



**REPORT of  
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND RESOURCES**

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**to  
COUNCIL  
14 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**SOUTH EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To review the South Eastern Area Planning Committee (SEAC) running from Burnham-on-Crouch Town Council (BTC) offices and provide options for the future set up for these meetings.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That Members note the findings from the review and the issues as set out in section 3.7 of the report;
- (ii) That Members confirm the preferred option for future meetings, as set out in section 3.8 of the report.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 The Council voted on 24 February 2022 to continue live streaming for all SEAC meetings (Minute No. 538 refers).
- 3.2 At the Statutory Annual meeting of the Council on 12 May 2022, the Council also agreed to hold future SEAC meetings from BTC offices, allocating £4,812 set up cost and £252 per meeting officer resource to put in place a hybrid / digital set up in line with public experience from the Maldon District Council (MDC) Chamber.
- 3.3 Meetings have been running since August 2022 from BTC offices. There have been issues with the streaming of the meetings that are highlighted in the table in section 3.7 below.
- 3.4 In the six SEAC meetings held between January and July 2023, there were an average of 130 online meeting views, versus an average of five members of the public attending physically to view the meeting.
- 3.5 Since the meeting on 7 December 2022, due to interference with the on-site microphone system, a temporary microphone was put in place to improve the meeting sound. This was a temporary fix and the sound is still of low quality.
- 3.6 There have recently been issues with live streams of the meetings 'dropping out'. The ICT team have run speed tests from the location at different times of the day and night. These show an average download speed of 32Mbps – and upload speed of 10Mbps. On average a 40Mbps upload speed is required as a minimum for a good quality, reliable stream.

- 3.7 In order to address the issues at BTC, additional IT support would need to be funded to solve the problems and provide ongoing support. Further details of the costs and wider considerations are set out in the table below:

Known issue	Further detail
Broadband speed and reliability	<p>Public streams have been dropping. The ICT team has run speed tests on 3 August 2023 from the location, which show an average download speed of 32Mbps (megabits per second) – and upload speed of 10Mbps. A 40Mbps upload speed is the required minimum for a good quality, reliable stream.</p> <p>MDC ICT has tested internet speeds before, during and after every meeting plus when they are reviewing setups etc. Testing has been completed morning, midday, afternoon and late evening and whilst the speeds are stable, this is not fast enough for streaming when the line is in use as would be the case during any meeting held.</p> <p>The work needed to resolve this issue would be a new internet line with at least 80Mbps download and 40Mbps upload which BTC would need to purchase and install. As BTC own the IT infrastructure on site, they would need to provision the new line.</p>
Sound issues	<p>There is an intermittent ‘thump’ over recordings making it hard for the viewing public to hear, and the Council has received at least one public complaint.</p> <p>Officers have spent eight hours system testing and recommend that a sound system change will be needed to address this.</p> <p>A temporary Omnidirectional microphone has been put in place as an interim solution, but this only picks up sound quietly and is not a good quality permanent solution.</p>
BTC set up relies on BTC sound system	<p>ICT has identified that this system is not fit for purpose. It is a wireless microphone system and not cable. This system will pick up ongoing interference from local wireless devices during meetings, for example personal phones whereas a cable system will not.</p> <p>There would be a cost and additional time to change this set up to a cable set up. However, the wireless system is owned by BTC. BTC has been approached to see if they have any plans around system changes but have none to date.</p> <p>A new sound, cabled system would need to be implemented to provide good quality, consistent sound.</p> <p>BTC IT could do this work. Alternatively, MDC ICT could complete this at a cost.</p> <p>BTC will benefit from this work as MDC is a user of the system only once a month, but the offices are used for town council and wider business around this.</p>

Known issue	Further detail
MDC ICT staff are unable to control environment – space is used for other meetings	Hardware used for other non-MDC meetings such as the access points on site, means sometimes issues have been stabilised after the last MDC meeting, but then in the month up to the next meeting, set up / hardware has been changed by BTC IT causing further issues.
Costs - agreed £4,800 already borne and around average 9 hours ICT resource being taken out for each meeting which is not within MDC ICT budget and structure	<p>The report to the Council on 12 May 2022 highlighted £4,812 set up costs and £252 per meeting resource to deliver the project, but these costs have been surpassed by the need of a new sound system.</p> <p>We are also paying BTC £120 for room hire and set up service per meeting.</p> <p>There have been 60 ICT specialist hours taken out for problem solving, which were not in the original project calculation and have impacted on Business As Usual (BAU) and ICT project delivery.</p> <p>In the scoping paper it was agreed that IT resource and the sound system would be provided by BTC - so far this team have not been involved in any of the set up or repair works.</p>
Impact to MDC ICT programme delivery	Resource diverted so far and any further resource commitments will have an impact on the MDC ICT programme unless an additional officer post is funded.
Area Planning Committee uniformity	At present, the customer experience is different across the Area Planning Committees. This was one of the issues raised by the Planning Advisory Service when they completed a review of our planning arrangements
Demand for access to meetings is largely online	<p>Figures (see below) show the public demand for these meetings to be higher for online viewing, so for improved customer experience this should be kept in mind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18 January 2023 ... 120 views ..... 0 people physically</li> <li>• 15 February..... 121 views ..... 5 people physically</li> <li>• 15 March ..... 84 views ..... 1 person physically</li> <li>• 12 April..... 105 views ..... 4 people physically</li> <li>• 25 May ..... 163 views ..... 13 people physically</li> <li>• 28 June ..... 187 views ..... 4 people physically</li> <li>• 26 July..... Stream not available</li> </ul> <p><b>Average: 130 online views 5 physical attendees</b></p>

