

Item: 10

Policy and Resources Committee: 19 February 2019.

Audio casting – Review.

Report by Chief Executive.

1. Purpose of Report

To reconsider the review of audio casting.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That audio casting of Council meetings has been underway since June 2015, using a low-cost, in-house system, with the following meetings currently broadcast:

- General Meetings of the Council.
- Policy and Resources Committee.
- Development and Infrastructure Committee.
- Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.
- Orkney Health and Care Committee.
- Monitoring and Audit Committee.
- Orkney's Integration Joint Board, together with its Audit Committee.

2.2.

That the existing microphones and audio-casting equipment are not providing an acceptable quality of sound output and therefore a review of the current arrangement has been undertaken.

2.3.

Options for the type of audio-casting, as detailed in section 5 of this report, with the preferred option being Option 3, namely to progress with replacement of the in-house system.

2.4.

Options for the type of replacement microphone, as detailed in section 6 of this report, with the preferred option being Option 2, namely dual use microphones with no voting, to be purchased.

2.5.

Options for the scope of audio-casting, as detailed in section 7 of this report, with the preferred option being Option 2, namely to extend the audio-casting facility to include the following:

- Licensing Committee.
- Planning Committee.
- Local Review Body.

It is recommended:

2.6.

That the Council continues to audio cast meetings of its committees.

2.7.

That the Chief Executive should purchase replacement audio-casting equipment, including a survey of the Chamber, together with dual user microphones with no electronic voting system, at a cost of £29,000, to be funded from the Capital Fund.

2.8.

That the audio casting provision be extended to include meetings of the following Committees:

- Licensing Committee.
- Planning Committee.
- Local Review Body.

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 a low-cost, in-house system.

3.2.

Committees currently broadcast are Education, Leisure and Housing, Development and Infrastructure, Orkney Health and Care, Monitoring and Audit and Policy and Resources, as well as General Meetings of the Council and Orkney's Integration Joint Board.

3.3.

As well as the 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 new report to make it easy for people to listen to a particular item of interest to them and to find the relevant Committee reports.

3.4.

Although the live listening figures fluctuate, with reasonably high numbers for some topical meetings and a smaller number for others, the 'listen again' facility has consistently high numbers of listeners and a summary of the 'Listen Live' and 'Listen Again' statistics is provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

3.5.

In general, 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 facility provides the Council with a verbatim record of the meeting which can be used to check any disputed decisions or statements. The media can remotely attend the meeting or 'listen again' which results in increased coverage for council business. In addition, the media regularly use the facility by broadcasting clips of the audio-cast as part of news items which gives listeners a clearer insight into the decision-making process. Council staff find the facility useful for monitoring what stage a meeting is at in order to attend the meeting in time for a particular item and also for improving their understanding of governance and process.

3.6.

On 25 September 2018, the Policy and Resources Committee considered further options for audio-casting and subsequently 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 no electronic voting system, at a cost of £29,000, to be funded from the Capital Fund.
- That the audio-casting provision be extended to include meetings of the following Committees:
 - Licensing Committee.
 - Planning Committee.
 - Local Review Body.

3.7.

However, at the General Meeting held on 9 October 2018, when considering the recommendations detailed at section 3.6 above, the Council resolved that the review of audio-casting of Council meetings be referred back to the Policy and Resources Committee for further consideration.

4. Microphones and Audio-casting Equipment

4.1.

The microphones serve two purposes, one being to ensure that all in the Chamber and public gallery can hear what is being said and secondly, where applicable, to stream and record the output through the audio-casting equipment.

4.2.

Recently, the microphones have been producing poor sound quality, both during the meeting and the audio-cast output. A technician has assessed the situation with the aim to improve the sound quality of the existing microphones.

4.3.

