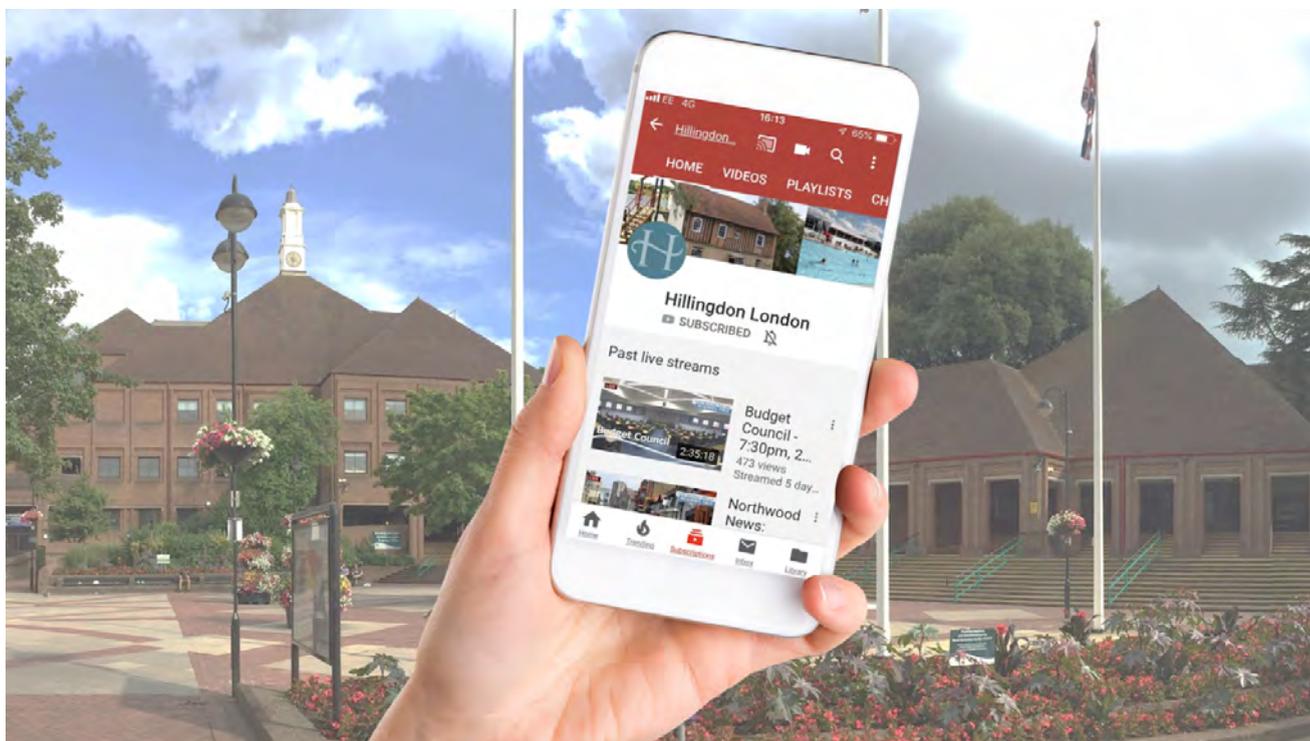


Digital broadcasting of Policy Overview, Scrutiny & Select Committees



A review by the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee

Councillors on the Committee:

Richard Mills (Chairman); Wayne Bridges (Vice-Chairman); Lindsay Bliss; Nicola Brightman; Farhad Choubedar; Alan Deville; Jazz Dhillon; Vanessa Hurhangee; Kerri Prince

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Chairman's Foreword

Hillingdon Council has a proud record of directly engaging residents in the democratic process. This is not only through well established ways, such as the petition process, but increasingly through more modern digital means. Indeed, the broadcasting of council meetings live on YouTube has been a big leap forward in bringing local democracy directly to residents in a more modern and immersive way. Since 2016, when the Council first started filming, over 280 meetings have been broadcast, with thousands tuning in to watch.

Broadcasting our meetings increases transparency and can strengthen the connection between residents, the Council and local politicians. By making use of the universally versatile YouTube digital platform and integration with other social media, this has enabled residents to view meetings on any device, anywhere and at any time.



The Committee's review is in response to the Council motion on 22 November 2018 which sought to expand the broadcasting of meetings to the Council's policy overview, scrutiny and select committees. As part of the review, Members considered the merits of broadcasting these additional meetings, along with viewer and practical considerations, including that of witnesses. The Committee received a live demonstration of how YouTube operates and watched videos of other public organisations using the same technology for comparison. The Committee is pleased to report that Hillingdon is leading the way in this field of digital engagement in local government.

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to propose to Cabinet recommendations that enable the Council to successfully expand the broadcasting of council meetings online and at no financial cost. Finally, I would like to thank Members on the Committee for their insight and in particular, the Democratic Services team for their expertise in broadcasting our meetings to residents each and every week.

Councillor Richard Mills

**Chairman, Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee
Councillor for the Brunel Ward**

Our recommendations to Cabinet

Through the witness session and evidence received during the review by the Committee, Members have agreed to the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1	That Cabinet notes the opportunity to raise the profile of the work the Policy Overview, Scrutiny and Select Committees, demonstrating the broader public engagement in Hillingdon’s democratic process;
2	That Cabinet approve the expansion of the current digital broadcasting service to all Policy Overview, Scrutiny and Select Committees, noting that this does not apply to any Panel established by a committee. Furthermore, that this commences, as soon as practicable after the start of the 2019/20 Municipal Year;
3	That Cabinet note the Committee’s conclusion that the current camera configurations are deemed generally suitable for viewing and that Democratic Services will put in place suitable procedures regarding the attendance of witnesses;
4	That Cabinet agree that, going forward, such meetings are held in Committee Rooms 5&6 to negate the need for any additional infrastructure and to not incur any financial expense in broadcasting them.

Current broadcasting arrangements

The Committee heard from the Senior Democratic Services Manager that in 2015, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services agreed a project to broadcast council meetings. Following a review of different platforms, it was decided to adapt the Council's existing CCTV and WiFi infrastructure and integrate it with YouTube Live to provide a modern, viewer friendly and cost effective solution to broadcasting the meetings for both growing democratic engagement and having a record of proceedings.

Members were shown that Council meetings could be watched live or on demand after the event on the Council's YouTube channel: *Hillingdon London*, which was easily accessible on most laptops or mobile devices, or through links provided by the Council, e.g. on its website, on the agenda page and social media. It was noted that although the Council's YouTube channel contained interesting cultural and informative content, however, that Council meetings had now become the primary content provider and a magnet for people to watch the channel.

Members were informed that the central broadcast studio was located in the Democratic Services Office by the Council Chamber, which controlled the live feed(s) coming in and the output via encoding software. To be mobile, a laptop would then be used by Democratic Services Officers to control the output feed into YouTube during a meeting, thereby creating the live broadcast. It was welcomed that the resilience of the platform to-date had been very good and that any technical issues to the broadcasts were rare.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager referred Members to a more detailed report on the technical operation of YouTube, which had been submitted to the previous Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee on 1 February 2018.

It was noted that the following meetings were currently broadcast on the channel:

<i>Full Council</i>	<i>Central and South Planning Committee</i>	<i>Major Applications Planning Committee</i>	<i>Licensing Sub-Committee</i>
<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>North Planning Committee</i>	<i>Major Applications Planning Sub-Committee (HS2)</i>	<i>Ad hoc wider public interest petition hearings</i>

The Committee acknowledged that the setup had not changed since 2015/16 when an initial capital cost had been required to install new cameras and a much-needed upgrade of the audio package and microphones in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms 5 & 6. As YouTube was free to use, Members welcomed the fact that there were no annual running costs of broadcasting council meetings for resident taxpayers. The Committee were informed that live broadcast capability was currently available in the following rooms as follows:

Rooms	Capability	Broadcast Images
<p>Council Chamber</p>	<p>3 cameras integrated with in-room audio-setup, speakers and microphones</p> <p>Of which 2 cameras provide automatic zoom to the person speaking when using the microphone</p> <p>360 degree multi-camera views available watching on YouTube for a greater viewer experience.</p> <p>Sound, microphones and visual also controlled from the studio above the back of the Chamber</p>	  
<p>Committee Room 6</p>	<p>Single Camera integrated with in-room audio-setup, speakers and microphones</p> <p>Single stream on YouTube</p>	
<p>Committee Room 5</p>	<p>Single Camera integrated with in-room audio-setup, speakers and microphones</p> <p>Single stream on YouTube</p>	

Viewer analytics

The Committee were mindful that YouTube was a global platform managed by Google and that the videos were often watched based on an individual's own searches and preferences using evolving algorithms to help them find relevant content. It was welcomed that Democratic Services tag videos in relation to items on the agenda to improve their relevance to people when searching.

In terms of where people watch from, the Committee noted that generally, the vast majority of people watching council meetings were from the UK compared to other countries around the world and understood that it was not possible to drill down viewers into UK sub-regional areas. However, what was clear to the Committee, was that since 2016 more and more people were watching Hillingdon Council meetings online. The Committee welcomed this ability for residents to watch meetings that they were not able to attend in person, and even choose the specific agenda item they wished to watch in some cases.

Latest trends

Through YouTube's basic analytics function, the Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that the Council was able to break down how people in real-time (and over time) had been watching council meetings. It was noted that the data generally showed that people watch council meetings that are relevant to them, for example, the higher the public interest in certain planning applications, the higher the viewer rate for those planning committee meetings.

The meetings currently broadcast were predominantly those that directly involved residents on matters that were of interest to them. An example was given of the Licensing Sub-Committee on 23 May 2017 that considered the South Ruislip Cineworld application and attracted over 500 views within a very short space of time, along with an average watchtime of 9 minutes.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that 'watchtime' data was arguably more relevant to user engagement than overall viewing numbers because it showed for how long people watched a particular video. On Hillingdon's channel, it was noted that as the number of views had continued to increase over time, there had been a corresponding decrease in the average watchtime, but that this was to be expected as it reflected common viewer habits with people browsing for the right content or instead watching only parts of the meeting that were relevant to them.

It was understood that people could also subscribe to the Council's YouTube channel to receive alerts of new videos added or live broadcasts and that the number of subscribers to the channel after watching a council meeting had increased by 146 people since May 2018. Subscribing to the channel helped people stay up-to-date with the latest content added and maintained a core base of potential viewers. Members were shown how people could also show their like or dislike of videos and how they could share them with friends further on social media. It was welcomed that trends in these were positive and on the rise.

Furthermore, it was noted that the Council had disabled the ‘comments’ and ‘live chat’ features due to the potential of inappropriate use and the moderation required by staff during a broadcast. However, these features could be enabled to provide added viewer engagement in certain circumstances, should Members decide this. The Committee explored whether the broadcasts generated enough traffic to warrant advertising and heard that monetisation of the videos had been automatically disabled and that the number of viewers were below the level for YouTube to place any automatic advertising on videos at this time. The Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that as a public body, any future advertising would need to be very sensitively considered, primarily due to the current lack of control over what adverts would appear and whether they would be relevant or reputable in nature.

Members noted that a small [yet increasing] number of local authorities and public organisations in the UK were making use of YouTube to broadcast their official meetings, whilst it was more widely used in the USA and Canada. Members were shown examples of other public bodies around the UK and world for comparison and these organisations are listed in [Appendix A](#) for reference. It was welcomed that Hillingdon had been approached by and shared its experience with a number of other councils. In comparison to other relevant organisations, it was clear to the Committee that the Council had been extremely successful in broadcasting on the YouTube platform. Members welcomed the positive trends in viewership and engagement watching Council meetings online, taking into account the latest viewer analytics set out in [Appendix B](#).

Future innovation

During the witness session, Members experienced a live internal demonstration of the Committee meeting itself, which enabled Members to see directly how videos were prepared, encoded and then broadcast live on YouTube by Democratic Services Officers.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager expressed the need to continually embrace innovation in the Council’s broadcasting on YouTube and noted that much of this would be largely steered by changes that YouTube itself rolls-out across the world. It was welcomed that Democratic Services were investigating cost-effective ways to be more informative within the live public video stream, such as placing text overlays, e.g. with the names of Councillors speaking. The Committee supported this, in particular, looking at how in-room presentations used in Planning Committee meetings could also be displayed to viewers in real-time during a live broadcast. It was advised that any enhancements should ideally be automated to avoid the Democratic Services Officer in the room having to undertake any live-editing during a meeting, and not detract them from their primary responsibilities of advising the Chairman, taking the official minutes and ensuring the effective operation of the meeting.

As with a growing number of websites, the Committee considered the possibility of embedding the YouTube content directly on the Council’s own website when meetings were live. It was explained that this would be technically feasible, and that it could be requested as part of the upcoming website changes taking place. Members considered that this could allow for greater local promotion of them. Councillors also welcomed the provision of subtitling and transcripts for residents when watching videos, particularly for those hard of hearing and it was noted that Google’s voice recognition technology was improving for such services on YouTube.

Expanding broadcasting to Policy Overview, Scrutiny & Select Committees

Members recalled the full Council meeting on 22 November 2018 which had considered a motion submitted by Councillor Stuart Mathers regarding extending the scope of council meetings that are broadcast on YouTube. It was noted that the Council had amended the motion, to enable this Committee to explore the matter in more detail. Council resolved:

‘That this Council asks the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy and Overview Committee to look at the issues pertaining to adding the Executive Scrutiny and Policy Overview Committees to those already streamed live on our YouTube channel and to report their recommendations in due course to Cabinet for a final decision.’

The Committee regarded the Council motion as its Terms of Reference for the review and during its single witness session, the Committee structured its approach around the three key themes as set out in this section of the report.

1. Broadcasting the additional meetings

The Committee established that the following meetings would fall under the scope of the review:

<i>Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities</i>	<i>Social Care, Housing and Public Health</i>	<i>Residents, Education and Environmental Services</i>
<i>External Services Select Committee</i>	<i>Executive Scrutiny Committee</i>	<i>Any Committee Panels set up (currently a GP Pressures Select Panel / Corporate Parenting Panel)</i>

Members considered the benefits or otherwise of broadcasting these additional meetings and noted that some informal discussions had taken place with other Members from other committees. The following potential positives, issues and approaches were reviewed:

Potential positives	Potential unknowns / issues	Possible approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This could raise the profile of the work of policy overview, scrutiny and select committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional meetings (up to approx. 50 a year) could lead to a saturation of meeting video content on the YouTube channel, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To broadcast all meetings irrespective of type.

Potential positives	Potential unknowns / issues	Possible approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It could showcase the broader public engagement in the democratic process, such as witnesses attending to give evidence, similar to Select Committees that are broadcast in Parliament. ● Using YouTube is a tried and tested method in Hillingdon, and evidence shows there has been little impact upon how meetings operate ‘in the room’. There have been no issues and little reaction from residents and petitioners attending. ● There are a number of interesting topics of broader public interest that are discussed at committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Currently only meetings that make decisions are filmed. Evidence (to-date) shows that people tend to tune in to watch specific videos on matters that are of direct relevance to them, e.g. a planning application. ● Policy Overview and Select Committees undertake interesting policy reviews spanning a number of meetings from start to finish. Keeping viewers engaged across a ‘series’ of meetings may prove a challenge, but it certainly would be something to positively promote. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To not broadcast any meetings. ● To broadcast specific meetings only. ● To broadcast specific meetings on single issue scrutiny or policy topics of public interest (as agreed by the relevant Chairmen) ● To trial broadcasting with one Committee and review viewer engagement after 6-8 months, before recommending any further roll-out.

On balance, the Committee considered there would be a positive benefit in broadcasting policy overview, scrutiny and select committees and that ultimately this would help raise the profile of the important work they do in scrutinising and monitoring council services, holding organisations to account, along with developing service proposals for Cabinet to consider.

The Committee did not wish to differentiate between broadcasting only certain types of committees based on their remit, considering that this would not enable residents to see the sheer breadth of activity undertaken. Furthermore, Members considered that in broadcasting the testimony given by the extensive range of witnesses attending all committee meetings, it would demonstrate the much wider public engagement in the Council’s democratic processes, beyond that already seen with those in the current live broadcasts.

