

Title of meeting: Resources Portfolio
Date of meeting: 16th March 2017
Subject: Council Chamber
Report by: Director of Community and Communications
Wards affected: All
Key decision: No
Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To seek approval to commence a project of improvements to the Council Chamber.
- 1.2. To seek approval for the release of funds to meet the cost of said improvements.

2. Recommendations

RECOMMENDED

- 2.1. **That approval is given to the improvements as outlined within this report expected to be completed by October 2017.**
- 2.2. **That approval is given to fund the project as detailed in the Director of Finance's comments**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council Chamber is currently used for all Full Council Meetings, for major schemes and/or planning meetings, for Council staff/public consultations, for any meetings likely to attract many members of the public, by Portsmouth Pensioners' Association and by the Coroner as the Court for major inquests.
- 3.2 There have been no major improvements to the Chamber for over 40 years.
- 3.3 Following issues with the current AV sound and recording system, professional advice was sought and it was agreed that the current wireless system needed to be replaced with a hard-wired system. This in turn will provide the opportunity to deliver other recommended improvements as outlined in this report.

4. Reasons for recommendations

Overall, the recommended improvements to the Council Chamber will make meetings more accessible, will prepare the Chamber for future opportunities and deliver efficiencies and income.

4.1 AV System

The Council has experienced issues with the current wireless microphone system which is now obsolete and approaching end of life. The issues include poor quality and interrupted sound and recording and as this impacts on accessibility needs to be resolved.

Any replacement system will need to be flexible for the changing needs of open democracy and will need to be robust and cost-effective.

Having undertaken soft market testing it has been agreed that the replacement microphone system needs to be hard-wired.

4.2 Power supply

The Chamber currently has limited power points and none available for elected member or officer use at the benches. The power supply and wiring of the Chamber has not been changed in decades.

With the increased use of technology and the move towards paperless meetings as part of our savings initiatives it is recommended that all benches are provided with sufficient power sockets and that this work is undertaken at the same time as hard wiring the AV system.

4.3 Webcasting

From July 2015, the current Administration have piloted the webcasting of Full Council meetings as part of their commitment to openness and transparency. At present this is managed via a fixed camera that is set up at the start of each meeting and is manually over-ridden as appropriate at adjournments and for exempt items. This is not an efficient use of officer time.

The current system is unable to manage the flow of the meeting in terms of tracking the agenda and presenting related items to the audience, including amendments. Nor can it track the speaker or inform the audience of whom the speaker is.

In order to make the meetings more transparent and easier to engage with, the installation of new fixed and automatic cameras linked to the recording system and eventually our Mod-Gov (document) system is recommended.

4.4 Presentations

For Planning meetings, consultations and the Coroner the need to have good presentation tools readily available is already important and in our drive towards greater efficiencies and less paper this will become increasingly important across all meetings. The need for greater involvement via remote participation, the use of SKYPE, video conferencing etc all add to this.

In addition in order to maximise income opportunities for the Chamber, presentation facilities will need to be available. It is therefore recommended that as part of the improvement works to the Chamber, the discrete installation of retractable screens and fixed projector(s) is included.

4.5 Ventilation

The Chamber has no mechanical ventilation and many of the windows are in need of repair as they are either painted shut or cannot shut due to lack of general maintenance. Associated with this, is the fact that some of the curtain rails are broken and as such have resulted in un-necessary wear and tear to the curtains.

It is therefore recommended that the window frames and curtain tracks are repaired.

4.6 Lighting

The general lighting of the Chamber is poor with several light bulbs no longer working and in need of replacement. As this core lighting is in the ceiling and requires the use of a scaffold platform to replace or fix the problems, it is recommended that we take the opportunity to replace the lighting with the more efficient and longer-lasting LED lighting, which should save costs both in terms of energy and replacement in the longer-term

4.7 Income Opportunities

If the recommendations are approved, once the works are completed the Council Chamber will be able to accommodate board meetings as well as conference facilities for up to 100 people, thus offering a rare and marketable facility in Portsmouth.

4.8 Other

It is recommended that whilst scaffolding is in place to replace the lighting that the opportunity to refresh the paintwork on the ceiling of the Chamber is taken.

5. Equality impact assessment

5.1 A preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached as appendix 1. From this it has been determined that a Full EIA is not required as the recommendations do not have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010. The main points that were highlighted from the preliminary EIA were:

- Reasonable adjustments have been made in regard to people with mobility issues or wheelchair users in that they can attend the meetings in a more accessible way by sitting in the actual council chamber.
- The changes to the sound equipment will improve the experience for people with a hearing or visual impairment
- There will be no changes to the induction loop so this will not impact on people who wear hearing aids
- The improved webcasting will help people who lip read as the cameras will be able to zoom into whoever is speaking

- The improvements to the lighting will aid people with a visual impairment but not necessarily blind people.

6. Legal implications

6.1 The City Solicitor is satisfied there are no legal implications arising from the report.

7. Director of Finance's comments

7.1 The capital cost of the proposed scheme is estimated at £235,000 as follows:

<u>Capital Cost</u>	£
Building & Electrical works	127,000
AV equipment - Projector and sound system	85,000
Professional Fees	19,000
Statutory Charges	4,000
TOTAL	<u><u>235,000</u></u>

This will be financed as follows:

Approved capital programme - Resources portfolio	£
- Guildhall works	50,000
- Modernisation of Council Chamber (RCCO*)	150,000
RCCO	35,000
	<u><u>235,000</u></u>

The cost of the AV equipment and electrical works included in the scheme will be funded by an RCCO from Information Services and the remainder of the works will be met from the existing capital provision for Guildhall works and from the Resources portfolio reserve.

It is anticipated that there will be some ongoing revenue saving arising from the switch to LED lighting in the Chamber.

*Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay

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Signed by:

Appendix 1 - Preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: