

8.6. Council Chambers Audio Visual Requirements

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ATTACHMENTS: Nil

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to report to Council options and cost to upgrade the Council Chambers audio visual system and IT requirements with the intent of improving the experience for those watching the webcast, participating remotely and participating in the meeting in person.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Council has resolved to upgrade Council Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment with the intent of implementing improvement as a matter of urgency.

The current webcast meets Council's legislative obligations and is comparable to neighbouring Councils. However, there have been issues with stability and consistency which is not acceptable. Council is required to webcast meetings and may also be required to continue the facilitation of remote attendance at meetings depending on Council's decision in this regard prior to 30 June 2022.

It is estimated that an upgrade to the system will be approximately \$100,000 although this is subject to a formal procurement process. The current system was installed in 2014 at a cost of approximately \$88,000.

This report provides options to Council with regard to the upgrade of the Council Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment.

The options considered are:

- Proceed to request for quotation process to engage a provider
- Undertake an expression of interest process to engage a provider
- Consider an out-sourced model for provision of this service for each meeting
- Focus on ongoing incremental improvement

Given the recent advances and changes in the conduct of meetings and events via audio-visual means it is recommended that Council proceed through an Expression of Interest process to drive innovative and agile solutions.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Staff sought a preliminary estimate of the cost of upgrading the Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment on 3 February 2022 but have not yet received this estimate.

In March 2020 the Office of Local Government issued a Guide to webcasting Council and Committee Meetings. This document included a summary of amounts expended by Councils for installation and ongoing maintenance. Given the requirements identified in the Notice of Motion, the cost identified by Ballina Shire Council have been used as an indicative cost as it has similar system equipment. The cost estimate for installation was \$110,000 for the system design and equipment supply, installation and commissioning.

There is currently no budget allocation for this project. Council is unable to go to the market formally without having a budget allocation for the proposed work to be undertaken. A funding allocation has therefore been included in the Quarter 2 Budget Review, to be considered separately at this meeting.

Should Council resolve to proceed it is recommended that provision be made in the Quarter 2 budget review to make allowance for this work to commence and that any adjustment to the provision be managed by way of a future quarterly review in response to final costings.

RECOMMENDATION:

1.THAT subject to inclusion of funding in the Quarter 2 Budget Review, Council proceed with a project to upgrade the Council Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment through an Expression of Interest procurement process.

2.THAT Council make provision for \$110,000 in the Quarter 2 Budget Review for that purpose.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

- 5. Our Civic Leadership
- 5.2 Council is well governed and customer focused
- 5.3 Community is informed and consulted

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held 24 January 2022 Council resolved as follows:

1. THAT a report be presented to Council identifying the options and cost to upgrade Council Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment with the intent of implementing improvement as a matter of urgency.

Legislative context

There are three key legislative elements to the audio-visual requirements of meetings:

1. The requirement to webcast

Since 14 December 2019 all Councils in NSW have been required to webcast their Council and Councillor-only Committee meetings under the Model Code of Meeting Practice. North Sydney Council has been webcasting its Council meetings since 2014.

The Office of Local Government issued a *Guide to webcasting council and committee meetings* in March 2020. The guide is available here: <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Guide-to-webcasting-council-and-committee-meetings.pdf>

The minimum requirement is that Council must broadcast an audio requirement of the Council meeting on the Council website as soon as reasonably possible after the Council Meeting. Council has the option of providing an audio-only or audio-visual webcast of the meeting.

2. The ability for remote attendance

Since advice by Circular on 25 March 2020, Councillors have had some capacity to participate in Council Meetings remotely. This has added a layer of complexity to the technical requirements for Council Meetings. Rather than simply webcasting the meeting occurring live in the Chambers it is now necessary to

- facilitate the ability of Councillors in the Chamber to see and hear those attending remotely
- facilitate the ability of Councillors attending remotely to see and hear those in the Chambers

- Webcast those attending remotely and those in the Chambers

Despite this significant change in technical requirements there has been minimal expenditure on the audio-visual systems to support the change.