The finding of the assessment is that the microphones utilise wi-fi technology on the same frequency as many other wi-fi routers and devices. The microphones were manufactured at a time when there was significantly less use of wireless technology and they do not have the capacity to negate the effect from interference from other wireless and Bluetooth devices. The interference has gradually become worse over time as more devices access wireless points and additional wi-fi points have been installed in the vicinity of the Council Chamber. Modern wireless microphone systems are designed and equipped to be interference free.

4.4.

Officers from the Council's Information Services have explored whether there are any options for changing the wireless provision within and near the Chamber to exclude the range that the microphones operate within. This would however require a global change across the Council's entire wireless network and the cost to re-configure the network, and any consequential costs as a result of the change, would be higher than investing in new microphones.

5. Audio-casting – Options Analysis

5.1.

The Council's microphones and audio-casting equipment are not providing an acceptable quality of output and therefore, prior to the consideration of replacement equipment, an option appraisal on the type of service to be provided has been undertaken. There are five options which can be considered:

5.2.

Option 1 – Do nothing.

5.2.1.

Doing nothing will mean that the system will continue to provide a poor sound quality and could eventually fail. The facility to hear clearly what individuals are saying and audio-cast council meetings will not be possible. The benefits of the current system, will be lost and there is likely to be reputational damage to the Council for reverting to a position where Council meetings are more difficult to access by the general public.

5.2.2.

Regardless of the audio-casting element, the microphones are an essential element to ensure all within the Chamber and public gallery are able to hear proceedings. Not progressing with replacement microphones could compromise the ability of councillors to be able to participate in the meetings effectively.

5.3.

Option 2 – Cease audio-casting.

5.3.1.

This option is effectively withdrawing the service before it fails but would generate a saving of £4,000.

5.3.2.

Ceasing audio-casting could, as referred to in section 5.2.1 above, lead to reputational damage if the Council makes accessing Council meetings more difficult for the general public.

5.4.

Option 3 – Renew Microphones and Audio-casting In House Equipment.

5.4.1.

This option is to maintain the status quo in terms of the provision of the facility. The current in-house system is delivered using the Council's equipment to broadcast the live audio stream. The broadcast equipment requires to be operated during the meeting and this function is currently delivered by a contractor with back-up provided by the Council's IT Services. A recording of the meeting is then made available via the Council's website by the Council's Web Co-ordinator.

5.4.2.

When considering the information in section 4 above, together with factors such as the age of the microphones and the difficulties in obtaining spares and repairs, it is recommended that the microphones be replaced with new modern units. Newer microphones systems now employ cross-interference measures to prevent interference. The in-house audio-casting equipment required updating and the audiocasting output would be improved by purchasing a device which can both record and broadcast simultaneously.

5.4.3

It is recommended that a specialist engineer should survey the Chamber and confirm that the equipment being recommended would best meet the Council's needs

5.4.4.

The cost of this Option would include replacement microphones, as detailed in section 6 below, plus the cost of replacement in-house audio-casting equipment estimated to be £5,000. In addition to the survey cost, estimated at £1,000, and equipment replacement costs, the annual cost of operating the system, again depending on the length and duration of the meeting, for up to 180 hours, is in the region of £4,000.

5.5.

Option 4 – Specialist Provider of Audio Casting.

5.5.1

This option considers the provision of the audio-casting system by a specialist company who provide an online audio streaming solution through a microsite. The system requires an operator who operates the live stream from a laptop. The system platform includes agenda management tools to assist the listener and offers listeners the chance to comment and engage online. The Council can use its own social media sites to interact with the content of the microsite. The microsite also enables councils to include biographies of speakers and links to Councillor pages. In addition, a transcript is automatically generated which can later be accessed. As with Option 3, an operator and administrator are required to manage the system.

5.5.2.

The cost of Option 4 for the survey £1,000, microsite and online streaming would be in the region of £900 initial set up and training. Annual costs are up to £4,000 for the operator and £5,200 for up to 180 hours per year audio-streaming.

5.6.

Option 5 – Replace Equipment with Web casting facility

5.6.1.

Webcasting is the one-way broadcast of Council meetings which includes both a video and audio stream of the meeting. To watch web-cast meetings, particularly live streaming, requires broadband infrastructure of a reasonable standard which is more challenging for those in rural areas. Broadband coverage in Orkney varies from community to community. Superfast speeds are available in some areas, with far slower connections – or even no service at all – in others. With full webcasting requiring greater bandwidth than an audio stream, it is likely that fewer residents would be able to access the service if this was introduced.

5.6.2.

This facility would see cameras installed within the Chamber which would feed a live video and audio stream of the meeting via an online system. The feed also displays the names of speakers automatically. All cameras move automatically when a microphone is activated which makes operating the live stream very simple. A tablet is provided so that the live stream can be started and stopped from anywhere in the room. The content is streamed to the public via a microsite which would be styled with the Orkney Islands Council branding. There are other additional features which are provided with this option to support on-demand and interactive agenda and presentation management. If members wished further exploration of this option, then it would be prudent for a demonstration to be arranged.

5.6.3.

The costs for this option to survey, cover set up, installation, commissioning and training are in the region of £6,000. Annual costs, amounting to £19,000, include:

- Leased equipment - £4,400.
- Licence - £6,500.
- Servicing and upgrades - £1,300.
- 150 to 180 hours per annum of streaming - up to £6,800 per annum.

5.6.4.

There may still be internal costs to operate the system and this would be as listed in section 5.4.3 above, for up to 180 hours, in the region of £4,000.

5.6.5.

This option could provide an opportunity for recording sessions, such as training and seminars, to generate a library of resources to support learning and development for members and officers. In addition, there could be additional opportunities for its use in partnership working. There will be, however, a similar opportunity to explore a similar facility through the development of Office 365 functionalities and therefore aspirations for this type of resource could be explored through this route.

5.7.

It is recommended that, in order to maintain accessibility of the broadcast through the internet connections available across Orkney, the preferred option for audio-casting is Option 3, namely to replace the equipment and retain in-house delivery of the system, as it currently demonstrates best value for the Council. If Option 3 is approved, it is important to note that the equipment purchased would be compatible with a web-casting option, should the Council reassess the service to be provided in the future.

6. Replacement Microphones

6.1.

Regardless of the system used, the microphones urgently require replacing as they intermittently fail or generate poor quality sound

6.2.

There are four options in respect of the type of replacement microphones.

- Option 1 – Dual user with voting – indicative costs of £25,000.
- Option 2 – Dual user without voting – indicative costs of £23,000.
- Option 3 – Single user with voting – indicative costs of £37,400.
- Option 4 – Single user without voting – indicative costs of £35,700.

6.3.

The Council has amended its Standing Orders in respect of voting at Council meetings, with the usual method of voting by calling the roll.

6.3.1.

This method of voting not only allows for a recorded vote, but also for audio listeners to establish how the vote is placed by each voter. Considering this current practice, there is no immediate need to purchase microphone units with a voting facility as the electronic voting function would not be used to its full potential.

6.3.2.

In addition, bearing in mind the meetings which are audio-cast, electronic voting would be less transparent for listeners as the individual voting preference of each voter would not be heard or available immediately.

6.4.

The current microphones work well on a one between two basis and therefore it is recommended that replacement dual user microphones without voting are purchased at a cost in the region of £23,000, namely Option 2.

7. Scope of Audio-casting

7.1.

Currently the Council audio-casts the following meetings:

- General Meeting of the Council.
- Policy and Resources Committee.
- Development and Infrastructure Committee.
- Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.
- Orkney Health and Care Committee.

- Monitoring and Audit Committee.
- Integration Joint Board, including its Audit Committee.

7.2.

Should the Council continue with audio-casting, three options are presented for consideration.

