

ANGUS COUNCIL

18 MARCH 2021

REVIEW OF REMOTE MEETINGS ARRANGEMENTS: UPDATE

**JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND THE
DIRECTOR OF HR, DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT**

ABSTRACT

This Report updates elected members in relation to remote meetings arrangements following deferral of Report 34/21.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council: -

- (i) Agrees to continue to hold Council and Committee meetings on a remote basis;
- (ii) Approve the retention of recorded Council and Committee meetings on YouTube, while they are being held remotely and recorded, for a period of 12 months from the date of such meetings in the interests of the openness and transparency of Council and Committee meetings and in compliance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations;
- (iii) Agree that for the reasons outlined in the table below in paragraph 5 of this report, Microsoft Teams will be the default platform used for all Council and Committee meetings while such meetings are being held remotely; and
- (iv) Note that a further report will be brought to Council on 24 June 2021 so that the arrangements for remote meetings may be reviewed.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

This Report contributes to the achievement of our priority that the Council is efficient and effective as detailed in our Council Plan for 2017 – 2022.

3. BACKGROUND

At the meeting of the Special Arrangements Committee on 23 June 2020 arrangements were put in place to conduct Council meetings remotely, due to the COVID -19 pandemic (Report No 175/20 refers). It was also agreed that these remote meeting arrangements would be reviewed in 6 months' time.

A Report was submitted to the meeting of Angus Council on 11 February (Report 34/21). Following discussion at that meeting, the Council agreed:-

“to defer consideration of the Report and that officers report back to the next ordinary meeting of Angus Council in relation to GDPR retention periods for the recorded meetings and further information regarding the rollout of Teams as the default platform for all Council meetings.”

This Report now updates elected members in relation to these points.

4. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS

Reference is made to Article 5(e) of the General Data Protection Regulations, (GDPR), which states that personal data must be: “kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed”.

Members will be aware that recording council and committee meetings and publishing them for online viewing has been done for the public to ensure the openness and transparency of Council proceedings.

The legal basis for keeping the recordings available for the public to view may be found within Section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 which provides that the local authority maintains the right to make certain arrangements to secure best value, being the requirement to seek continuous improvement in the performance of the authority's functions. The proposals contained within this report seek to achieve such best value having regard to the implications of the current pandemic relative to legal restrictions affecting actual or physical attendance at meetings.

At the meeting of Angus Council on 11 February elected members highlighted that some other Councils and other public bodies retained the recordings of meetings for longer than what was being proposed in Report 34/21, (which proposal was until the minute of the meeting was finalised and agreed by elected members as a correct record).

Officers have looked specifically at the practices of other councils. The following councils act as a demonstration of how long remote meetings are posted online:

Aberdeenshire Council: 12 months
Aberdeen City Council: 12 months.
East Lothian Council: 6 months.
City of Edinburgh Council: 5 years.
Glasgow City Council: 5 years.
Highland Council: 12 months.
Moray Council: 12 months.

As can be seen, the practice varies quite widely amongst Councils in relation to the retention periods. There is a balance to be struck in terms of complying with the legal obligation under GDPR to hold personal information "for no longer than is necessary" and the need and desire to ensure that Council and Committee decision-making at meetings is open and transparent.

In order to assist elected members, there is attached to this report at Appendix 1, information and a table created by Angus Council's Communication team providing a cross section of the types of committee videos shared on YouTube and viewing patterns. From these examples, there appears to be a clear trend that viewing figures decrease significantly within 2 months of posting a live video on YouTube with the majority of views taking place within the first week of posting the live video.

Taking all of the above into account, it is recommended that Council holds recordings of such meetings for a period of 12 months from the date of the meeting. It is also proposed that in order to comply with the requirements of GDPR, appropriate advance notifications are issued to relevant participants, for example, parties to deputations or applicants/objectors at a planning meeting to say that recordings of the meeting will be available on the selected media platform for the agreed period.

