

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Not Applicable
-

Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: New Policy
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority (delete as appropriate):
(5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost: £20k
 2. Ongoing Costs: £20k pa
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Democratic Services
 4. Total current budget for this head: £376,460
 5. Source of funding: Revenue Budget
-

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 6 FTE
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Live streaming of meetings will require additional staffing resources – see section 7.
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable: Non-executive decisions are not subject to call-in.
-

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not Applicable
-

Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: Not Applicable
-

Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: Provision of streaming may result in members of the public watching meetings from home rather than travelling to the Civic Centre.
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected): See section 10.
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Not Applicable

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 Live-streaming is the transmission of audio or video via the internet while the meeting is taking place, so that anyone can see and hear the meeting from anywhere in the world as it happens. Meetings can also be recorded and made available for later viewing. During the covid-19 lockdown, the Government relaxed the requirement in the 1972 Local Government Act for Councillors in England to meet in-person, and Bromley, like most local authorities, swiftly moved to virtual, online meetings. Bromley used Webex for its meetings, linked to a Youtube livestream so that members of the public could watch and listen to councillors as they conducted Council business. The temporary provision enabling virtual meetings was not renewed by the Government in May 2021, forcing Councils to return to in-person meetings.
- 3.2 During the lockdown period, just over one hundred meetings were live-streamed (in addition, some meetings were made available as a Webex Event instead, or were not available online). The highest recorded number of views was 182 for a Development Control Committee considering a particularly controversial planning application. This figure will have included people who logged on for just a few seconds, members of staff and repeat attendance by the same people logging in and out more than once. Attendance varied considerably at other meetings, with a small number of meetings achieving more than a hundred views but most well below this and a few with virtually no views at all. These numbers are probably slightly higher than would have been attending in person if this was allowed, but still low in the context of the overall population of the borough. It is clear, though, that viewing figures reflected the content of the agenda, and a single controversial report would lead to greater interest and more views.
- 3.3 Following the resumption of in-person meetings in May 2021, officers continued to facilitate remote attendance by both Councillors and officers on a variety of equipment including phone lines and screens (via Teams meetings), with the majority of meetings held in the Council Chamber with a new fixed layout to facilitate social distancing and other covid precautions. Early in 2022, the PA/audio-visual facilities in the Council Chamber were upgraded, with new loudspeakers, screens and electrical equipment. The new equipment makes remote attendance much more practical and professional, and was used for the first time at the full Council meeting on 28th February. The new system allows for cameras to focus on each speaker, linked to a range of a range of pre-set room layouts. The new equipment does allow the Council to livestream meetings if Members think that this would be helpful.
- 3.4 Since the end of the lockdown, live-streaming has occasionally been used in special circumstances – for example for the Annual Council meeting. However, viewing figures have not been high – between 2 and 8 concurrent viewers for Council meetings over the last few streams. This figure may include Council members, officers and contractors as well as members of the public, and can include multiple “hits” from the same person joining the meeting more than once.
- 3.5 These occasions have required substantial additional resources in terms of technical support from IT and Communications staff. Should live-streaming be re-introduced on a regular basis then Democratic Services staff will need to be trained in how to live-stream so that this becomes business as normal. However, this will require additional resources on an on-going basis as two members of the team will need to be present for each meeting, rather than one. Additional support will also be required from IT, at least on a standby basis, should there be technical issues.
- 3.6 Live-streaming of meetings is used by some Councils, but is by no means universal, even in London. Both benefits and concerns can be identified, summarised below, and set out in more detail in [Appendix A](#) –

Benefits -

- Makes the Council more accessible and transparent to residents
- Enables residents (and other members and officers) to watch meetings at a convenient time (assuming recordings are made available)
- Provides a more detailed record of each meeting (although arguably this could undermine the role of the minutes which are the formal record of each meeting)
- May be perceived as being a more accessible format for younger people

Concerns -

- There could be a chilling effect on debates if Members and other participants are concerned about their words and actions being recorded and available (perhaps out of context) across the internet
- Remote attendance could lead to a drop in personal attendance at meetings by the press and public
- There is little evidence of substantial demand for live-streaming and recent viewing figures have been very low
- There are resource implications – live streaming does create additional work at the meeting which will need to be absorbed within current budgets

3.7 Since the end of the lockdown, the Council has reserved live-streaming for particular meetings, and a positive approach could be to continue with this. This would mean that meetings are not routinely live-streamed, but the option is available on specific occasions, such as the annual meeting, or when there is unusually high interest in a meeting to the extent that there would be pressure on the public gallery. In these cases the Chief Executive, in consultation with the chairman of the meeting, could arrange for live-streaming as a means to avoid over-crowding in the Council Chamber.

