



Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

NAFWC 2007 Paper 5B

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Author name and contact number: Bedwyr Jones, ext 8898

National Assembly for Wales Webcasting Service

Purpose and summary of issues

To recommend that an option for the provision of a new webcasting service for the Assembly is taken up as part of the Host Broadcaster contract (67/2004). Barcud Derwen would develop and run the new service, replacing the current webcasting site which falls far short of other parliamentary video streaming services such as those provided by Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. The current site's design is based on the old Assembly website adding to the impression of it being a dated product.

Recommendations (including priority deadline)

- That the National Assembly for Wales Commission takes up the option of providing the webcasting service through contract 67/2004 (Option 1, annex 1), and instructs Barcud Derwen to continue developing the site with the aim of going live as soon as possible in 2008.
- That the archive of meetings on the new site is limited to all Plenary and Committee meetings from the Third Assembly, and all Plenary meetings from the Second Assembly.

Discussion

Strategic Issues

- Developing public use of the webcasting service was one of the strategic aims of the Assembly Parliamentary Service in relation to enhancing the level of public engagement with the National Assembly for Wales.
- There may be some uncertainty over the future of S4C2, based on the options outlined in the S4C consultation paper "Serving Children in the Digital Future". One option proposed in the document is to completely cease the broadcasting of Assembly proceedings on the channel. This



would severely restrict people's ability to view Assembly proceedings, and the current webcasting service cannot be considered as a viable alternative to watching proceedings on television.

Technical Issues

- The current Assembly webcasting service has not been updated since 2003. The site's design is based on the old Assembly website, which was replaced in May 2007, and the technology behind it is now very dated. The use of video streaming over the internet has grown considerably in the past three years. Technical developments and the increase in the number of users with broadband connections means that public expectations of the quality of streamed video is considerably higher.
- There is a considerable archive of material on the current site, which currently stands at approximately 8,000 files. Re-feeding all material onto the servers of the new site will be an exceptionally laborious task, and given the quality and extent of the records, may not be cost effective. The recommendation is to re-digitise:
 - all Plenary meetings from the Second Assembly onwards; and
 - all Plenary and Committee meetings of the Third Assembly.As a guide, the Scottish Parliament keeps an archive of all meetings for three months.

Contractual issues

- The National Assembly for Wales has been broadcasting proceedings over the internet since October 2002. The contract, awarded to BBC Technology, was jointly managed by the Presiding Office Broadcasting Unit and the Business Information Service (BIS). The contract was awarded by the BIS under the Osiris framework with no direct contractual relationship between the Presiding Office and the service providers.
- The contract was originally valid for the duration of the BIS' framework contract for internet services, which was due to expire in September 2003. However, it was extended on a term-by term basis through BIS (which became BID under the Merlin Partnership). BBC Technology was subsequently sold to Siemens, who in turn became the service provider for webcasting, and the rolling contract between BID and BBC Technology was later incorporated into the Merlin contract and passed to APS.
- In 2003 the House Committee decided to continue with an upgraded webcasting service, on the proviso that "the Web-casting service would need to be the subject of the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) tender" and based on running costs of £80,000 per annum.
- To comply with the House Committee's decision, the APS offered the webcasting service as an option within the new host broadcaster contract, advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) in August



2004. The rationale being that an integrated broadcasting service through one supplier would benefit the Assembly and its customers. The contract was awarded to Barcud Derwen in February 2005.

Governance Matters

Financial implications

- The costs to set up and run the new service (Option 1, annex 1) are as follows:

Capital costs:

Total set-up costs: £136,872

Ongoing costs:

Monthly costs: £4,557

Annual maintenance cost: £9,020

These costs can be met from the existing broadcasting budget (B07 / B1103) for 2007/08. The cost per annum for the service from April 2008 will be £63,704.

- The current costs for the service are £2,900 per month plus an additional £107 per meeting. As a guide, the total cost for webcasting proceedings in 2006 was £61,547.
- The Commission may wish to note that the quote for the service also included staff costs of approximately £25,000 per annum for a compression technician / archivist. However, this work will now be undertaken by a broadcasting support officer within the APS ICT branch.

Risk Assessment

- There is a risk to the reputation of the Assembly if we continue with the current service as it is dated and difficult to follow proceedings.
- Given that the encoding equipment is coming to the end of its operational life, technical failures are inevitable.
- The project to set up the new service will be managed under PRINCE 2 guidelines, and a risk register will be maintained.

Compliance

There are no compliance issues.

Publication



This paper is not intended for publication as it includes commercially sensitive information.



Annex 1

Options

There are three possible options available:

Option 1 – Service to be set up and maintained by the Host Broadcaster

A brand new site provided by Barcud Derwen as part of Contract 67/2004, providing an archive of all Third Assembly meetings and all Second Assembly Plenary meetings.

Advantages:

- The system has already been designed, and is ready to be implemented, cutting down on the length of the set-up period;
- Delivery of a high-quality, modern product offering web-streaming using the latest technology;
- A new design for the webcasting site, taking into account the requirements gathered during the specification stage;
- Fixed monthly cost regardless of the number of meetings covered;
- System is a platform for future developments such as setting up a digital broadcast-quality archive of Assembly proceedings;
- There will be a fully integrated broadcasting service for the Assembly from one provider;
- It has been subject to an OJEU procurement exercise.

Disadvantages:

- Initial set-up costs;
- Work needed to retrieve archived material or to re-record it at an acceptable quality level, if it is needed.

Option 2 - Upgrade the service using the current suppliers

A full upgrade of the site and technical equipment through Merlin.

Advantages:

- Experience of company;
- Continuity;
- Ability to use the archive of material since 2002.

Disadvantages:



- A more complicated contractual relationship – the service would be provided by a third party working on behalf of Merlin;
- Addition of another set of ‘contractors’ between the actual production of proceedings and their appearance on a website;
- Increased timescales for delivering the site compared to Option 1;
- Potential costs, as the work would be subject to the usual Merlin design, consultation and management fees. This would include a charge for providing a quote for the new system;

Option 3 – Continue with the current service

Continue with the current service, with modifications to the site design and necessary upgrades to the encoding equipment.

Advantages:

- Potentially the lowest cost option, as set-up costs would be minimal;
- Continued use of the archive of material since 2002.

Disadvantages:

- Poor quality of the service
- Redesign of site is likely to be complicated – previous requests to change the webcasting.wales template have taken weeks to implement.
- Monthly costs could be more expensive than the Barcud Derwen proposal – the Assembly currently pays a flat fee of £2900 per month, with an additional charge of £107 per meeting. If, as anticipated, there are more formal meetings during the third Assembly, the monthly costs will increase.
- The encoding equipment, which resides in the host broadcaster gallery, is coming to the end of its life and will need to be replaced very soon.