- Option 1 – Status quo – continue to audio-cast the meetings listed in section 7.1 above.
- Option 2 – Include all committees.
 - This option would include the committees listed in section 7.1 above plus Licensing Committee, Planning Committee and the Local Review Body.
 - These three committees include representations from other contributors who are not Elected Members or Council Officials and therefore clear guidance would be provided to them prior to the meeting.
 - This option could be managed within existing resources.
- Option 3 – Include all committees and sub-committees.
 - The Council has nine sub-committees which meet up to five times per year. This would be a significant increase in the number of meetings to arrange an operator to be present and prepare and submit onto the web-site.
 - If members wish to extend audio-casting to some or all of the sub-committee meetings then a report with proposals will require to be prepared for consideration in due course.

7.3.

It is recommended that Option 2 be progressed, namely that audio-casting provision is initially extended to include the Licensing Committee, Planning Committee and the Local Review Body.

8. Equalities Impact

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

9. Corporate Governance

This report relates to 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.

10. Financial Implications

10.1.

The financial implications of the five options for the review of audio casting are as follows:

Option.	Capital Cost.	Annual Cost.
1 – Do nothing.	-	-
2 – Cease Audio Casting.	-	Savings - £4,000
3 – Replace current Equipment.	£5,000. £1,000 for Survey	£4,000 for Operator within existing budget.
4 – Specialist Audio Cast provider.	£900. £1,000 for Survey	£4,000 for Operator within existing budget. £5,200 additional cost for Service.
5 – Web Casting.	£5,000. £1,000 for Survey	£4,000 for Operator within existing budget. £19,000 additional cost for Service.

10.2.

The financial implications of the four options for the replacement microphones are as follows:

Option.	Capital Cost.
1 – Dual User no voting.	£25,000.
2 – Dual User without voting.	£23,000.
3 – Single User with voting.	£37,400.
4 – Single User without voting.	£35,700.

10.3.

The recommended option for replacement of the audio-casting facility is Option 2 as set out in section 7.2. above, which proposes to absorb audio-casting of three additional committees within existing resources and would therefore have no additional revenue cost. The current equipment would be replaced under this option at an estimated cost of £6,000.

10.4.

The recommended option for replacement microphones is for dual user microphones with no electronic voting system at an estimated cost of £23,000. The overall cost for replacement audio-casting equipment and microphones is an estimated capital cost of £29,000 with no increase in operator costs, which could be met from the Capital Fund.

10.5.

Operation of the Capital Fund is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Finance.

11. Legal Aspects

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

12. Contact Officers

Alistair Buchan, Chief Executive, extension 2101, Email chief.executive@orkney.gov.uk

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

David Hartley, Communications Team Leader, extension 2245, Email david.hartley@orkney.gov.uk

