

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 1 February 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Approval to purchase the hardware and associated equipment to provide a hybrid meeting solution for the Council Chamber at Blackdown House

Report summary:

This report sets out the details of the proposed IT solution to enable hybrid meetings to be run from the Council Chamber at Blackdown House.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1). That Cabinet recommends the purchase of the MVI audio visual solution as set out in this report
- (2). That Cabinet approves the exemption to contract standing orders in respect of the purchase of the MVI audio visual solution system
- (3). That Cabinet recommend to Council to approve the budget in the sum of £45,000 in respect of the preferred solution

Reason for recommendation:

To allow the purchase of a system that will facilitate hybrid meetings to take place within the Council Chamber at Blackdown House.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning

- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

The proposed system would aid access to meetings of the Council by providing a robust hybrid solution

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

[Council 19 October 2022 Temporary continuation of virtual meetings report](#) - Item 44

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Report in full

1. As Members will be aware, a decision was made by Council on 19 October 2022 to progress a hybrid solution for members to consider.
2. The following brief was prepared by officers for the project and agreed with the Chair of the council:

Source a solution for council meetings to take place in the Council Chamber in Blackdown House (initially) that will enable participants to attend that meeting both in person and remotely. For those attending in the chamber there is a need for voice tracking cameras to be installed that will follow the speaker. For the Chair of the meeting and the Democratic Services team a solution needs to be sourced that will allow for speakers whether in person or remotely to be queued together and managed from a single monitor. The meeting to be streamed via the Council's YouTube channel.

3. Officers have engaged with Strata Service Solutions Ltd who have brought in specialist AV expertise to advise us. Several solutions have been considered which have included looking at what is provided at partner authorities, the previous virtual solution and how our existing equipment in the chamber can be utilised to meet the brief of the project. Quotes were received for 4 different solutions. A series of demonstrations have been held where these solutions have been tested and from this a preferred option (MVI audio visual solution) was showcased to members and the Democratic Services team in January.

The proposed solution meets all the requirements of the brief, namely the installation of voice tracked cameras and will allow participants to be both in the chamber (those who wish to have their vote recorded and count towards the quorum under the Local Government Act, 1972 will still need to be present in the chamber) and to be remote. A request to speak from both will be queued together and it will be for the Chair of a meeting to determine which order a speaker would be selected. The solution can be fully programmed and tailored to meet our needs and this work would be carried out in conjunction with the Democratic Services and the Digital and Data team at the council.

Meetings would be streamed to the council's YouTube channel as at present. The solution would make use of the existing equipment which would be programmed to full capacity taking note of the feedback of members in the past about this equipment.

4. There are additional costs incurred in ensuring that the staff and the building are secure for out of hours meetings, this is the cost of a security guard for the evening, their role will be to oversee entry and exit of members of the public, to deal with any issues that may arise during the meeting and to ensure that the building is secure at the end of the meeting. The cost of this currently per shift is £180.00. These costs will be incurred regardless of whether there is a hybrid solution as they are applicable when there is a physical meeting in the building out of the hours that reception is covered. These costs would be avoided in the event of a fully virtual meeting (when permitted by legislation).
5. The intention is to install the new equipment in the Council Chamber in Blackdown House initially, once we have become familiar with the kit, we will need to consider installing the same system within the Council Chamber at Exmouth Town Hall. Officers would suggest that we use the system in Blackdown House initially for a 3-month period in order that we can apply lessons learned to its deployment to Exmouth Town Hall later in the year.

6. Full Council

The Council is about to start a process to assess its office buildings and office space following the reduction of Covid risk. This will include an intention to bring more desks back into use in Blackdown House and Exmouth Town Hall once appropriate risk assessments have been carried out.

As part of this process the capacity of the meeting rooms will also be reviewed.

Officers propose that once the assessment of meeting room capacity has been completed and the hybrid system has been deployed and used in the Council Chamber, that a further report is brought back to cabinet on the preferred location for Full Council to take place.

7. Procurement and exemption to contract standing orders

Officers obtained 4 quotations from potential suppliers, this broadly meets the requirements of the Council's Contract Standing Orders dealing with procurement, however as the initial contacts were not made via the procurement portal, an exemption to Contract Standing Orders is requested to ensure compliance on the basis that this was a purchase of specialised kit with limited and specialist suppliers.

Financial implications:

The report is recommending to Council a capital budget of £45,000, this sum is not included in the draft budget but the implications are not material.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment