Members' guide to Web Casting

Brighton & Hove City Council

September 2008

Why web cast?

The principal reason for web casting is that it increases accessibility, openness and transparency.

A key benefit of web casting is that citizens can access content where and when they want (experience shows that about 80% of web cast visitors view the archive, at the time of their choosing, rather than the live feed). Archived meetings are automatically indexed by agenda item and speaker, which allows viewers to watch just those specific items in which they are interested.

Web cast viewers spend on average 9 minutes at a time viewing. This ties in with the typical length of a single item on an agenda and supports the belief that users of the service 'tune in' for the items of interest to them – something which is very difficult to do if actually attending a meeting.

What is a web cast?

Web casting is the live or recorded transmission of video over the Web. Video cameras in our main meeting rooms capture the live information from selected meetings and send it, via our provider Public-i to anyone that would like to view the meeting. Through the use of your internet connection (either broadband or via a dial-up modem) and the free Microsoft Media Player you can view live and older meetings from the comfort of your own home.

Brighton & Hove City Council web cast:
www.brighton-hove.public-i.tv

Viewing a web cast

Viewing a web cast either live or older meetings, is simple - all you need is Windows media player and internet connection. Viewers receive video and audio and also names and biographical details about the current speaker and meeting attendees. There are links to supporting information and relevant documents. And index points to enable the viewer to jump to the content they are most interested in.

Web cast funding

The pilot project was funded from resources within Legal & Democratic Services and amounted to £28,680. This provided for the leasing of hardware and software to enable the capture of meetings, the development of a bespoke player page, the provision of hosting and streaming of web casts with 6 months archiving for up to 240 hours per annum.

What is the legal position?

The conduct of council meetings and the conduct of Members at those meetings are governed respectively by Council Procedure Rules and by the Code of Conduct for Members. This framework applies to all council meetings, web cast or not.

The advent of web casting does not alter the liability of Members with respect to the Code of Conduct. If anything, Members need to be mindful of how their conduct might be perceived by any one viewer among potentially a much larger audience than might be present at the meeting venue itself.

The Council is a Data Controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. A protocol for web casting meetings will be submitted to Members. This will assist the conduct of web cast meetings and discharge the obligations of the Council under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Under the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986, the period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. For this reason, Members are advised not to use web cast meetings during such times for any purpose that might be construed as proactive election publicity.

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Speaking at a meeting

- Firstly and most importantly remember to turn your microphone on each time you speak; if you do not your words will not be broadcast. When using the microphone try to speak directly towards it and make sure that it is not too far from your mouth (but also not too close!).

- Try to avoid moving unduly whilst speaking and using expansive hand gestures; because the video stream is highly compressed all movement causes temporary pixilation and leads to a diminution of picture quality. In addition the camera operator will struggle to keep a moving person in shot. For the same reason if giving a presentation please try to stand in the same area rather than walking around the room.

- When other people near you are speaking please bear in mind that you may still be on camera.

- Bear in mind that even when there is no audience in the room members of the public are nonetheless watching the meeting.

Microphone noise

- Microphone noise is an artificial sound that is introduced when an object touches the microphone; speakers should not tap pencils and rings against microphones or touch the cable.

- When speaking try to speak directly towards the microphone and do not place objects such as water bottles in-between yourself and the microphone.

Clothing

- Avoid bright colours which tend to cause exposure problems when web cast.

- Stripes are best avoided as they can cause a strobe effect when web cast, especially when the subject is moving.

Name plates

Members are requested to sit in the seats designated for them by a name plate. This is because the cameras are pre-set so when they focus on a particular member, that member's profile will come up on the viewing screen.

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Wider uses

In time, Brighton & Hove City Council can consider web casting for a wider range of uses outside formal meetings. This could include the Chairman's welcome; video clips on special topics, such as budget setting; information on new schemes; and consultation.

Promoting web casting

Members can consider a variety of ways to promote web casting. They could:

- include the web cast address (see bottom of this page) on letter heads, business cards, email signatures and official websites.

- report to their political groups, and parties using web casts to offer a new dimension by showing a clip of a debate.

- refer to web casts in ward newsletters or meetings with business, community groups and at surgeries, to highlight the work of the authority and member roles.

Web casting operators

Staff from Democratic Services will support Members during the web casting project. The role of the operator is to direct the cameras during meetings. Operators will also manage computer based presentations required by meetings.

Web casting references

Other organisations which use web casting include:

East Sussex County Council **www.east**sussex.gov.uk
Lancashire County Council **www.lancashire.ukcouncil.net/**
Hull City Council **www.hullcc.ukcouncil.net/**
London Borough of Hounslow **www.hounslow.ukcouncil.net/**
The Local Government Association **www.lga.ukcouncil.net/**
London 2012: London Organising **www.webcast.ukcouncil.net/hoste**
Committee for the Olympic Games **d/london2012/**

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Public-i

The company which is providing the web casting service for the pilot project is Public-i: www.public-i.info This company is 6 years old and concentrates on the local government sector where this pioneering technology has been aimed at engaging citizens.

Version 1.0

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