

ANGUS COUNCIL

24 JUNE 2021

**UPDATE ON REVIEW OF REMOTE MEETINGS ARRANGEMENTS AND
POTENTIAL FOR HYBRID MODEL FOR MEETINGS**

**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 100/21.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Council: -

- (i) Note the preliminary detail on the options for facilitating hybrid meetings for Council and Committee meetings through an appropriate IT solution;
- (ii) Note that hybrid meetings would require a sizeable financial investment by the Council;
- (iii) Note the current estimated limited capacity of the Council Chamber in terms of social distancing requirements
- (iv) Authorise the Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support following consultation with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to develop a full business case summarising the advantages and disadvantages from making an investment in an appropriate IT solution to allow hybrid meetings taking into account the financial and non-financial implications;
- (v) Note that this business case will be subject to a further report in the first cycle after the summer recess at which point members will be asked to determine whether to invest in the necessary equipment or not;
- (vi) Note that such a system would if ultimately agreed for deployment continue remote committee attendance in Teams while also allowing physical participation in the council chambers through audio/video capability installed to integrate with the Teams session.
- (vii) Note that the significant benefits in terms of travel cost and carbon reduction, greater accessibility to meetings and more effective use of members and officers' time will be included in that full business case detailed in (iv) above;
- (viii) Agree that in the meantime remote meetings of the Council and Committees will continue using MS Teams
- (ix) Approve the retention of recorded Council and Committee meetings while they are being held 100% remotely and are recorded, for a period of 5 years in total from the date of such meetings for the first 3 years being available by link on our website and thereafter for 2 years on a historical archive basis all in compliance with and subject to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations.

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 Angus Council meeting of 18 March (Report 100/21) it was agreed:

- (i) to look at options and costs to provide a hybrid model for meetings, continuing remote attendance in Teams while also allowing physical participation in the council chambers through audio/video capability installed to integrate with Teams session; and
- (ii) to give further consideration to the recording of Council meetings held remotely. At the previous meeting of Angus Council on 11 February 2021 (Report 34/21), the issue of retaining records of the public and recorded sections of Council and Committee meetings was discussed. 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 was until the minute of the meeting was finalised and agreed by elected members as a correct record). In the report to the Council on 18 March it was recommended that the Council holds such recordings of meetings for a period of 12 months from the date of the meeting and it was proposed that appropriate advance notifications were issued to relevant participants, for example, parties to deputations or applicants/objectors at a planning meeting to say that recordings of the meeting would be available on the selected media platform for the agreed period. Discussion took place and members expressed their desire to retain the recorded meetings for a longer period than 12 months. It was agreed that a further report would be brought to Council on 24 June 2021 so that the arrangements for remote meetings may be reviewed and a decision be made on the retention of recorded Council and Committee meetings.

4. REMOTE APPLICATION PLATFORMS

At the Angus Council meeting of 18 March it was agreed to look at options and costs to provide a hybrid model for meetings, continuing remote attendance in Teams while also allowing physical participation in the council chambers through audio/video capability installed to integrate with the Teams session. Consideration will require to be given to the physical and capacity constraints of the chamber in the context also of the current COVID distancing requirements, and general health and safety requirements.

Plans detailing the final capacities are being drawn up by Property Assets. There will be two plans, one for 2 metre distancing and one for 1 metre distancing. Under 2 metre distancing maximum capacity is currently estimated to be 10 persons (with potential for 2 more in shorter meeting (less than 2 hours)).

By way of outline of possible IT solutions, two options are presented from different suppliers. These are indicative of costs and equipment required to deliver a suitable solution. Should the council agree to proceed further then wider engagement and procurement would be required to define full requirements and choose a supplier/solution.

Supplier A Background

Supplier A is a popular choice for streaming physical and virtual council meetings online, with a mature managed solution that has been adopted by over 100 local authorities across the UK.

Technical Requirements & Installation

This solution would require a dedicated network connection and internet broadband line installed in the council chambers.

A council laptop would be used to connect to the network and deliver the audio/video from the chambers as a virtual Teams attendee. The resulting livestream would seamlessly switch between the chamber view and virtual attendees' video as the active speaker changed.

Four cameras would need to be installed in the chamber to zoom in and focus on the active speaker or general quadrant that audio is coming from. These cameras would either be mounted on the walls if permissible or on stands in the centre of the room pointing out towards the tables.

