

Committee(s): General Purposes Committee of Aldermen – For Decision	Date: 5 December 2023
Subject: Wardmote Livestream Pilot Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	4 & 9
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N/A
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Town Clerk and Comptroller & City Solicitor	For Decision
Report author: Saira McKechnie – Head of Electoral Services	

Summary

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the City of London Corporation has livestreamed many meetings to improve public participation to meetings. In recent times, several Members have expressed an interest in exploring the extension of this provision to Ward Meetings, known as Wardmotes, with the issue raised at the May 2023 meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen.

Livestreaming Wardmotes would continue to build upon our continued programme of engagement with City of London Corporation electors; however, as with all such initiatives, there are cost and resourcing implications associated with any such decision. There is no legal obligation on the City of London Corporation to facilitate the livestreaming of Wardmotes, similarly there is no legal impediment either. Members will, therefore, have to balance the costs and benefits in coming to a considered decision.

In order to inform this decision, a pilot was trialled, utilising the Aldermanic Wardmote in Castle Baynard, in July 2023, at a cost of £3,000. This report outlines the outcomes of that pilot and seeks views as to whether there is an appetite to pursue broader implementation

Recommendation(s)

That Members:-

1. Note the content of the report and the findings of the pilot scheme
2. Consider the options, set out at paragraph 17, in that context and determine how they would wish to proceed.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London's unique electoral system pre-dates Parliament and the division of the City into wards is evident in the earliest written records of the City. The 25 wards were the military, judicial and administrative units for the area, being the equivalent of the rural hundred elsewhere.
2. The Saxon term "Wardmote" refers to a meeting of the ward held to announce the candidates of at an election and then adjourned until after the poll has taken place. In early times, the Wardmote also had a wide jurisdiction for the preservation of the peace and the power to inflict appropriate punishments; in the modern era, Wardmotes are meetings of the ward held to announce candidates at an election and to provide candidates the opportunity to address electors and for electors to ask questions of the candidates (or serving Members, in years where there is no contested election).
3. Wardmotes are a statutory part of the election process and must take place the day before the poll is held (with the adjourned Wardmote then reconvening after any subsequent poll and count, to confirm the results).
4. Wardmote attendance is currently limited to physical, in-person attendance only. Attendance at Wardmotes has been inconsistent in the past, with relatively low turnout figures. Asking electors to turn out two days in a row is inconsistent with the national position. However, they are a unique part of the City of London Corporation's electoral process.

Current Position

5. The City of London Corporation has committed itself to a broad programme of engagement with its various electorates. We have increased the number of electors on the Ward Lists and turnout figures are generally consistent with local-all out elections and local by-elections nationally. However, we are still experiencing low turnout at Wardmotes, relative to the size of the electorate.
6. Members have expressed a concern that this limited participation at Wardmotes is impacting negatively voter turnout at polls and that addressing the former might go some way towards improving the latter and strengthening engagement.
7. Whilst it is not open to the City in the short-term to change the scheduling of Wardmotes in terms of proximity to polling (due to legislative restrictions), the suggestion of livestreaming the events as a way to provide for greater engagement has been made.
8. Wardmotes are held at a variety of venues, as each must be held within the relevant Ward's boundaries. The vast majority of suitable venues across Wards are not owned by the City, and different venues are often used each time depending on availability. Therefore, any decision to livestream as a matter of

course would require a discrete allocation in terms of resource and funding to manage.

- To help inform any decision about a broader or more long-term commitment, a pilot programme to livestream the Castle Baynard Wardmote (in July 2023) was considered prudent, to ensure that the benefits and costs of any such approach might be assessed with greater confidence.

Key Data and Pilot Outcomes

- Castle Baynard has had two elections in the last 12 months, the City-wide elections in March 2022 and a by-election in March 2023. These had a turnout of 27.95% and 11.9% respectively. The average turnout in the City-wide elections in March 2022 was 36.57%. Both Castle Baynard elections fall short of the average. Therefore, there was a cogent case for additional efforts to be made at this third election in 16 months to drive up turnout, strengthening the case for the pilot to be targeted here.
- A final invoice of £1,928 was provided by RG Jones (the company which provides streaming services for certain City Corporation committee meetings) to facilitate the livestream of the Castle Baynard Wardmote.
- It should be noted that City of London Ward elections cost approximately £5,000 per Ward election. Therefore, the cost of the livestream represents a sum that is almost half the cost of an entire Ward election.
- The livestreamed Wardmote garnered 671 views at the time of writing. 20 of these were watching proceedings live, with a further 134 views registered by the end of the working day on 12 July 2023. Physical attendance of electors at the Wardmote was 25. This equates to a cost of £100 per person who watched the livestream prior to the close of poll. This means that the majority of views took place after the close of poll and therefore would not have had an influence on voting patterns for this particular election.
- The turnout for the Castle Baynard Aldermanic election in July 2023 was 24.9%. This is the lowest turnout for all Aldermanic elections in the preceding 14 months, even with the addition of the livestream. A breakdown of these results is as follows:

