning	12	14
Mar-03	Full Council	25	8
Feb-25	Special P&R	18	11
Feb-25	Special General	8	2
Feb-18	P&R	21	16
Feb-22	Planning	5	3
Feb-22	Local Review Body	12	4
Feb-06	M&A	15	6
Feb-05	ELH	40	20
Feb-04	D&I	20	13
	2019		
Dec-18	Planning	17	16
Dec-04	Special General	4	2
Dec-11	IJB	8	3
Dec-10	Full Council	13	4
Nov-26	P&R	15	26
Nov-19	IJB Audit	2	3
Nov-19	IJB	6	3
Nov-14	OHAC	6	3
Nov-14	M&A	6	7
Nov-13	ELH	36	9
Nov-12	D&I	14	16
Oct-30	Planning	9	37
Oct-08	Full Council	28	7
Oct-02	IJB	17	17
Oct-26	M&A	29	20
Sep-24	P&R	43	24
Sep-12	OHAC	12	5
Sep-11	ELH	32	10
Sep-10	D&I	20	24
Aug-29	IJB	5	3



Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan	
Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.	Audio Casting Review.
Service / service area responsible.	Chief Executive's Service.
Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.	Karen Greaves, Head of Executive Support. Extension: 2202. karen.greaves@orkney.gov.uk
Date of assessment.	2 November 2021
Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	Existing – this review considers future options in respect of audio casting of Council meetings.

2. Initial Screening	
What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?	Audio-casting makes council business more accessible for residents and interested parties who are unable to travel to attend a council or committee meeting. The proposal lists options to extend this facility to all committees and sub-committees held in the Chamber.
Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?	The function is strategically important in making the business of the Council accessible to all.
State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how.	Whole communities, group or individuals residing in Orkney will be positively affected by the proposal to continue with audio casting.

<p>How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?</p>	<p>The usage statistics for the facility have been considered. Engagement with media stakeholders was undertaken in 2017 where support for the audio casting facility was raised. Recent engagement with Officers also provided support for this approach.</p>
<p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p>	<p>The Orkney Islands Council, 'Council Plan' mission and values set out the commitment to how decisions are made. Core to this is promoting equality and fairness. The audio casting facility offers a mechanism for the general public to access the decision-making process either live or through the listen again facility. The recommendation is to expand the audio casting to all committees and sub-committees that meet in the Chamber.</p>
<p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise. E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See The Fairer Scotland Duty Interim Guidance for Public Bodies for further information.</p>	<p>(Please complete this section for proposals relating to strategic decisions). Not applicable.</p>
<p>Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?</p>	<p>(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).</p>
<p>1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.</p>	<p>Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all groups.</p>
<p>2. Sex: a man or a woman.</p>	<p>Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.</p>
<p>3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.</p>	<p>Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.</p>
<p>4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.</p>	<p>Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.</p>
<p>5. Pregnancy and maternity.</p>	<p>Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.</p>

6. Age: people of different ages.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
8. Caring responsibilities.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
9. Care experienced.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	(Includes physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, mental health) Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offers accessibility to committee meetings for all.

3. Impact Assessment

Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	No - The recommendation is to extend the number of council meetings that are audio cast.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	Not required
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes.

4. Conclusions and Planned Action

Is further work required?	To be confirmed once consideration of options resolved.
What action is to be taken?	Implementation of Council decision.
Who will undertake it?	Head of Executive Support.
When will it be done?	As soon as practicable.
How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans).	Through Service Plan.

Signature:



Date: 2 November 2021.

Name: KAREN GREAVES

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk