

SUBJECT:	Audio System
REPORT OF:	Leader of the Council - Councillor A Busby

1. Purpose of Report

To seek authority to purchase a new audio system.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1 To ensure the quality of meetings held in the Council Chamber, particularly those which the public attend.

3. Background

- 3.1 At present SBDC owns an audio system for use in the Council Chamber manufactured by Beyer. It consists of 28 wireless microphones, together with a control unit and charging cases. In addition there is one roving microphone.
- 3.2 The system was purchased in October 2004 and has been used regularly since then. Maintenance has been carried out as necessary, and in particular the microphone batteries were recently replaced in 2012.

4. Proposal/Discussion

- 4.1 Members have reported various faults when using the system including interference and failure of several of the microphones. This leads to difficulties in meetings where Members are unable to make themselves heard and the public cannot hear all of the proceedings.
- 4.2 We have received technical advice, identifying several problems:
- The system is fixed to a particular frequency band which is used by more and more other types of wireless device - mobile phones, iPads, wireless networks for example.
 - The output power of the system is, by current standards, weak which makes it susceptible to interference, and interference is now more prevalent from various wi-fi devices.
 - It is quite easy for a user to turn off a mic inadvertently.

- The batteries drain fairly quickly even when operating at optimum capacity.
 - The system is beyond its expected life.
- 4.3 We have made enquiries about the changes in technology which are available with new systems by the same manufacturer, Beyer:
- The system can operate across three frequency bands and will automatically search for an available one.
 - The output power of the system is much stronger and it has sophisticated software to avoid interference.
 - The microphone controls can be adjusted to make their use simpler.
 - The battery life between charges is 30 hours.
 - The system is easier and therefore cheaper to repair and maintain.
 - Additional roving microphones / hard of hearing units.
- 4.4 This manufacturer's UK agent has given us a budget price of £33k + VAT for the 'like-for-like' replacement of our present equipment. His view is the actual cost to us from a supplier/installer will be less than that. While the installer will have all his labour costs to add on, the manufacturer will give installers a significant discount on the equipment itself.
- 4.5 As the number of Members will be reducing from 40 to 28, the agent has also provided a quote for a system with 19 microphones rather than 28. The budget price for the smaller system is £24k + VAT.
- 4.6 In selecting new equipment we ought also to look at "future-proofing" to ensure that we allow for possible future enhancements such as webcasting. The new equipment suggested offers connectivity with various electronic devices.
- 4.7 The Cabinet is asked whether a procurement exercise should be undertaken to purchase a new audio system.

5. Resources, Risks and other implications

- 5.1 The expenditure would need to come from capital reserves. There would be an ongoing loss of revenue interest arising from the capital expenditure, although at say an interest rate of 1.5% this would only be £495pa.
- 5.2 The proposed new equipment is widely used and from a reliable manufacturer. If the system is not replaced then it is very likely that there will be further problems at meetings.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Cabinet is asked to give authority to undertake a procurement exercise for a new audio system based on 19 microphones and that the estimated cost of circa £24,000 should be added to the capital programme.
- 6.2 Cabinet is further asked to give a delegation to the Director of Services in consultation with the Resources Portfolio Holder to award the contract.

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Background Papers:	none