

### 8.3 REMOTE ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS

**Author:** Damien Cocks - Manager Communications, Jobs and Investments  
Sarah Clark - Information and Business Transformation Service  
Lidia Harding - Manager Governance & Corporate Accountability

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**Attachments:**

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#### SUMMARY

Following a Notice of Motion for a report to be prepared into the feasibility of livestreaming Council's Ordinary meetings, Officers have undertaken an analysis of the options available for Council to provide this service at a low cost, but still maintain a professional livestream quality. An analysis of other Victorian Council's approach has been undertaken and research undertaken into the use of Facebook, YouTube, Streaming Services, audio recording only and more sophisticated technologies through the market. As this is a new initiative it is recommended that a test of low cost technologies that will benefit the end user experience be entered into and a further report be presented to Council.

#### RECOMMENDATION

##### THAT:

1. Council resolve to receive and note this report.
2. Council test the use of an already owned mobile phone and camera to record a range of Council-led meetings for end-user quality.
3. A further report to be presented to Council at the conclusion of the test to determine if a live stream or other options could be hosted via Council's web and/or social channels on a permanent basis.

#### BACKGROUND

This report is in response to a Notice of Motion from the Council meeting on 18 November 2019 as follows: *"That Council officers prepare a report to the February 2020 Council meeting regarding the feasibility of various low cost, simple options for providing our community with more accessible and transparent means of viewing/listening to Council's Ordinary Council meetings"*.

Councils across Victoria are increasingly looking at ways to improve transparency in decision-making and ways to make Council meetings more accessible to the community. A number of Councils make either audio recordings or livestream their Council meetings on their website making video recordings available afterwards.

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REMOTE ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS (CONT.)**ISSUES AND DISCUSSION**

There are several options that are considered to be relatively low cost and simple solutions to livestreaming that could be implemented to televise Council meetings.

With most of these options, Council will be required to invest in new recording equipment such as a high definition camera and potentially a new microphone system. A RTMP-enabled encoder (capability to push to internet) may also be required.

The cost is estimated to be \$6 – \$24,000 for equipment. Footage will be from one angle only.

If Council determines to go ahead with providing the community with more accessible and transparent means of viewing/listening to Council's Ordinary Council meetings an 'in-house' test of a range of Council-led meetings should be supported determine the level of effort and quality of the footage prior to a decision to go live or have a web presence for community access.

Council in making its decision to support a streaming or audio service needs to take into consideration the end user experience and the quality of audio and/or video.

**Option 1. Audio recording only**

Key considerations:

- Current audio equipment is installed in the Council Chamber
- Use of microphones at all times is essential including in the confidential section of the Council meeting
- The confidential section of the Council meeting would still be recorded, but not transmitted
- Staff time required for transmitting the audio onto Council's website

*Staff = 1 x officers (approx. 5 hours per meeting)*

**Option 2. Post to Facebook Live**

Key considerations:

- The post to Facebook would be live – there would be no option for editing
- Comments uncontrolled, risking Council's reputation
- If not viewed 'live' there is no way to see footage post event outside of Facebook (i.e. viewer must be user of Facebook)
- A test would consist of filming and viewing the footage only
- Facebook commenting on Business Pages, the type of Facebook account used by councils, cannot be turned off. Business Pages are very different to

## REMOTE ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS (CONT.)

how individuals post on Facebook. Comments can be hidden but they will still be seen by the commenter and their friends.

*Camera = Approximately \$6k minimum*

*Microphones = \$13K (if required)*

*Subscription cost = nil*

*Staff = 2 x officers, one to film, one to monitor comments (approx. 20 hours per meeting including pre-post meeting set up, pack up, ongoing monitoring of Facebook)*

**Option 3. Film in-house using staff, host on Vimeo**

Key considerations:

- Host on Vimeo (similar to YouTube, already in use for video)
- Simple to post archive links on website (up to a year)
- Option to promote on Facebook via a link to website
- Can be watched on website live (no Facebook account required)
- Risk to Council is lower (comments can be controlled)
- Support from Vimeo available to set up & manage stream
- Links to footage can be made private during a trial of the system
- No editing while live streaming, can edit post-meeting if required
- No time code to minutes
- No captions
- No advertising

Hosting on Vimeo is like YouTube – footage must be hosted on a site like this so a link can be posted on the website/Facebook. This is a more controlled way to publish.

*Camera = Approximately \$6k minimum*

*Microphones = \$13K (if required)*

*Subscription cost = \$99 per month*

*Staff = 1 x officer to monitor livestream (approx. 4 hours per meeting including pre-post meeting set up, pack up, ongoing monitoring)*

**Option 4. Outsourced solution**

Key considerations:

- One staff member required
- Links posted to website by provider (fully managed)
- Training and high-level support included

## REMOTE ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS (CONT.)

- Simpler system for staff
- Risk to Council is low
- The ability undertake a test would need to be investigated with the provider
- Time-coded to minutes within 48 hours
- Will be livestreamed via Council's website
- Provider manages archiving and links on website
- Can promote on Facebook via a link back to website

*Camera = Approximately \$6k minimum*

*Microphones = \$13K (if required)*

*Subscription cost = \$1,260 per month plus GST*

*Staff = 1 x officers one to film (approx. 8 hours per meeting including pre-post meeting set up, pack up, ongoing monitoring plus extra if promoted on Facebook)*

**CONSULTATION**

All 79 Victorian Council websites were accessed to determine the livestreaming being used across the sector. A variety of platforms are being used including livestreaming, audio only, Vimeo or YouTube and outsources services.

**FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Providing equipment and staff to create a live streaming/filming option is not currently budgeted. Cost implications for the various options are outlined above.

**POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS**

Livestreaming Council meetings is in line with clause 3C(g) of the *Local Government Act 1989* "to ensure transparency and accountability in Council decision making".

**RISK IMPLICATIONS**

Risk Ranking is determined using [ROHS201-G1- Corporate Risk Matrix](#). Risk is identified as Low, Medium, High or Very High.

Risk	Risk Ranking	Proposed Treatments	Within Existing Resources?
Public perception that community does not have access to Council meetings	Medium	Adopt livestreaming proposal and promote effectively	No
Reputational damage through unmanaged Facebook comments	High	Propose council accepts Option 2 or 3 in this proposal.	No

## REMOTE ACCESS TO COUNCIL MEETINGS (CONT.)

Risk	Risk Ranking	Proposed Treatments	Within Existing Resources?
Possible defamation	Low	Training of Councillors and staff to understand risk. Do not post meetings to Facebook as council may be uninsured for defamation outside of chamber.	No
Footage & sound quality not high enough for public consumption	Medium	Emphasise the correct use of microphones, monitor and adjust on-camera behaviour. Purchase new microphones if required.	Yes (except new microphone system)

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL)**

Council meetings may be considered as more accessible as a result of livestreaming meetings.

**CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

The rights protected in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* were considered in preparing this report.

Implications may arise for people with disabilities due to the lack of captions or Auslan. If livestreaming is implemented council officers will need to investigate these features.

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

Nil.

**OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in this matter.

**CONCLUSION**

Four options have been presented for more accessible meetings. If Council determines to go ahead with more accessible meetings it is recommended that a one-month 'in-house' test and evaluation be considered to determine if a live streaming option is feasible because of its suitability to support public viewing.