It was noted that the Panels that could be set up by the Committees were more informal in nature and currently took place in private given that they did not fall under the Access to Information requirements that ordinary committees and sub-committees would do. In the case of the future Corporate Parenting Panel, Members considered the potential for more private discussions

relating to children in the Council’s care and care leavers, whom would also attend such Panel meetings. In reviewing the panels, the Committee was minded to not include them within their recommendations to Cabinet.

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

1	That Cabinet notes the opportunity to raise the profile of the work the Policy Overview, Scrutiny and Select Committees, demonstrating the broader public engagement in Hillingdon’s democratic process,
2	That Cabinet approve the expansion of the current digital broadcasting service to all Policy Overview, Scrutiny and Select Committees, noting that this does not apply to any Panel established by a committee. Furthermore, that this commences, as soon as practicable after the start of the 2019/20 Municipal Year;

2. Viewer and practical considerations

The Committee considered the existing camera configurations for viewers in Committee Rooms 5 & 6, noting the single static camera in the ceiling facing the Committee Members (towards the Chairman), as shown in the example image below:



Members were informed that officers had previously considered pan-tilt-zoom cameras, like in the Council Chamber, in the committee rooms but discounted this as seating plans could change from meeting to meeting. Pan-tilt-zoom worked well in the Council Chamber as all desks and microphones were fixed points within the room, and the camera could be preset to each location.

It was noted that when resident petitioners and other parties attended to speak, Democratic Services Officers would take into account an optimal room configuration based on the camera location to get the best live broadcast.

The Committee were very aware that policy overview and select committees would often invite a number of internal and external witnesses to attend and considered the best way to ensure that in broadcasting the meetings, their attendance or ability to fully speak on matters would not be hindered or affected in any way.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that in relation to the current meetings that are broadcast, there had been no known issues or negative feedback to-date with any external people attending to speak. He informed Members that those attending, in his view, had been able to give a full and frank account of the points they wished to make to councillors, and that this had included a large number of resident petitioners, along with the Police, Government officials, lawyers, applicants, agents, business owners, traders etc.. who had attended to speak at meetings.

The Committee learnt that Democratic Services currently send prior communications to all petitioners and external people attending meetings that may be broadcast, not only to make them aware of this fact, but also to show what it will look like on camera and in the room so they can get a good feel for it before they arrive. Furthermore, Members welcomed the introductory comments announced by chairmen at the start of meetings to alert people present to the live broadcast and how they will be both seen and heard on video during the meeting.

It was noted that there are no legal impediments to the Council broadcasting official meetings, except where they concern or reveal exempt information (Part II) or other confidential business. In respect of members of the public that may attend, speak or have their personal details broadcast during committee deliberations, this would largely be covered under the “public task” requirement in the Data Protection Act 2018, which enabled the Council to process personal data that supported and promoted the democratic process.

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

3

That Cabinet note the Committee’s conclusion that the current camera configurations are deemed generally suitable for viewing and that Democratic Services will put in place suitable procedures regarding the attendance of witnesses.

3. Technology and costs

The Committee reviewed three technical and financial options for the delivery of the additional policy overview, scrutiny and select committee meetings and noted the advice that had been received by Democratic Services and also Corporate ICT as set out in summary below:

	Viewing factors	New requirements	Estimated cost
Option 1 - hold all or specific meetings in CR5 or CR6 which are already set up with a single static camera, so no new camera or audio / microphone technology would be required.	This would provide a static view. It may not be suitable for all room configurations, yet would still ensure the meetings are broadcast professionally online.	N/A	None.
Option 2 * - hold meetings in CR5 or CR6 and provide a new second static ceiling camera..	This could be positioned to accommodate a different angle to provide multi-view (e.g. Member and Witness cameras)	As existing cameras are now 3 years old at a maximum 720p HD resolution, to ensure consistency between the different views, these may need to be upgraded.	Up to £1k per new camera (capital expenditure) and minor additional cabling costs.
Option 3 * - to install cameras in CR3 or CR4 should Members also wish to use these smaller rooms for meetings or smaller room layouts.	A static camera view or Members could combined with Option 2 above to provide two cameras in a room.	There would be new costs associated with this, beyond any cameras, as these rooms currently do not have any audio / microphone setup.	Estimated at £10-15k per room. This is based on slimmed down quotes for the larger committees rooms back in 2016, along with new cabling.