4 IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

4.1 Live-streaming of meetings could potentially enable a wider range of residents to observe Council meetings. However, viewer numbers remain very low based on recent meetings which were live-streamed.

5 TRANSFORMATION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council currently has no established policy on whether its meetings should be live-streamed.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are financial and resource implications. The hardware is in place for live-streaming, however, there will be additional staffing costs should regular live-streaming be introduced (see Personnel implications below.) The likely overtime costs will be approximately £20k pa (based on 120 meetings) and if IT support from BT, the Council's current IT contractor, is required the Council would be charged half a day per meeting.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Provision of live-streaming will require additional staffing resources. Experience during the lockdown (May 2020 to May 2021) when all meetings were held online and live-streamed showed that the additional demands of live-streaming required two members of the Democratic Services Team to administer each meeting, rather than one, nearly doubling the Team's commitment to evening work. Additional technical support would also be needed from IT technicians.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The requirement in the 1972 Local Government Act is that for Councillors to be legally present at a meeting they must be physically in the room. This applies to all decision-making meetings, but there are some meetings not covered by this requirement, such as SACRE or some partnership meetings, where online meetings can continue. There is nothing to prevent any Member from joining a meeting online, and contributing as technology allows this, but they cannot be counted as formally present, do not count towards calculation of the quorum, cannot move or second motions and cannot vote. The Council also has to make reasonable provision for members of the press and public to attend meetings in person if they wish, but there is no legal requirement that meetings should be live-streamed or recorded.

9. CARBON REDUCTION/SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Live-streaming of meetings could potentially result in fewer journeys to the Civic Centre, leading to a small but positive impact on carbon reduction targets.

10 CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 10.1 Live-streaming should be of benefit to residents, enabling more people to watch the work of their local representatives without need to travel to the Civic Centre.

Non-Applicable Headings:	Procurement/Property/Ward Councillor Views
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	"Hybrid Meetings and IT Provision" - Report to GP&L Committee (5/4/22)

<p>Advantages of live-streaming</p>	<p>Concerns about live-streaming</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased transparency of meetings • Offering increased accessibility to public meetings for vulnerable or disenfranchised groups (elderly/people with disabilities/carers etc) and young people • Raising awareness of Council activities/achievements/the democratic process • In line with normal practice at some other local authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members and officers may feel more constrained in expressing themselves in a situation where their comments are live-streamed • Some members of the public may be reluctant to speak at Planning meetings, or put questions in person at meetings • There is little evidence of widespread demand for live-streaming • Availability of a live-stream may discourage personal attendance at meetings, thereby reducing democratic participation • There are staffing/resource implications • Increased risk of GDPR non-compliance/data breaches where reference is made to private matters or to constituents by name • Technical requirements of running live-streams may be outside of officers' existing skillsets – it is possible to train for basic operational requirements, but will non-IT staff be able to trouble-shoot issues arising at live meetings? • Over-reliance on a limited pool of Democratic Services staff to run the livestream. • Resource implications of setting up a livestream for a 5-minute meeting. • Need for additional agreed guidance around meeting etiquette (e.g. – when livestream goes down, do meetings need to be suspended?) • Reliance on external parties the Local Authority has no control of to successfully livestream – namely Youtube. • Reliance on technology – what would we do if the microphones/screen set up ceased to work? • Live-streaming is only possible in the Council Chamber at present, so only one meeting can be live-streamed • Can the approach be applied unilaterally across all meetings (e.g. – would Plans Committees have a different approach due to the participation of members of the public?)

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do Councillors/Partners/Officers/public speakers have a right to anonymity and how could this be accommodated at a live-streamed meeting?• Live-streaming of some PDS meetings would require under-18 Youth Representatives to give consent to their participation.• Would the quality of live-streaming be sufficient in a meeting with a very large public presence (e.g. – could you hear the live-stream over the noise of the gallery?)• Reputational damage – meetings have occasionally been targeted by protesters or activists, and their impact could be magnified in a live-streamed meeting (the Handforth Parish Council meeting was a notorious example of a difficult meeting going viral during the lockdown.)• Additional caution and self-restraint would be required from Members during periods of pre-election purdah.• Additional complexity of in-person meetings being live-streamed may lead a Chairman to mistakenly move into Part 2 whilst a live-stream is running.• It will be harder to move temporarily into Part 2 during a meeting, due to the logistical difficulties of stopping and starting a live-stream |
|--|---|