Display screens would be required in the chamber to display the Teams view of the virtual attendees. Physical attendees would see the gallery of remote Teams attendees which is similar to what they see if they are viewing on their laptop/tablet. It may be necessary to install

Streaming licence	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	32,500
Data hosting	7,245	7,245	7,245	7,245	7,245	36,225
Design & implementation	6,500					6,500
Total (indicative only)	40,390	16,105	16,105	16,105	16,105	104,810

Supplier B Background

Supplier B is a provider of local government applications and services experienced in committee document management, but not with a mature product in the area of hybrid audio/video conferencing. Their solution is not widely in use throughout councils but is actively being developed with major updates expected throughout this year. Further investigation will be required to ensure optimal system functionality/performance and ease of installation/use for such a key system underpinning the smooth operation of committee services.

Technical Requirements & Installation

This solution does not include any pre-determined technical solution in terms of audio/video devices or networking, and would be dependant on site visits and specification of requirements to define and cost equipment for a live installation. However, hardware requirements and costs would be expected to be similar to Supplier A.

Streaming & Hosting

This solution offers a custom platform for the streaming, storage, indexing and archive of meeting recordings, but can also publish to YouTube. Meetings are viewed on a custom app available on PCs, laptops and Apple/Android mobile devices.

Hosting costs for this solution are based on the number of meetings per year and not dependant on the length of each meeting.

Document Management

This solution offers extensive options for the management of committee papers, supporting the generation of agendas, reports and minutes and full workflow to manage the production cycle. This allows publishing of papers to a council branded hosting area which would require some review of our existing web site committee section. This solution extends to allow management of other areas such as member profiles, declarations and expenses which are currently hosted on angus.gov.uk.

Given the capability to manage the full committee paper lifecycle from identification through drafting and publishing, this solution could offer a review of internal paper production workflow which is currently done in SharePoint. Based on other local authorities experience of using this solution this could result in a reduction in the current resource requirement in terms of finalising and publishing committee reports and create potential savings .

Implementation

Implementation likely to be longer than for supplier A due to relative immaturity of product.

Costs

Costs for Supplier B include estimates for hardware such as cameras, display and network connectivity. It is expected that audio equipment costs would be accommodated by the £40,000 budget previously allocated to upgrade the system within the chambers.

Hosting costs are based on a limit of up to 72 meetings per year. Hosting beyond 72 meetings per year would increase costs by £5,000 per annum, resulting in a 5-year increase of £25,000. We currently have a total of around 75 meetings per year.

Hardware, hosting and services	Y1 £	Y2 £	Y3 £	Y4 £	Y5 £	Total £
Hardware (est)	17,000					17,000
Application hosting, design and integration	18,000					18,000
Support and maintenance		7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500	30,000
Tablet app	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	15,000
Hosting	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	15,000
Office 365 integration	2,740					2,740
Integration support	500	500	500	500	500	2,500
Total (indicative only)	44,240	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000	100,240

Implications & Next Steps

The sizeable level of investment required to facilitate hybrid meetings means that in value for money terms any solution would need to be considered as a permanent approach rather than a COVID only response. The solution would need to be designed based on the future use of the council chambers post-COVID and would need to take into account any constraints around physical access, seating and technical adaptation.

Hardware failures will always be possible and can be expected. Neither of these are fully resilient services. While checks to ensure functionality prior to each meeting can help reduce the impact of these, other options may also need to be investigated such as local recordings or audio only.

Implementation of a hybrid meeting model and managed solution may impose resource implications for the relevant teams involved in managing meetings, streaming and currently publishing documentation to the web site. These have not been investigated for the purpose of this report but can be provided at a later date.

Development of a Full Business Case

There are a number of issues to consider in determining whether to invest in a hybrid meetings solution and it is therefore recommended that Council authorise the Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support following consultation with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to further develop a full business case summarising the advantages and disadvantages from making an investment in an appropriate IT solution to allow hybrid meetings taking into account the financial and non-financial aspects. This business case will be progressed as a matter of urgency and be the subject to a further report in the first cycle after the summer recess at which point members will be asked to determine whether to invest in the necessary equipment or not.

In the meantime remote meetings of the Council and Committees would need to continue using MS Teams.

4. GDPR - RETENTION

In terms of Article 5(e) of the General Data Protection Regulations, (GDPR), 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". There is however an exemption for archiving in the public interest. It is recognised that there is a public interest in permitting the preservation of personal data where it is for the long-term benefit of the public. The recordings of Council and Committee meetings could be deemed to fall within this exception provided safeguards are put in place. The proposed retention period must be transparent and any adverse impact on living individuals must be minimised. It would be necessary ensure transparency of the retention policy at the outset; e.g. by the use of privacy notices and provisions to ensure that in the event of any subsequent complaint steps can be taken to consider removing any recording or part of it which is considered to cause damage/distress. The specification of requirements for the proposed system will require to ensure the adequacy of technical controls around the streaming and recording of meetings to ensure, for example, that on the rare occurrence of improper conduct at meetings then appropriate measures can immediately be taken to properly manage such where appropriate.