5. REMOTE MEETINGS PLATFORMS

Shortly after the initial COVID lockdown, a special meeting of Angus Council was held remotely on 3 April 2020. Officers had undertaken discussions on what would be the most suitable platform to host remote meetings. It was concluded that neither BT MeetMe nor Skype were suitable for this, and Microsoft Teams was not yet available across the Council and not scheduled to be deployed until later in the year.

Zoom was popular in the consumer market at the time and was used for the meeting as an alternative. The use of Zoom was largely successful at the meeting on 3rd April 2020. Consequently, at the meeting of the Special Arrangements Committee on 23 June 2020 arrangements were put in place to conduct future Council meetings remotely using Zoom until Teams was available. (Report 175/20 refers)

In April 2020, the Office 365 team reviewed the implementation plan to concentrate on deployment of Teams to aid communications for all staff working remotely during the pandemic. The Teams application was deployed to all users from April to June. The Teams platform has been used for exempt committee agenda items since then. Improvements and new features have been added to Teams since it was implemented, and council staff and members now use it daily as a key communications tool.

Very soon after the 3 April 2020 meeting, advice came out from the Chief Digital Officer for Scotland that Zoom was not secure and the recommendation was not to use it unless there was no alternative. It was agreed that Zoom would only be used for public committee meetings and not used where exempt items were discussed. In addition, council users were advised to only use the web version of Zoom when invited to externally arranged Zoom meetings. Zoom data is hosted within the EU and account data may be held in the US such as usernames, password and account information which causes GDPR issues. Teams data is hosted within the UK.

Both Zoom and Teams offer accessibility options within their applications, supporting screen readers for the visually-impaired, and allowing keystrokes for common tasks. Neither product handles presenting information well as this is inherently visual content. For the hearing-impaired, both products offer closed captions and live transcription of audio. For Zoom this can only be set by the host for the meeting. Teams allows individuals to turn this on for themselves.

Zoom offers telephone numbers for those who cannot connect through the application or web interface. Teams does not offer this by default but is available as an add-on on a per user basis.

Pros/Cons

The table below shows a comparison of pros/cons for use of the different products for committee meetings.

| MS Teams Pros | Zoom Pros |
|--|---|
| Full functionality available as part of O365 licencing | Councillors and selected Business support staff familiar with product |
| Flagship Microsoft Office product with rich features and under constant improvement and development | Feature rich tool designed for simplicity and ease-of-use |
| Recommended tool by Scottish Digital Office, used by all other Scottish councils and many other public sector agencies | Has telephone/mobile dial in ability which is useful for those with poor connections or disruption |
| Service and functionality managed and supported by Angus Council Digital Enablement and IT | Integrates well with YouTube for streaming and recording |
| Available on council mobile phones and Bring your own device (BYOD) mobile phones | |
| | |
| | |
| MS Teams Cons | Zoom Cons |
| Dial in ability to be purchased as additional add on (but will then be available to wider council for a greater variety of meetings) | Several committees have agencies (e.g. Police) attending who are not allowed to use Zoom desktop due to security concerns, they would continue to have to dial in |
| Change of use | Security concerns around the amount of data collected when platform launches. Some data still goes to the EU and US Zoom privacy statement of concern including about the data leakage that may occur. |
| Streaming and recording may be slightly more complex technically than Zoom | Local Government Digital Office is questioning Angus Council's continued use of Zoom now that MS Teams is operational withing the council |
| | Only selected business support staff familiar with the product |
| | Teams would still be required for exempt items, meaning extra work to arrange meetings and possible delays and disruption as attendees move from Zoom to the Teams meeting |

5. PROPOSALS

Officers from IT are recommending that the Council continues with the move to MS Teams to comply with security requirements and enable feature development, This will involve a phased approach of moving committee meetings to MS Teams during March and April to allow adequate time to agree the functionality and procedures and for elected members to become more familiar with the use of MS Teams in a committee setting.

6. FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The cost of 10 Zoom licences, which are required by the Business Support Team to host Zoom meetings is £1,600 pa.

There are no additional costs to the Council from using MS Teams for Committee meetings because the functionality has already been bought as part of O365 for general use. The cost of Teams is £360 pa for telephone number availability for committee meetings should that be required for some participants.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached to this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1