3.8 Members are asked to review the issues table and confirm a future approach based on the options scored below:

No.	Option	Positive	Negative
1	Continue to run meetings from BTC offices without streaming	<p><b>Environmental impact:</b> 26 mile round trip – 11 Committee Members and average five physical attendees – This contributes to 0.15 tonnes of carbon per meeting saved (however, there are usually three officers making the opposing journey) - overall net saving of 0.12 tonnes per meeting run - <a href="#">Here's your calculation   Carbon Calculator (bp.com)</a></p> <p><b>Budget impact:</b> Without streaming, this would reduce the call on MDC ICT resource and additional spends on the set up.</p>	<p><b>Customer impact:</b> On average 96% of views are online rather than in person.</p> <p>This also goes against the Council resolution that all meetings should be streamed and creates varied experience across Committees.</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> This Option would go against the 24 February 2022 Council resolution that all meetings would be live streamed</p>
2	<p>Continue to run meetings from BTC offices, investing in streaming consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New cabled system</li> <li>• New internet line</li> </ul>	<p><b>Customer impact:</b> On average 96% of views are online rather than in person.</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> This would be in line with the two Council resolutions made on 24 February and 12 May 2022 respectively.</p>	<p><b>Budget and Resource:</b></p> <p><u>New cabled system</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately £6K to purchase.</li> <li>• 3 days installation from a Level 2 MDC ICT Fixed Term Employee (FTE), £175 per day, totalling £525.</li> <li>• MDC ICT Support to take over management of BTC IT to prevent the issue where BTC IT change the set up and adversely impact on the meetings.</li> <li>• An additional £45k per annum required for MDC ICT officer to run BTC IT and to ensure no impact on MDC Corporate ICT Strategy and budget.</li> </ul> <p><u>New Internet Line</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing £80 per month broadband costs, £960 per annum required.</li> </ul> <p><u>Total</u> £52.5k required year one, £46k ongoing.</p>

No.	Option	Positive	Negative
3	Return to MDC Chamber for SEAC meetings	<p><b>Customer impact:</b> On average 96% of views are online rather than in person.</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> Adheres to the Council resolution that all meetings should be streamed and creates consistent experience across Committees.</p> <p><b>Officer capacity</b> This option would have the best impact for freeing up officer capacity and time that is currently spent on problem solving the streaming issues.</p>	<p><b>Environmental impact:</b> It is expected that 0.12 tonnes of carbon will be generated per meeting- this could be offset at a cost of £0.74 per meeting - <a href="#">Here's your calculation   Carbon Calculator (bp.com)</a></p> <p><b>Governance:</b> This would be a change to the Council resolution of 12 May 2022.</p> <p><b>Customer impact:</b> Attending meetings physically may be harder for the five (average) in person attendees.</p> <p><u>Please note:</u> The Council provides a Microsoft Teams dial in option for public participation.</p>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The details are provided with the associated live stream of the SEAC from BTC, so that Members can review and confirm an Option for future delivery as set out in the table at section 3.8.

#### 5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2027

##### 5.1 Smarter finances

- 5.1.1 Depending on the Council decision, the Options detailed above could either incur additional finances or reduce resource impacts.

##### 5.2 A greener future

- 5.2.1 Depending on the Council decision, there could be a carbon impact as set out in 3.8 of the report.

##### 5.3 Provide good quality services.

- 5.3.1 The details in the report are given to understand the customer impact of the decision.

#### 6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The details in the report are given to understand the customer impact of the decision.

- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Restricting access if only available in person and not online.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – The report identifies current operational risks of SEAC and the benefits and risks of potential options.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Depending on the Council's decision, options could incur additional finances.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Depending on the Council's decision, options could reduce officer resource impact at meetings.

Background Papers: None.

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