The Council requires to achieve the balance between compliance with the requirements of GDPR whilst acknowledging the need and desire that Council and Committee decision-making at meetings are open and transparent.

5. GDPR - PROPOSALS

Taking these aspects into account it is recommended that (a) the Council makes available online recordings of such meetings for a period of 3 years from the date of the meeting, and (b) thereafter the recordings are kept by the Council on an archive basis for 2 years, all in accordance with the requirements of GDPR.

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 thereafter being taken off-line (albeit still available as an ongoing historical record or archive).

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this stage the full financial implications for the Council have not been determined which is why it is recommended that a full business case be prepared. Indicative costs for the procurement and implementation of a hybrid solution for the recording of committee meetings are as set out in paragraph 4 above to give members a sense of the scale of financial commitment which would be involved.

For fully remote meetings using Teams and You Tube there are no additional financial costs presently from retaining the recordings of meetings. That will change if the model of delivery as detailed in terms of Supplier A and Supplier B is ultimately implemented and this will be factored into the business case assessment.

In relation to funding for the costs of investment in a hybrid meetings solution, the only budget provision which currently exists is £40,000 for replacement of the audio system in the Council Chamber which was set aside previously. The Council is however in receipt of significant one-off COVID-19 funding support which could be used to meet the costs of a hybrid solution at least in the short term if this was considered to provide value for money. Funding options will be part of the business case to be prepared.

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.

8. CONSULTATION (IF APPLICABLE)

The Director of Finance has been consulted in the preparation of 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.

REPORT AUTHOR: ALAN INGRAM & CAROLINE COOPER
EMAIL DETAILS: INGRAMA@ANGUS.GOV.UK, IT@ANGUS.GOV.UK

List of Appendices:
Appendix One -EIA



APPENDX ONE

Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

(To be completed with reference to Guidance Notes)

Step 1

Name of Proposal *Arrangements for Hybrid and Remote Committee Meetings functions:*

Step 2

Is this only a **screening** Equality Impact Assessment No
(A) If Yes, please choose from the following options **all** reasons why a full EIA/FSD is not required:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| (i) It does not impact on people | Yes/No |
| (ii) It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics | Yes/No |
| (iii) It is for information only | Yes/No |
| (iv) It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year | Yes/No |
| (v) It is technical | Yes/No |

If you have answered yes to any of points above, please go to **Step 16**, and sign off the Assessment.

(B) If you have answered No to the above, please indicate the following:

Is this a full Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Is this a Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment	No

If you have answered Yes to either or both of the above, continue with Step 3.

If your proposal is a **strategy** please ensure you complete Step 13 which is the Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment.

Step 3

(i)Lead Directorate/Service: Digital Enablement & IT Services, Legal and Democratic Services

(ii)Are there any **relevant** statutory requirements affecting this proposal? If so, please describe.

Duty of the Local Authority to conduct committee meetings in public - Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973

(iii)What is the aim of the proposal? Please give full details.

To procure and implement a system to allow the council to conduct committee meetings in such a way that members of the public can view the conduct of meetings remotely by the live streaming of proceedings via the internet thereby enhancing the duty of the council to carry out its business in an open and transparent manner. This is in addition to members of the public being able to attend in person.

(iv)Is it a new proposal? Yes Please indicate OR

Is it a review of e.g. an existing budget saving, report, strategy, policy, service review, procedure or function? Yes of existing practice (conduct of council committee meetings Please indicate

Proceedings have been conducted via livestreaming as a result of co-vid which has restricted the ability of the council to conduct meetings in the usual manner ie in chambers. This proposal seeks to extend the use of this manner of conducting meetings as restrictions lift. It is proposed that a hybrid way of conducting meetings will be introduced whereby attendance by members of the public will be permitted in the traditional manner as restrictions are lifted whilst at the same time increasing the transparency and openness of public proceedings, by allowing online access to the meetings to people who might otherwise have been unable to attend or who might have found it inconvenient to attend for whatever reason. It is therefore considered that in terms of equalities the proposal will ensure greater access to council meetings than was previously the case. As a result of having hybrid meetings a wider range of people may be interested in participating in local democracy

Step 4: Which people does your proposal involve or have consequences for?

Please indicate all which apply:

Employees No

Job Applicants No

Service users Yes

Members of the public Yes

Step 5: List the evidence/data/research that has been used in this assessment (links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance). This could include:

Internal data (e.g. customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).

N/A

Internal consultation (e.g. with staff, trade unions and any other services affected).