Members sought clarification on the number of meetings that could be broadcast simultaneously and the Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that Democratic Services had the ability to stream up to 3 meetings live at the same time, if using a single camera in each of the Council Chamber and two committee rooms set up, and that this capability was deemed satisfactory given the official meeting calendar. It was noted that around 50 additional videos would be added each municipal year, should the Cabinet agree to broadcast the Policy Overview, Scrutiny & Select Committees.

The Committee queried whether Policy Overview, Scrutiny and Select Committee meetings could be held in Committee Rooms 5 & 6, given that some meetings currently take place in other smaller

committee rooms. The Senior Democratic Services Manager informed Members that whilst he could not rule out the odd clash with any new meetings arranged mid-year, the current timetable does allow the possibility to relocate such meetings into Committee Rooms 5 & 6, and that they would take priority over any other internal bookings. It was also confirmed that bookings for 2019/20 had provisionally taken into account of this, pending any final decision by the Cabinet.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager explained that the current solution provided in-house was extremely cost effective, built from existing modern infrastructure and hardware and the freely available YouTube technology with no annual running costs. The Committee supported the zero-cost approach and expressed a strong view that they did not wish to incur any new costs by fitting out other committee rooms to broadcasting the additional committee meetings, given that Committee Rooms 5 & 6 could easily be used.

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

4

That Cabinet agree that, going forward, such meetings are held in Committee Rooms 5&6 to negate the need for any additional infrastructure and to not incur any financial expense in broadcasting them.

Committee review activity

As set out in its multi-year work programme, the Committee conducted this review with the following structure, timetable, witness testimony and evidence received:

Meeting	Review phase	Suggested committee activity
8 January 2019	Scoping	The Committee considered an introductory report based on the Council motion, the progression of the review and provided initial feedback to officers.
5 February 2019	Witness / evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witness: Senior Democratic Services Manager • Updated Analytics report (the view of the viewer) • Member presentation and live demonstration of how YouTube broadcasting works • Examples of other organisations broadcasting • Detailed Options Paper to assist Members
5 February 2019	Findings	Following consideration of the Options Paper, Members framed their initial draft recommendations, which it agreed to consider further when receiving the final report.
6 March 2019	Final report	The Committee considered and agreed the final report for referral to Cabinet, delegating minor presentational changes to the Chairman.
TBC	Cabinet meeting	For Cabinet to consider and make decisions based upon the Committee's report and recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix A Other local councils and public bodies broadcasting on YouTube

Members noted that a small (yet increasing) number of local authorities and public organisations in the UK were making use of YouTube to broadcast their official meetings, whilst it was more widely used in the USA / Canada. It was welcomed that Hillingdon was successfully broadcasting on this platform, particularly in relation to comparative viewer analytics.

Members during the review, briefly watched meetings from the organisations below, which can be accessed by clicking the links if online:

- [LB Hillingdon, Cabinet](#)
- [LB Southwark](#)
- [York City Council](#)
- [Telford & Wrekin Council](#)
- [Monmouthshire County Council](#)
- [Greater London Authority](#)
- [Toronto City Council, Canada](#)



Appendix B Latest Hillingdon viewer analytics and engagement on YouTube

The top 5 meetings in terms of viewership, since May 2018 to 26/1/19, are shown below:

Meeting	Views	Average “watchtime” in the UK (mins)	Shares on social media	New subscribers gained	Likes / dislikes
Cabinet 21 June 2018	5930	1:49	8	3	12/3
North Planning Committee - 19 June 2018 (Part A)	5302	6:43	16	9	31/2
North Planning Committee - 19 June 2018 (Part B)	4748	2:46	18	8	29/3
Cabinet - 25 October 2018	3847	1:17	0	3	9/4
Major Applications Planning Committee - 19 June 2018	3757	8:12	11	8	23/0

YouTube viewer analytics for the 2018/2019 municipal year to-date are shown below:

Viewer engagement	2018/19 (MY) - as of 26/1/19	Trend from previous year
No. of meetings broadcast live on YouTube	89	↑
Views	93,473	↑
Average “watchtime” in the UK (mins)	3:25 mins	↓
Shares on social media	336	↑
Likes / Dislikes	329/87	↑
New subscribers gained watching	146	↑

