

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES

12 February 2015

SECTION B – MATTER FOR INFORMATION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with a further update in relation to the Welsh Government grant funding made available to support the development of webcasting of council meetings.

Background

In February, 2013, the Welsh Government wrote to local authorities notifying them of specific grant funding that it had decided to make available to modernise democratic arrangements. Specifically:

- To enable councils to make particular arrangements to broadcast council meetings;
- Introduce remote attendance at council meetings; and
- Assist community councils to publish information on and be contactable through the Internet.

The conditions of the grant funding were drafted in such a way that councils would need to deliver on all three of these developments in order to secure any of the grant funding. The total grant available to Neath Port Talbot Council was £49,500.

To secure the grant the Council was required to:

- Broadcast some/all of the council meetings by 31 March 2014;
- Provide funding to community councils to assist them with the development of their websites by 31 March 2014.
- Arrange for remote attendance by councillors at council meetings by 31 March 2014.

Following an exchange of correspondence with Welsh Government, officers received written confirmation that it would be possible to distribute the funding to Town and Community councils even if this Council chose not to proceed to use the funding allocated for broadcasting and remote attendance.

Progress and current position

The Council decided in Policy and Resources Cabinet Board of 11 July 2013, following scrutiny that it did not wish to proceed with the introduction of webcasting due to the fact that there was no recurring additional funding available to support the maintenance of these activities and Council budgets were already under significant pressure. In relation to remote attendance at meeting by Members this was also rejected due to the lack of demand for the facility in this area and again due to issues of cost.

However, the Council did agree that arrangements should be put in place to disperse the ring-fenced £9,500 in grant aid to Town and Community Councils for the development of websites.

Following the decision of the Council, the Chief Executive, Mr Steven Phillips, formally wrote to the Welsh Government on 1 August, 2013, confirming the Council's decision to return the allocated grant funding of £40,000.

During the Summer of 2014, the Welsh Government began to investigate the possibility of pursuing a single contract arrangements for all local authorities who wished to pursue an All-Wales webcasting arrangement from April 2015 onwards.

On 12 November 2014, the Council was informed by Welsh Government that following discussions with suppliers and representatives of the National Procurement Service, the decision had been taken not to pursue a national contract.

This was due to difficulties surrounding the level of interest in the agreement, contract duration, as well as the added complication of EU procurement rules. In addition, it was felt that due to the significant budget pressures facing local authorities at the moment, the level of political commitment to this type of project remained highly uncertain.

On 3 February 2015, Welsh Government published a White Paper that proposed to introduce a requirement to broadcast Council meetings at some future date.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

Recommendations

It is recommended as follows:-

- (a) That the above report be noted.

List of Background Papers

Report of the Head of Democratic Services and Corporate Strategy –
Webcasting and Remote Attendance at Meetings (31 January 2014)

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