



DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/09/10
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	31 MARCH 2009
SUBJECT OF REPORT	ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY TO AUTHORITY MEETINGS
LEAD OFFICER	Clerk to the Authority
RECOMMENDATIONS	<p>(a) <i>that the Authority indicates whether it would wish to progress the procurement of a web-casting facility for its meetings;</i></p> <p>(b) <i>that, subject to (a) above, the report be noted.</i></p>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>At its meeting on 31 July 2008 the Authority considered a report on public access to Authority meetings. That report detailed the legislative requirements for access (with which the Authority is compliant). It also identified that the meeting rooms in Somerset House were fitted with a hearing induction loop and limited public address (PA) facilities (amplifier; ceiling-mounted loudspeakers; two wireless headset microphones; and two lecturn-mounted microphones). The installation of a full PA system was being explored. In considering this report, the Authority asked that options to further enhance public access to meetings – for example, webcasting – be explored.</p> <p>This report notifies the Authority that a full PA system (comprising desk-top wireless microphones) has now been installed. It also sets out, for consideration, options and associated costings for webcasting.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	As indicated in Section 3 of this report.
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	No potentially negative impact sufficient enough to warrant a full impact assessment has been identified in the content of this report.
APPENDICES	Nil.
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	Report DSFRA/08/20 – “Access to Authority Meetings” – as submitted to and considered by the meeting of the Authority held on 31 July 2008.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its meeting on 31 July 2008 the Authority considered a report of the Clerk on issues connected with access to Authority meetings (including provision for disabled access and other facilities to assist persons with disabilities). The Authority resolved that a report be submitted to a future meeting on costs associated with webcasting meetings (Minute DSFRA/34 refers).
- 1.2 The initial report to the Authority meeting had been prompted by issues raised by the Fire Brigades Union over a perceived lack of access to the February 2008 Budget setting meeting of the Authority and a previous meeting in October during which the dual crewing of aerial appliances had been discussed. The report outlined the legal requirements for public access to meetings (with which the Authority was fully compliant) and also identified that:-
- with completion of the building work to both Somerset House and the new reception area, the meeting facilities at Somerset House were compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, with wheelchair access being effected by means of the lift situated in East Devon House and utilising the upper floor connecting link to Somerset House via the new Main Reception building; and
 - that both meeting rooms had a fully-functional hearing loop (capable of being used as a single system when both rooms were being used in combined mode) and that both had limited public address (PA) facilities – although at that time options for a full PA system (which would integrate into the hearing loop) were being explored.
- 1.3 As indicated, although being fully compliant with legal access requirements it was nonetheless felt that other possibilities existed and should be explored (e.g. webcasting) to further enhance public access to Authority meetings.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 It was always intended, from the development stages for the new meeting facilities at Somerset House, that ultimately they would be equipped with a full hearing-loop and PA system. The hearing loop was installed during the building stages and ceiling-mounted speakers, with an IT (PowerPoint, Video and SmartBoard) provision including an amplifier, also installed.
- 2.2 More recently, it has been possible to install wireless microphones, the costs being met from within the existing ICT budget. These units, each of which has an individual speaker built into the base, fully integrate with the amplification system, hearing loop and loudspeaker system already in place in the meeting rooms. This new PA system will be used at this meeting of the Authority and at subsequent meetings and should result in a considerable improvement in terms of audibility of proceedings. The new system is also capable of being fully integrated into any webcasting provision the Authority may subsequently choose to adopt and the remainder of this report focuses on that issue.

3. OPTIONS FOR WEBCASTING

- 3.1 As indicated earlier, the initial report to the Authority meeting in July was in part prompted by concerns expressed at the time by the Fire Brigades Union over access to two, particularly contentious meetings. By way of context, the report also detailed:-
- that the Authority was (and continues to be) fully compliant with legal requirements in terms of public access to meeting;
 - that, historically, there has been little or no press or public attendance at the vast majority of full Authority or Committee meetings. This remains the case to the present time despite the fact that details of forthcoming public meetings are published on the Authority's website (with an appropriate link circulated to local media).
- 3.2 The above context still applies. While there may be other benefits associated with webcasting of meetings it is suggested that one factor involved in any decision to procure such a system might be the likely take-up of the facility.
- 3.3 Preliminary investigations into webcasting have been on the basis of providing:-
- 1 x static camera providing a whole room overview;
 - 2 x dome cameras with automatic tracking, configured to focus on the person speaking at any one time;
 - provision of associated equipment to facilitate the webcasting (e.g. camera switching software and equipment [PC]; dedicated server for streaming/webcasting video and audio via the intranet and internet.
- 3.4 As indicated earlier, the existing equipment in the meeting rooms (including wireless microphones) is capable of full integration with any webcasting solution that may be pursued. The provision indicated in paragraph 3.3 above is intended for webcasting of full Authority meetings (i.e. using both meeting rooms in Somerset House in combined mode). It would also be possible to webcast Committee meetings (where only one meeting room is used) but it would be necessary for all meetings to be held in the same committee room (as at present the purchase of only one overview camera has been explored). To equip both committee rooms for independent webcasting would require additional cost associated with the purchase of a second, static overview camera.
- 3.5 Four companies have been approached and the indicative costs obtained for the provision of a webcasting facility as described in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 above range from £9,200 to £14,200 for one-off hardware purchases. Additionally, for two of the potential suppliers approached there would be the following ongoing costs:-
- in one case, of £2,800 per annum for annual support and software licences; and
 - in the other case, ranging from £7,553 per year (based on 5 hours per month/60hours per year webcasting) to £10,172 per year (based on 20hours per month/240hours per year webcasting) for use of bespoke software and servers ("hosting"). This supplier also offers:
 - an annual contract (equipment leased rather than purchased) option ranging from £16,557 to £24,157 per year;

- additional functionality including contextual information (meeting name; current speaker name, current agenda point) displayed next to the video output window (**NOTE:** the Service ICT Section considers that it can provide this additional functionality to whatever system is procured).

3.6 The lowest cost for the procurement of an in-house webcasting solution (with no ongoing licence or webcast “hosting” costs) is approximately £9,200.

3.7 At present no specific budgetary provision has been made for the procurement of a webcasting facility. If, however, the Authority was minded to seek to progress this then efforts would be made to secure the provision from within existing resources.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 This report updates the Authority on enhancements (i.e. the provision of wireless microphones) to the existing meeting facilities made following consideration of general accessibility issues at the meeting in July 2008. The report also identifies, as requested at the July meeting, options and associated costs for webcasting Authority meetings.

4.2 The Authority is invited to consider the contents of this report and indicate whether at this stage it would wish to progress a webcasting facility.

MIKE PEARSON
Clerk to the Authority