

MEETING	Democratic Services Committee
DATE	19th March 2013
SUBJECT	Web casting and remote attendance
PURPOSE	Present the requirements of the Local Government Wales bill and the expectations of the Minister for Local Government and communities with regards to web casting and remote attendance. Update on grant available to enable the above.
AUTHOR	Councillor Les Day, Chair Democratic Services Committee
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1. Background:

- 1.1 The Local Governemnt (Wales) Bill 2011 aims to promote local democracy and be more inclusive of the public's input and engagement. The Minister for Local Government and Communities, Carl Sargeant, has noted
"I want to enable as many people as possible to have access to the proceedings of local government ... members of the public are entitled to feel that they should be able to see how decisions affecting their everyday lives are made".
- 1.2 In a similar vein, the Minister notes that principal Council's are best placed to work with their community and town councils to enable the public to have access to information concerning the business of their local council and how to contact them. Provision has been made in the Local Government Bill (Democracy) (Wales) for the above, which is currently under consideration by the Assembly.
- 1.3 In addition, Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, requires principal councils to allow for remote attendance at Council meetings, in other words, all members do not have to be present at the principal meeting place in order to participate in the meeting. Further guidance has not been issued thus far on the exact requirements and execution of the Measure. Guidance is expected soon.

2. Grant Developments

- 2.1 At the begining of the year the Minister announced that he would be allocating a grant to assist Councils in Wales in relation to the above areas of work noted in 1 above.

The Minister sent a grant agreement to Gwynedd on the 21st of February with direction to return by the 7th of March. The agreement notes that £72,000 will be

available to Gwynedd Council for the following purpose:

- a. £42,000 for web casting of Council meetings and allowing remote access by elected members;
- b. £30,000 for issuing grants of up to £500 each for the county's community councils to establish their own websites.

2.2 By accepting the grant, Gwynedd Council have agreed to:

Action	Timescale	Evidence
To broadcast all / or some of the Council's meetings	31 March 2014	Web casting on the Council's website.
Provide finance to community councils to assist with the development of their websites.	31 March 2014	Number of Community Councils with websites.
Arrange remote access for elected members.	31 March 2014	Written report noting the number of such meetings held, and an assessment of their success.

2.3 At first glance it seemed that the grant was available for the financial person of 1st April 2012 to 31 March 2013, and to be fully claimed by 31 March 2013. However, there is provision to transfer expenditure to 2013/14.

2.4 As the timescale for responding to the grant application was very limited, it was agreed that the grant should be received, with further work to be undertaken within the Council with regards to how to broadcast meetings over the web.

3 The current situation in Gwynedd

Web casting.

3.1 Gwynedd is in an advantageous situation as the infrastructure required for webcasting the meetings has been inserted as part of the work in Siambr Dafydd Orwig during the last few weeks and is part of the scheduled work in Siambr Hywel Dda. The Council aims to use part of the grant money to assist with these costs.

3.2 With regards to locations, provisions are in place to enable web casting from Siambr Dafydd Orwig and Hywel Dda, and to enable members remote access and join committees from the video conferencing rooms at Dolgellau and Pwllheli.

- 3.3 In order to broadcast efficiently and bilingually, it appears that we may have to purchase broadcasting/ editing services. There are a few independent companies providing this service, with one prominent company operating the market in Wales. A quotation for £32,000 has been received for an agreement to broadcast meetings for a period of two years. We continue to research the best and most cost effective approach, working with other authorities in Wales and seeking guidance from the Welsh Assembly regarding their requirements. It appears that this sort of service must be procured in order to broadcast bilingually. Whilst the grant monies could be used to fund this work for two years, the Council would then be required to ensure provision should they wish to continue with the service.

Community Councils – website development.

- 3.4 The second element of the grant is the provision of up to £500 for Community Councils to develop their own websites. The requirement would be for Gwynedd to facilitate the grant for the Community Councils within the county. There are discussions currently underway with the Economic development Service with regards to undertaking this work.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee permit relevant officers to undertake further research with regards to the requirements of the Measure when further guidance becomes available, and the possibilities of using the grant money. The relevant officers to discuss the matter with the Chair of the Committee and report to the next committee meeting in June 2013.