Ward	Date	Turnout
Aldersgate	25/26 May 2022	40.4%
Cordwainer	25/26 May 2022	48.4%
Cornhill	25/26 May 2022	41.8%
Bridge	6/7 July 2022	43.4%
Walbrook	6/7 July 2022	41.6%
Bishopsgate	14/15 September 2022	28%
Cripplegate	14/15 September 2022	38%
Aldgate	7/8 December 2022	30.7%

15. There are caveats around the lowest three turnouts in the above table: all three were impacted by rail and postal strikes; additionally, the elections in September 2022 were held in the week immediately prior to Her Majesty the Queen's State Funeral and during a period of national mourning.
16. The Castle Baynard Aldermanic election July 2023 was not affected by these issues; however, Members may wish to note that the frequency of elections in the Ward may have contributed to voter fatigue amongst the electorate, which could have had some impact. Additionally, Castle Baynard is a larger Ward in terms of electorate, which can account for a lower turnout. Nevertheless, it does not appear that the livestream had a demonstrative impact on voter turnout at this election.

Options

17. It is, therefore, proposed that Members consider whether it is financially and democratically prudent to roll livestreaming out across all Wardmotes. The options are as follows:
- 1) Decide against rolling out the programme and reflect on alternative methods of engagement which might be more cost and resource effective (recommended);
 - 2) Proceed for Aldermanic elections only, with the costs met from the CoA contingency budget OR a bid made to increase the electoral services budget to cover the additional cost;
 - 3) Recommend adoption for all elections be explored – noting the significant cost and resourcing implications would need to be calculated and presented to P&R.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial implications

18. Just under £2,000 was required for the pilot scheme, which was funded through the Court of Aldermen's contingency budget. There is no current provision within the Electoral Services budget for this; similarly, there is no provision for any wider, longer-term implementation. Therefore, if Members decide they wish to adopt this practice as standard, long-term consideration will need to be taken to adjusting the overall budget of Electoral Services budget on an ongoing basis, and a corresponding approach made to the relevant Corporation Committees.

Resource implications

19. As a one-off pilot, the resource implications were absorbed by the immediate members of the electoral services and governance and member services teams. However, if this were to be carried forward, it should be noted that there is no physical or technical resource to manage multiple and simultaneous livestreams. There are currently two livestream laptops, with one officer primarily assigned to this activity. The process to livestream requires an officer at Guildhall to enable and disable the livestream; it will also require an individual at the Wardmote to support the livestreaming within the room. For

the pilot, this was managed by the Honorary Ward Clerk, but were this to be replicated it would need to be ensured that such individuals were suitably trained and competent at managing the process. Broader application would, therefore, have implications in both staffing and equipment terms.

Legal implications

20. There are no direct legal implications, insofar as there is no requirement to live-stream Wardmotes; neither is there any legal impediment to doing so. However, as the role of Electoral Services is statutory, it should be stated their statutory responsibilities must always take precedence over those that are considered non-statutory.

Risk implications

21. Discrete from risks around finance and resource implications which would need to be addressed, there is a specific risk associated with the application to certain venues. Therefore, we must take into account, given the variety of venues utilised, it is possible that some may not be compatible with livestream arrangements. These would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Equalities implications

22. A full equalities impact assessment has not been carried out in respect of the pilot scheme; however, it could be stated that this improves the access that electors have to Wardmotes which in turn mirrors the legislative provisions that ensure voters have a variety of means to participate in elections. Should there be a desire to pursue this more widely, a more detailed assessment should be undertaken.

Climate implications

23. None

Security implications

24. None

Conclusion

25. There was no demonstrative benefit to the turnout of electors to the Castle Baynard Aldermanic election based on livestreaming the Wardmote. Given the financial and technical requirements it is not recommended that we implement this permanently.

Appendices

None

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