

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Recording of Meetings

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1. Purpose of the Report

To consider the continuation of the system of recording meetings.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the final meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the last Borough elections in 2015, the Committee asked officers to investigate the option of the Council making its own recordings of council committees as an official record of proceedings. They were concerned about members of the public potentially making their own recordings and editing the content out of context. At that time there had been no documented incidents where 'mischievous' or 'malicious' recordings had been made.
- 2.2 The issue was researched, and a paper setting out three options for the recording of meetings was presented to the July 2015 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. The merits of each method of recording were discussed and it was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that a system of audio recording and broadcasting was implemented. It was agreed that there would be a trial period of audio recording of the Planning Committee and Council. This would use the Audio Minutes system which integrates with the Council website. This would enable the public to be able to listen live to meetings at home; recordings would also be available for twelve months on the website, similar to services as the BBC iPlayer. The option chosen was seen as providing an affordable solution. There would be no set up cost and the council would be on a 'pay as you go' arrangement. It

was envisaged that the cost of the service would be relatively modest and anticipated costs would be met from existing budget.

- 2.3 The recording was implemented but due to a range of technical issues, and the system not working consistently, the trial was extended and has now concluded. It is now evident that due to these technical problems use of the current system is not possible and continuation of recording would now require additional budget.
- 2.4 At the last meeting of the committee, members requested information regarding the number of people who listened to the recording and were informed that detailed analysis was not available; it was estimated to be in the low teens.
- 2.5 As part of the evaluation of the trial the Senior Leadership Team asked for a survey to understand if there was demand for audio recording. A small scale survey amongst residents was undertaken through the Council's social media channels where residents were asked if they would value or use such a facility. Disappointingly no feedback either positive or negative was received.
- 2.5 There have been no recorded incidents of 'malicious' recordings being made.
- 2.6 Alternative options to enable recordings to be made of meetings were explored although these were not taken forward due to a number of practical considerations. One possible alternative that was discussed was making a recording not using the audiomminutes system by using a simple sound recording set up. This was not taken forward due to a number of practical considerations such as giving access to the recordings to the public and issues surrounding storage. The principle of recording meetings and not making them freely available was also felt to be not in keeping with the desire to keep decision making open and transparent.
- 2.7 Members are asked to consider in the light of the lack public interest, and the need to spend additional budget, if the recording of meetings should be discontinued. The view of officers is set out below

2.8 Due to a number of factors officers are recommending that the trial is concluded and the Council does not audio record meetings in the future. The reasons for this are:

- There is very little evidence of any demand for this service from the public; and
- The costs for the service have increased significantly since the trial was started resulting in the service becoming unaffordable within the agreed budget. The service is non-statutory and the council must prioritise existing resources towards services that we have a duty to deliver and are valued by residents.

3. Recommendation

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Discuss the issue of recording committee meetings; and
- 2) Consider making a recommendation to Cabinet on the future for audio recording of meetings.