N/A

External data (e.g. Census, equality reports, equality evidence finder, performance reports, research, available statistics)

N/A

External consultation (e.g. partner organisations, national organisations, community groups, other councils).

N/A

Other (general information as appropriate).

The proposal is to ensure that there is greater access to council meetings - not to limit or restrict such access. Physical attendance, as is permitted under normal circumstances will be permissible (subject to co-vid protections). The proposal will therefore benefit service users or members of the public not restrict them in terms of accessibility. Steps will be taken to ensure that the online system will meet current guidelines and standards around web-site accessibility and GDPR requirements.

We will also ensure that the dual accessibility to council meetings is widely publicised both using electronic and non electronic means, to ensure those who are, and those who are not, digitally enabled are aware of the dual accessibility.

Step 6: Evidence Gaps.

Are there any gaps in the equality information you currently hold? No

If yes, please state what they are, and what measures you will take to obtain the evidence you need.

Step 7: Are there potential differential impacts on protected characteristic groups? Please complete for each group, including details of the potential impact on those affected. Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each group. Please state the reason(s) why.

Age

Impact: *Neutral/Positive*

Potentially positive for more people who are younger to be attracted to local democracy if all meetings are always electronically accessible.

Disability

Impact: *Neutral/Positive (system specification to address user requirements in terms accessibility requirements)*

Potentially more people with disabilities may be attracted to local democracy if easier to attend meetings electronically

Gender reassignment

Impact: *Neutral*

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Impact: *Neutral*

Pregnancy/Maternity

Impact: *Neutral/Positive*

Race - (includes Gypsy Travellers)

Impact: *Neutral*

Religion or Belief

Impact: *Neutral*

Sex

Impact: *Neutral/Positive*

Potentially more women may be attracted to local democracy, as statistically they are still predominately the main carers of children and/or older relations. Having electronic access to meetings may enable more women to attend meetings whilst being at home with children etc.

Sexual orientation

Impact: *Neutral*

Step 8: Consultation with any of the groups potentially affected

If you have consulted with any group potentially affected, please give details of how this was done and what the results were.

N/A

If you have not consulted with any group potentially affected, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating action of any negative impact (Step 9)?

No negative impacts identified

Step 9: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce potentially negative impacts?

No negative impacts identified

Step 10: If a potentially negative impact has been identified, please state below the justification.

No negative impacts identified

Step 11: In what way does this proposal contribute to any or all of the public sector equality duty to: eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between people of different protected characteristics?

It is felt that the hybrid model of committee meetings enhances participation by allowing remote access to meetings without limiting the possibility of personal attendance in the context of the proposed hybrid structure. The proposal enhances equality of opportunity by enabling a wider range of people with different protected characteristics to attend council meetings which they might otherwise be unable to attend.

Step 12: Is there any action which could be taken to advance equalities in relation to this proposal?

Ensure that the specification for the proposed system addresses accessibility requirements and ensure that GDPR requirements are also taken cognisance of in respect of the length of time recordings will be retained.

Step 13: FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

This step is only applicable to **strategies** which are key, high level decisions. If your proposal is **not** a strategy, please leave this Step blank, and go to Step 14.

Links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance.

Step 13(A) What evidence do you have about any socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome in relation to this strategic issue?

Step 13(B) Please state if there are any gaps in socio-economic evidence for this strategy and how you will take measures to gather the evidence you need.

Step 13(C) Are there any potential impacts this strategy may have specifically on the undernoted groupings? Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each grouping.

Low and/or No Wealth (e.g. those with enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future.

Impact

Material Deprivation (i.e. those unable to access basic goods and services e.g. repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies).

Impact

Area Deprivation (i.e. where people live (e.g. rural areas), or where they work (e.g. accessibility of transport).

Impact

Socio-economic Background i.e. social class including parents' education, people's employment and income.

Impact

Other – please indicate

Step 13(D) Please state below if there are measures which could be taken to reduce socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome.

Step 14: What arrangements will be put in place to monitor and review the Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment?

To ensure that the specification of requirements for the system addresses accessibility

Accessibility issues to be reported to project team and thereafter Democratic Services to address and resolve issues identified in conjunction with IT.

Step 15: Where will this Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment be published?

Alongside the committee report

Step 16: Sign off and Authorisation. Please state name, post, and date for each:

Prepared by: Alan Ingram

Reviewed by: Doreen Phillips Snr Practitioner (Equalities) 09/06/21

Approved by: Sharon Faulkner, Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT & Business Support

NB. There are several worked examples of separate EIA and FSD Assessments in the Guidance which may be of use to you.