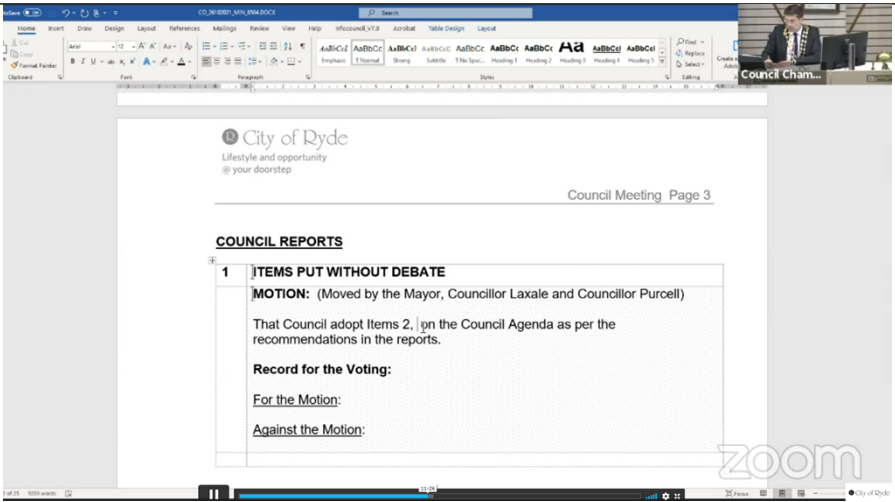

3. The continued ability for remote attendance



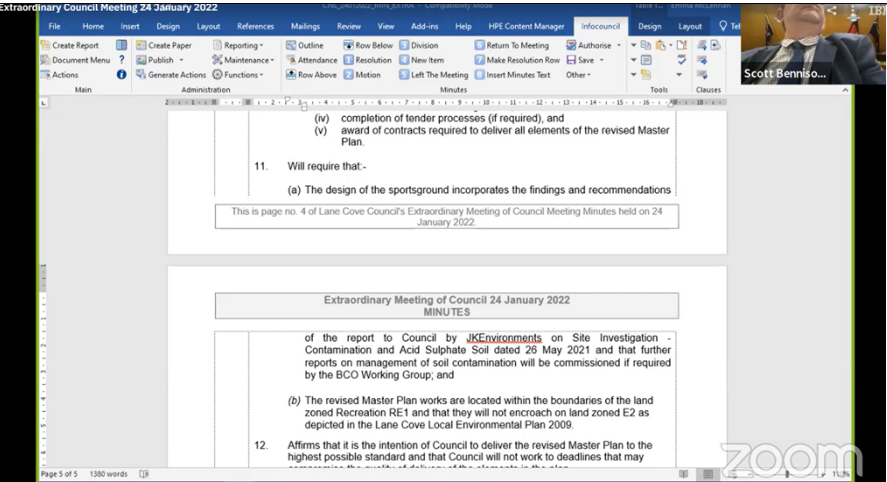
The provision under the Regulation that provides for remote attendance at Council Meetings by Councillors expires on 30 June 2022. Council is required to consider whether to make allowance for remote attendance in the Code of Meeting Practice.


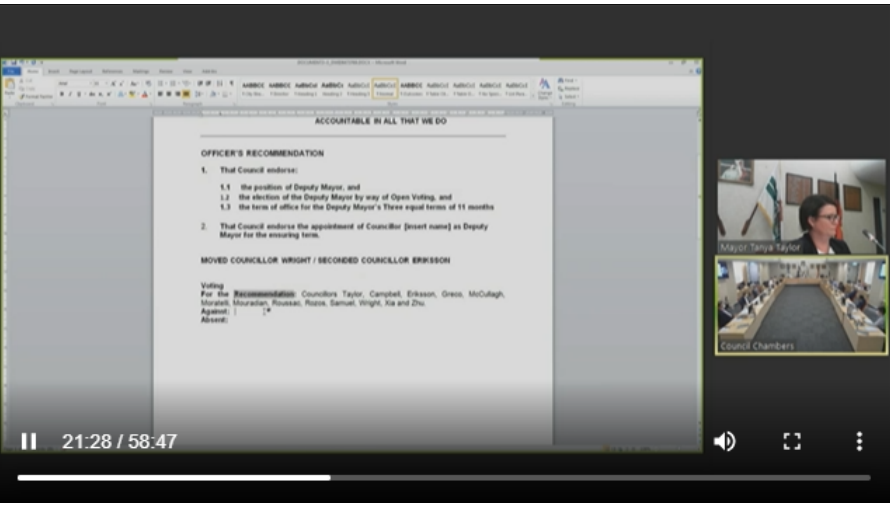
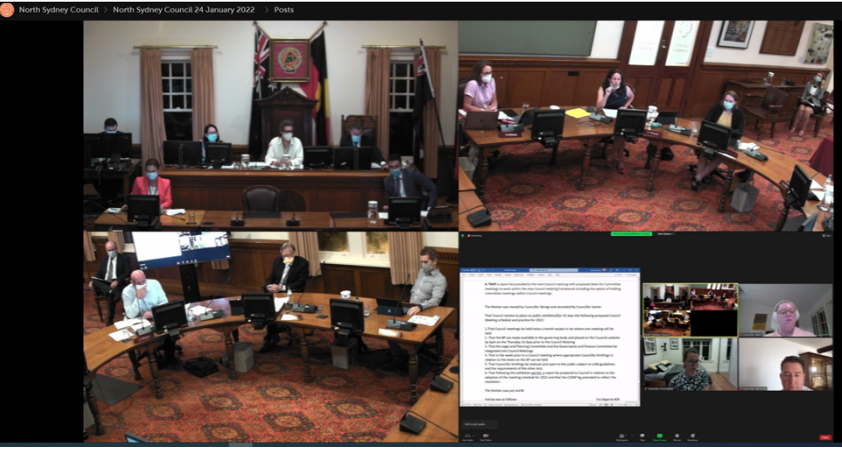
A draft Code of Meeting Practice is planned to be reported to Council in April for consideration of remote attendance at Meetings as well as other matters currently the subject of public exhibition in accordance with Council resolution.

