

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Governance Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>13 July 2021</b>
<b>By:</b>	<b>Assistant Chief Executive</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Notice of Motion – Webcasting Scrutiny Committee meetings</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	<b>To consider a Notice of Motion seeking agreement to live webcast all Scrutiny Committee meetings (with the exception of confidential/exempt items)</b>

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Committee is recommended to recommend the County Council agrees the motion as set out in paragraph 1.1 subject to review in July 2022 or as soon as practicable thereafter, or when requested by the Scrutiny Chairs.

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## **1 Background Information**

1.1. The following Notice of Motion has been submitted by Councillor Ungar:

*"That this Council will, from the date of agreeing this motion, live webcast all its Scrutiny Committee meetings with the exception of when dealing with confidential/exempt items as directed by the Council's Monitoring Officer."*

1.2. In line with County Council practice, the matter has been referred by the Chairman to the Governance Committee for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motion. The Committee's recommendation on this Notice of Motion will be reported to the Council at its meeting on 23 July 2021.

## **2 Supporting Information**

2.1 The same motion regarding the webcasting of Scrutiny Committee meetings was considered by Council in December 2018, shortly after the Council undertook a review of its scrutiny arrangements and introduced a new committee structure from May 2018 comprising People Scrutiny Committee, Place Scrutiny Committee and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. During the review, some Members expressed reservations with regard to webcasting of scrutiny meetings which fell into two themes:

- some Members felt that webcasting of meetings would restrict an open and frank debate and would potentially result in some Members and officers feeling inhibited;
- some were of the view that webcasting of these meetings would result in them becoming more politicised.

2.2 In light of the feedback from the review the County Council rejected the motion.

2.3 From 4 April 2020 – 6 May 2021 temporary national regulations were in place which allowed flexibility in the holding of meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic. These regulations enabled meetings to be held virtually using video conferencing technology with public access provided through a live webcast.

2.4 The past year has seen a rapid and significant change in practice in relation to Council meetings. Viewing and participating in meetings online has become commonplace, not only for Council Members and officers but for the wider public.

2.5 Permanently webcasting Place and People Scrutiny Committee meetings, in addition to maintaining the meetings previously webcast before Covid-19 (which include the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee), would be possible within the existing webcast service contract without additional cost. There would be a limited resource implication arising from webcasting more meetings as an additional member of staff is required to attend the meeting to operate the system, along with associated preparation time. Until webcasting facilities are made available in other Council meeting rooms, or

legislation is introduced to provide for virtual meetings, it would be necessary to hold all Scrutiny Committee meetings in the Council Chamber as this is the only room currently equipped for webcasting.

2.6 Scrutiny Committees undertake a significant amount of their work outside formal committee meetings, through informal Review Boards or Reference Groups which report back to the main committee. It is important these groups retain complete flexibility to meet virtually or physically in a range of venues to undertake more detailed investigations into topics agreed by the Committee, in the way scrutiny Members consider most effective.

### **3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1. The Notice of Motion requests the live webcasting of all Scrutiny Committee meetings (with the exception of confidential/exempt items). The use of webcasting has been kept under review over a number of years in response to Member feedback. Practice over the past year has altered considerably in light of temporary virtual meetings provision and Scrutiny Committee meetings have successfully been webcast without any significant issues arising. The current Scrutiny Committee Chairs have been consulted and are supportive of continuing the current practice of webcasting the committee meetings, subject to the opportunity to keep the impact under review over the coming year.

3.2. The Committee is recommended to consider the Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 1.1 and to recommend the County Council agrees the motion, subject to review in 12 months or when requested by the Scrutiny Chairs.

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#### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None