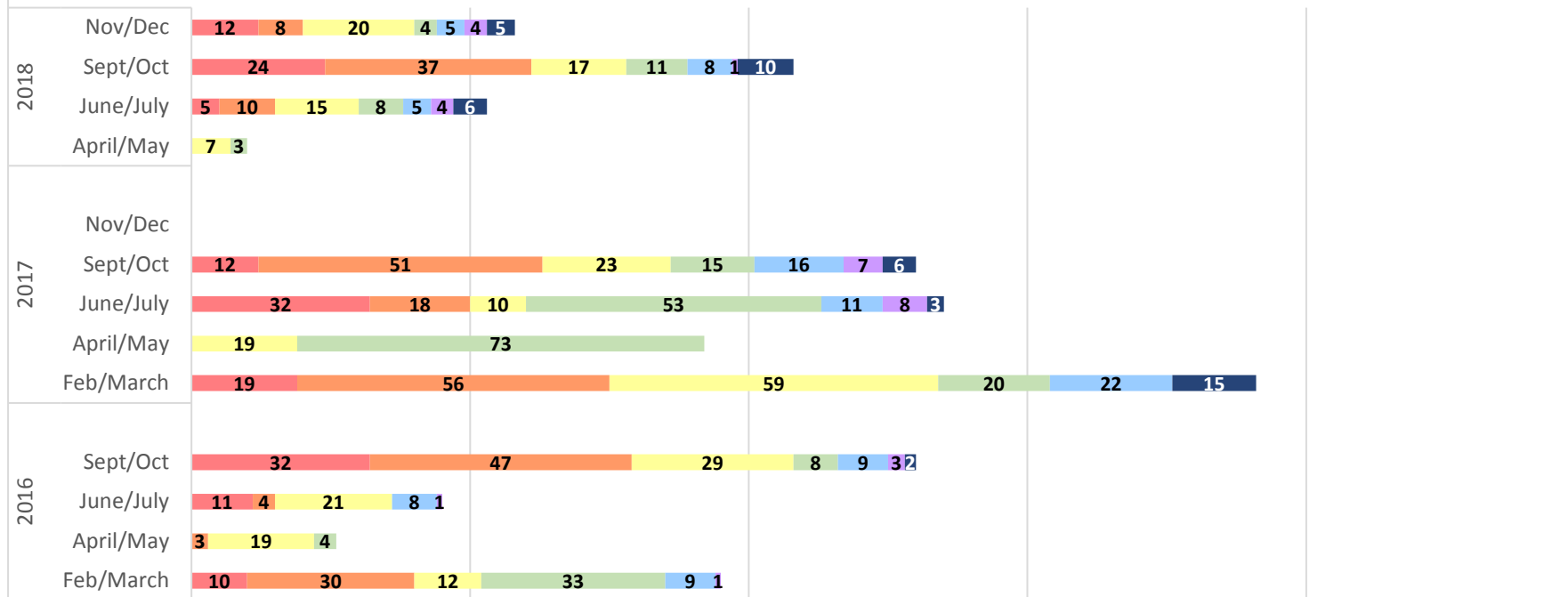
13. Appendices

Appendix 1: Listen Live and Listen Again Statistics.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.

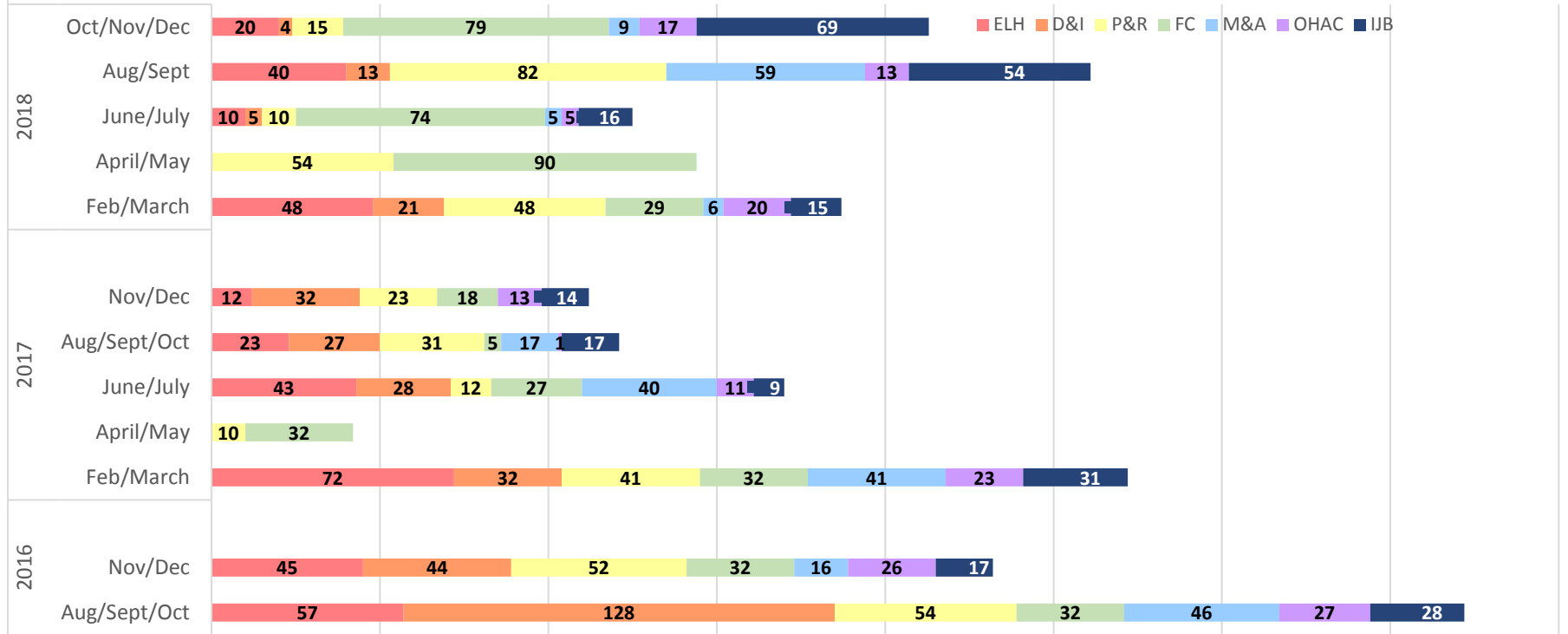
LISTENERS (LIVE)