Webcasting by other Councils

Below is a summary with screen shot of webcasting provided by NSROC Councils. The City of Sydney webcast was not able to be viewed as it does not work in Chrome or Edge but can be viewed via Internet Explorer or Firefox.

Council	Screen shot
<p data-bbox="204 1066 368 1133">City of Ryde Council</p> <p data-bbox="204 1182 432 1290">Visual of minutes and one speaker on zoom</p>	
<p data-bbox="204 1599 395 1666">Hornsby Shire Council</p> <p data-bbox="204 1715 392 1823">All Councillors present, none remote.</p> <p data-bbox="204 1872 368 1939">Minutes not shown</p>	

Council	Screen shot
<p>Hunters Hill Council</p> <p>Visual of the Chambers and Councillors joined remotely.</p> <p>Minutes not shown</p>	
<p>Ku-ring-gai Council</p> <p>Visual of the Chambers and Councillors joined remotely.</p> <p>Minutes not shown</p>	
<p>Lane Cove Council</p> <p>Visual of minutes and one speaker on zoom</p>	

Council	Screen shot
<p>Mosman Council</p> <p>All Councillors present, none remote.</p> <p>Minutes not shown</p>	
<p>Willoughby Council</p> <p>All Councillors present, none remote.</p> <p>Minutes, Chair and group of Councillors shown</p>	
<p>North Sydney Council</p> <p>Visual of the Chambers and Councillors joined remotely - shown after meeting</p> <p>Minutes shown (small)</p>	

Viewership currently of North Sydney Council Meetings

Data as to views of the recordings of Council Meeting is available from April 2020.

Since April 2020	Unique views (live)	Unique views (recording)
Data held for	12 Meetings	27 Meetings
Average	169	104

Highest	434	394
Lowest	32	33

Data as to unique live views has not been consistently recorded in the past. Data is held for 12 meetings in the period since April 2020. Data is available as to unique live views for the last five Council meetings. The average live viewership for the last five Council meetings is 225.

Combined data for unique live views and unique recorded views is held for 12 meetings in the period since April 2020. The average total unique viewership is 267.

The average total unique viewership for the last five Council meetings is 362.

Stability and reliability issues

In the latter half of 2021 there were stability issues with the system and as a result the webcast experience. Some of these have since been rectified with rewiring and replacement of a four in one video input box on which the fuse had blown.

The livestream currently is managed through a Livestream Box which has had some reliability issues causing intermittent failure. This piece of equipment is considered past its life span which means that the amount of troubleshooting that can take place is limited.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

The current Chambers audio visual system was introduced in 2014 at an approximate cost of \$88,000. Currently Council uses a provider, Vimeo, as the live stream platform.

Considerations

1. Heritage Constraints

The North Sydney Council Chambers building is a Heritage item of local significance. The Council Chambers itself is regarded as being of considerable significance both in form and fabric. Any proposed upgrade of audio-visual systems that involves the alteration of that fabric should be developed in consultation with an accredited Heritage consultant. Standalone, plug-in devices that are not attached, or require intrusion into that fabric are preferred. Dependant on the final nature of the proposed upgrade and its potential to impact on the heritage fabric, Development Consent may be required.

2. Suitably skilled staff

Council does not have specialist audio visual technical staff. The staff accountable for the operation of Council Meetings are administrative staff whose primary focus is the governance of Council Meetings.

They are supported by Information Technology staff prior to meetings with regard to the current system and technical requirements. An IT staff member is also present at the commencement of meetings to trouble shoot as required. This has been implemented since the commencement of the remote attendance and also to provide telephone support to remote attendees.

It is noted that to some extent the ability to troubleshoot audio-visual issues are limited should they occur during a meeting. Once the meeting is in progress, staff are fully occupied in the conduct of the meeting and the administrative requirements. While IT staff can do some troubleshooting, often it can require restarting the system which may result in an unacceptable interruption to the meeting.

The complexity of the solution installed will determine the level of support required from the provider on an ongoing basis. The more complex the solution the higher the likelihood of ongoing support costs to ensure service level agreements are maintained.

3. Supply and timeframe

Based on preliminary discussions and to set clear expectations as to timeframe, early advice is that there is currently up to a 20-week lead time for the provision of the type of audio visual equipment that would be required should Council proceed with procuring and installing a solution.

