

REPORT TO PICKMERE PARISH COUNCIL

5th October 2021

AGENDA ITEM 9.3 THE POTENTIAL FOR HYBRID MEETINGS AND THE INSTALLATION OF BROADBAND AT THE VILLAGE HALL

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 It has previously been suggested that the potential cost of installing broadband at the Village Hall be investigated. Further, at the September Council meeting members requested a report on the potential for broadcasting Council meetings online, where the meeting itself took place at the Village Hall.
- 1.2 As members are aware, Government did not renew the temporary pandemic powers enabling council meetings to be held online, and thus since last May such meetings have not been possible. However, this and other councils discovered whilst holding online meetings during the pandemic that more residents tuned in to observe council meetings than normally attend meetings held in person, and apparently a request has been received from one or more residents that such a facility would be valued now.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The ability to broadcast council meetings online, in a reasonably secure and efficient way that causes minimum disruption to the meeting itself, requires:
 - A broadband service to the meeting venue – i.e. the Village Hall, and
 - The requisite technical equipment to enable satisfactory visual and sound coverage of the meeting.

Broadband

- 2.2 Enquiries have been made of business broadband providers and quotations have been sought from several. The request for quotations is complicated by the fact that there is no telephone line to the Village Hall. This means that providers are not able to test the line in order to assess what level of broadband service might be possible.
- 2.3 It seems likely that the potential broadband service to the Hall would be good, since the Hall is obviously located near the fibre-connected BT/Openreach box that provides telephone and broadband to this part of the village. Broadband provision in the vicinity of the box is good.
- 2.4 Selection of a potential provider is constrained not only by who could technically provide such a service, but also the quality of customer service such companies offer. There are frequent mentions in the press of various companies who do not perform well in customer service terms. Uswitch for instance have recently produced the results of research which found that there was wide variation in the number of complaints per 100,000 customers that different companies

experienced – EE, Sky and BT being better than the industry average in these terms and Plusnet, Vodafone, TalkTalk and Virgin Media being below it.

2.5 The following ‘quotations’ have been secured primarily from the various providers’ webpages. Telephone contact has been made with BT but not with the other two. Bonline could give no information by telephone other than that shown on their website. The figures provided relate to a quotation to provide unlimited download broadband only (i.e. not a telephone service) at the Hall; all costs are exclusive of VAT and are costs quoted at the moment (in this sector, costs can change rapidly as package offers are altered):

- **BT** BT’s website quotes a charge for their Superfast Essential+Value line (download 65-74 Mbps) of £24.95 per month plus £9.95 up front (24-month contract). This does not include a telephone service.
- **Charities Buying Group (CBG)** This non-profit group (some information on the group is appended) provides all sorts of services to charities and non-profit organisations. For broadband it deals direct with BT. It can provide an 80Mbps download/20Mbps upload service without the need for a telephone line at an installation cost of £49.50, with a one-off router cost of £53.00, and a subsequent monthly rental of £32.00. The contract would be with CBG, and any breakdowns, problems with the service, etc., would be dealt with via CBG and their direct links with BT, making for a much more efficient service.
- **Bonline** Bonline’s website states that installing a broadband service (including the initial telephone line) would cost £83.99, and the subsequent broadband service would cost £22.95 monthly for unlimited fibre service of up to 76 Mbps. Bonline have an ‘excellent’ rating on Trustpilot, but there is very limited information available about the company.
- **xln** xln similarly have an ‘excellent’ rating on Trustpilot. Their Superfast Fibre Broadband service including unlimited telephone calls would currently cost £29.95 monthly (18 month contract) plus £48 installation charge. However that monthly cost is a current promotion and the ‘normal’ monthly price would be £37.95.

2.6 Enquiries have been made of the SLCC Clerks’ forum and several other options were suggested, but none have proved appropriate to the Council’s needs.

2.7 It has to be reported that securing precise and definite advice and prices for broadband services is not easy. Different conversations with different parts of BT reveal different approaches to the question, with information slightly differing from the web-based packages. There is little authoritative information available about smaller providers.

2.8 It would appear therefore that an effective broadband service at the Village Hall could be secured for a cost **within about £300 - £400 per annum, excluding set-up costs.**

2.9 Council is reminded that there is no provision for this expenditure in the current year's budget.

Equipment requirements for streaming meetings.

2.10 The following equipment would be required to ensure efficient and non-disruptive streaming of council meetings:

- Laptop – the Clerk has a Council-owned laptop at present but this is now several years old and is starting to show its age; it may be that purchase of a new laptop will in any case be suggested for next year's budget;
- A multi-directional USB microphone – cost approx. £100 for a reasonable quality;
- A USB camera – approx. £25
- Camera stand – approx. £30;
- Several USB extension cables – cost £15?
- Projector – cost £200-£500?
- Screen £100?
- Small speaker system – cost £50?

- **Total cost in the order of £600-£800? excluding the question of laptop.**

2.11 Clearly a council meeting could be streamed without the need for a projector/screen/speakers if that was all that was required; however it is considered likely that if such equipment was provided there might well follow a demand for remote observers/participants to contribute to the meetings, for instance in the Public Forum section of the Council agenda, and at that point the projector, screen and speakers would be necessary.

2.12 Again, members are reminded that there is no provision in the current year's budget for such expenditure.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 That members give consideration to the information provided.

Jack Steel
Clerk to the Parish Council

APPENDIX TO AGENDA ITEM 9.3 – BROADBAND PROVISION

INFORMATION ON CHARITIES BUYING GROUP

The Charities Buying Group is a Community Interest Company and as such all profits go towards **CBG 4 Health** our initiative for health and wellbeing, particularly for the elderly.

The Charities Buying Group provide a dedicated service operated for the benefit of **ALL charities and not for profit organisations** offering a wide range of buying agreements that are designed to reduce expenditure and, by reducing cost, help these organisations make better use of their money for the benefit of the missions/objectives they were created for.

The Charities Buying Group was formed in 2002 after reviewing how little support charities get in solving their purchasing issues, particularly small charities who do not have the buying power of larger organisations. By using the collective buying power of the Charities Buying Group, we can support all charities as we truly believe that by buying more efficiently, more of their money can be used for the purpose it is intended, meeting their service objectives and, more importantly, helping those people who need the help most in terms of care and welfare. This is the true vision of the Charities Buying Group.

In 2004, we were commended in **Parliament** for helping our first 255 members achieve in excess of 1 million pounds saving in our first year.

Website: charitiesbuyinggroup.com