ELH D&I P&R FC M&A OHAC IJB



	2016				2017					2018			
	Feb/March	April/May	June/July	Sept/Oct	Feb/March	April/May	June/July	Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec	April/May	June/July	Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec
ELH	10		11	32	19		32	12			5	24	12
D&I	30	3	4	47	56		18	51			10	37	8
P&R	12	19	21	29	59	19	10	23		7	15	17	20
FC	33	4		8	20	73	53	15		3	8	11	4
M&A	9		8	9	22		11	16			5	8	5
OHAC	1		1	3			8	7			4	1	4
IJB				2	15		3	6			6	10	5

LISTEN AGAIN FIGURES



	2016		2017					2018				
	Aug/Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec	Feb/March	April/May	June/July	Aug/Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec	Feb/March	April/May	June/July	Aug/Sept	Oct/Nov/Dec
ELH	57	45	72		43	23	12	48		10	40	20
D&I	128	44	32		28	27	32	21		5	13	4
P&R	54	52	41	10	12	31	23	48	54	10	82	15
FC	32	32	32	32	27	5	18	29	90	74		79
M&A	46	16	41		40	17		6		5	59	9
OHAC	27	26	23		11	1	13	20		5	13	17
IJB	28	17	31		9	17	14	15		16	54	69



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.	7 February 2019
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 list options to continue this facility.
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.

How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?	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.
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).	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 continue audio casting. If web casting is the preferred option, the accessibility of the video stream may be limited due to current standards of connectivity across remote areas of Orkney.
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.	(Please complete this section for proposals relating to strategic decisions). Not applicable.
Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?	(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).
1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all groups.
2. Sex: a man or a woman.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
5. Pregnancy and maternity.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
6. Age: people of different	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer

ages.	accessibility to committee meetings for all.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
8. Caring responsibilities.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
9. Care experienced.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer 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 offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all.
13. Isles-proofing.	Positive impact. The proposal in the report offer accessibility to committee meetings for all. The recommendation is to continue audio casting. If however, web casting is the preferred option, the accessibility of the video stream may be limited due to current standards of connectivity across remote areas of Orkney. Differential impacts may then exist for those groups who live in the isles with poor connectivity.

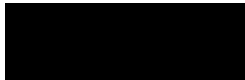
3. Impact Assessment

Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	The recommendation is to continue audio casting. If however, web casting is the preferred option, the accessibility of the video stream may be limited due to current standards of connectivity across remote areas of Orkney. Differential impacts may then exist for those groups who live in areas with poor connectivity.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	Further work to explore options would be explored.
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:



Name: KAREN GREAVES

Date: 7 February 2019.

(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