Options

As resolved by Council the following options are presented for consideration.

1. Engage a provider to install a solution through Request for Quotation

The early estimate of cost for a solution as described in the note accompanying the Notice of Motion considered by Council at its meeting of 24 January 2022 is \$110,000 based on the amount expended by Ballina Shire Council on a similar project.

Given this estimated expenditure Council needs to follow an appropriate process under the procurement guidelines.

Council can progress to Request for Quotation seeking a minimum of two formal quotes in response to a documented needs requirement. Staff have commenced the process of capturing both the functional and non-functional needs to expedite the process should Council resolve to proceed in this way. Given the lack of certainty regarding the cost, staff would aim to obtain more than two formal quotes.

It is proposed that there be some differences to the solution set out in the needs document from those described in the note accompanying the Notice of Motion being:

- It is proposed that the solution is not 100% fixed but has capacity to be moved where practicable should Council determine to reconfigure the Chambers or conduct meetings in a different venue.

The recommendation from IT is for the installation of a permanent hard-wired solution over a portable solution due to the associated risks that a portable solution presents, such as time increased point of failure, cable management, and the ability for IT staff to support the system. If Council subsequently elected to reconfigure or relocate the conduct of Council Meetings, the audio-visual equipment would be able to be repurposed and wired into an alternative configuration. Any rewiring would result in further costs however this would be anticipated to be fairly minimal when done in conjunction with other works.

- That while the solution may be capable for using “follow me” cameras (a ‘should have’ requirement in the needs document) that follow the active speaker and zoom this may be unsuitable for Council Meetings due to the speed of some exchanges between speakers. Preliminary advice from an adviser is that this would create an unpleasant viewing experience. This also reflects past experience.

These cameras have automatic pan, tilt and zoom (PTZ)

2. Engage a provider in response to an Expression of Interest process

Given the estimated expenditure Council needs to follow an appropriate process under the procurement guidelines including the use of an appropriate market approach.

Council may wish to proceed to an Expression of Interest process where providers are invited to scope a solution in response to a high-level functional statement. The determination as to the preferred provider would be made on set criteria which would include price and quality of the solution.

This process would take longer than a simple request for quotation as various providers would need to consider the current solution, opportunities for improvement and prepare a proposal. It is noted that Council has resolved that there is urgency in progressing a solution.

This process may result in some additional costs as providers present solutions with various capabilities. But the process through Expression of Interest may also lead to cost savings as providers present solutions and efficiencies that were not previously considered in the needs document.

This process may also result in creative approaches that address the heritage constraints of the venue.

Given the changing landscape of audio-visual meetings and the technical knowledge of staff in this area, an expression of interest is the recommended approach. The software and systems available for remote meetings has developed significantly in the past two years as organisations move to provide complex services and experiences online.

This Expression of Interest approach means that providers can propose solutions for Council rather than Council providing a set of technical requirements which may not reflect what is currently possible or available.

3. Outsourced solution

A small number of Councils outsource the provision entirely of Council meeting audio visual requirements and remote attendance systems.

The City of Parramatta uses a provider for the purpose of webcasting Council Meetings when meetings are conducted in person. It is understood that this is provided at a cost of \$6,000 - \$8,000 per meeting.

When the meetings are conducted live this solution provides a camera that shows the speakers and the speakers using handheld microphones. It is understood that the reason the Council chose this solution was because they were in temporary Chambers.

Outsourcing transfers the risk and responsibility of providing audio visual support to suitably experienced and qualified professionals. However, there would still be some need for IT support from Council staff.

This option would allow Council to consider how it wishes to continue with the conduct of Council Meetings with regard to location and layout. A suitable audio-visual solution could be developed as part of any works conducted in this regard.

This Option may also reduce the impact in terms of any heritage constraints as equipment would be temporary. However doing so could impact the amount of available space in the Chambers for physical distancing and public attendance as the equipment required takes up additional space.

The cost of this Option would be impacted by Council's future determination as to the number of Council meetings.

This option would still require an appropriate procurement process to identify a provider.

4. Incremental improvement

Council has resolved to upgrade Council Chambers IT infrastructure and video streaming equipment with the intent of implementing improvement as a matter of urgency.

This option would result in no additional expenditure beyond regular maintenance. Staff would continue to seek to ensure the stability and quality of the current system and identify low or no cost improvements. For example, staff have been working on an alternate livestream provider to improve reliability and quality.

The current webcast meets Council's legislative obligations. It is comparable to neighbouring Councils. However, there have been issues with stability and consistency which is not acceptable.

This option would allow Council to consider how it wishes to continue with the conduct of Council Meetings with regard to location and layout. A suitable audio-visual solution could be developed as part of any works conducted in this regard.