Members' Library Service Request Form

Date of Document	10/07/20
Originator	Lel Gillingwater/Jill Totney
Originator's Ref (if any)	
Document Title	Procurement of Digital Meetings System

Please indicate if access to the document is to be "unrestricted" or "restricted", with regard to the terms of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

Unrestricted	☒	Restricted	☐

If the document is "restricted", please state on what grounds (click on grey area for drop-down menu):

For Publication

Additional information:

Authorised By	Jim Lamond
Designation	Head of Council Resources
Date	14/07/20

REPORT TO: Members' Library Service

MEETING DATE:

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)

SUBJECT: Procurement of Digital Meetings System

---

1   PURPOSE

1.1   To advise Members of the decision taken by the Head of Council Resources, under delegated powers, to purchase a digital meetings system, which will allow for meetings of the Council, its Committees and its Sub-Committees to be held remotely and made accessible to the public through live-streaming and archive retrieval.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   Members are asked to note the decision taken by the Head of Council Resources, under delegated powers, to purchase a digital meetings system, Public-i Connect Remote.

3   BACKGROUND

3.1   Since the outbreak of COVID-19, and the decision of the Council to enter a period of emergency recess in March 2020, officers have been looking at ways of continuing the democratic process whilst face-to-face meetings cannot take place. A number of committee meetings have been held using the Skype for Business platform, and positive feedback has been received from those attending the meetings and those administering them. However, it is now looking increasingly likely that face-to-face meetings will not resume for some time, and it is recognised that Skype for Business does not provide a long-term solution for large-scale formal meetings, as licences are required for individual users (although there is an option to participate by telephone only), administrator functions are limited, and it is difficult to manage public 'attendance'.

3.2   Officers have been looking at a variety of options for continuing the democratic process in a way that replicates face-to-face meetings, as

well as being accessible by members of the public. One system has been identified as providing an effective remote meeting facility which can be live-streamed and also stored in the archive and accessed retrospectively. This system is called Connect Remote, and is provided by Public-i, a company which has significant experience in providing webcasting facilities. Their webcasting services are already used by more than 100 local authorities, including City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, Midlothian Council, North Lanarkshire Council and Aberdeenshire Council. Connect Remote is a recent addition to their suite of products, and it is anticipated that many Scottish local authorities will be implementing it in the near future.

3.3   Connect Remote is a web-based system, so individual user licences are not required and there is no need to software to be installed on users' IT equipment. It will allow Members and officers to participate in meetings remotely, as well as providing members of the public with access to proceedings, either as they happen or via archived recordings. Meetings will be managed by a moderator (likely to be a Committees Officer), who will ensure that participants are able to join and contribute to the meeting. It should be noted that this particular facility does not include a fixed webcasting facility in the Council Chamber or allow for hybrid meetings (i.e. with some Members attending a meeting in person and others participating remotely).

3.4   The costs associated with setting up and operating Connect Remote are set out in detail at Section 6.1. The system will operate on a pay-as-you-go basis, with bundles of hours being purchased in advance. Officers have been assured that the system would not be 'switched off' in the event that a meeting runs on beyond the purchased hours.

3.5   The Council's Procurement Team have confirmed that Public-i are included in a Framework Agreement for webcasting services. As there are no other providers of such services within the Framework, the procurement of the Connect Remote system can be carried out promptly by way of a Single Source Application, rather than by competitive tender. This has allowed officers to complete the procurement process quickly, with a view to having the system set up and training carried out in time for the start of the 2020/21 committee session.

4   **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1   Introducing remote participation in meetings (on the lifting of or modification to the Emergency Recess arrangements) have required changes to Standing Orders. A report on this was dealt with under COVID-19 Emergency Recess Procedures on 23 June 2020 and was duly approved and subsequently published in the Members' Library (Ref: 74/20, June 2020 Bulletin).

5   INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1   The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Financial – It is estimated that the annual cost of using the system for public meetings could be in the region of £22,500 (which includes the creation of an ELC-branded micro-site, training for users, testing and technical support, and broadcast meeting time). The costs will be recorded as COVID-19 related and, along with other such costs, it is hoped this will attract government funding support. Efforts will be made to accommodate ongoing costs thereafter within the budget for the People and Governance Service.

6.2   Personnel – it is anticipated that the introduction and management of the Connect Remote system will have an impact on the Committees Team resource, particularly during the initial period of operation and for meetings with large numbers of participants. Resources within that team will need to be prioritised to deliver the changes and additional resources allocated where possible.

6.3   Other – the Team Manager – Information Governance will ensure that requirements are met in relation to data protection and data sharing. The Team Manager – IT (Infrastructure and Security) has no concerns in relation to the security of Connect Remote.

7   BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1   East Lothian Council's Standing Orders

7.2   Briefing note 'Webcasting of live remote meetings, to include public participation', May 2020

AUTHOR'S NAME	Lel Gillingwater/Jill Totney
DESIGNATION	Team Manager - Democratic & Licensing
CONTACT INFO	lgillingwater@eastlothian.gov.uk / jtotney@eastlothian.gov.uk
DATE	10 July 2020