

ANGUS COUNCIL

9 SEPTEMBER 2021

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

REPORT BY SHARON FAULKNER, DIRECTOR OF HR, DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

ABSTRACT

This report updates elected members in relation to remote meetings arrangements and future hybrid meeting requirements.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

- (i) notes the proposed method for developing the hybrid meeting business case;
- (ii) notes the progress made and future steps to investigate and resolve members Teams issues;
- (iii) agrees to continue remote meetings until 31 December 2021

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 24 June 2021 (Report 211/21), options and estimated costs were provided to equip the council chambers with the capability to include audio and video from the chamber into committee Teams meeting streams. This was to consider providing a hybrid meeting option for future committees post-COVID, where members and officers could join remotely or be present in the chambers.

High costs for the fully managed service led to discussion around alternatives and whether the chambers would remain as the main location for physically hosting committee meetings. Funds had previously been allocated to upgrade the audio system, and other work may be necessary to ensure that the chambers are compliant with future workplace requirements. It was agreed that further work was required to identify wider options to deliver hybrid meetings, in terms of physical locations and technical/business requirements and that a full business case should be developed. It was agreed that this business case will be subject to a further report at which point members will be asked to determine whether to invest in the necessary equipment or not.

In addition to future hybrid meeting models, it was agreed to look into different issues that members were experiencing in terms of attending Teams meetings and remaining connected.

4. CURRENT POSITION

To deliver the business case for hybrid meetings we are considering what meeting spaces could be made available and what technology would be required to ensure that when the public view the committee streams or recordings they can clearly see and hear (and read if necessary) what is being said and by whom.

Microsoft Teams currently handles this automatically as each attendee has their own audio and video feed. Options could range from a small space with a single wide-angle camera to larger rooms with multiple cameras and microphones which can more intelligently focus on individual speakers. We will be looking at this type of technology for general hybrid meeting options as part of our future workplace planning.

This will align with the future workstyles and office layouts to ensure that we are equipped to offer the audio/video functionality that members and officers need to ensure that they can continue to meet in a flexible manner, in line with their expected workstyle.

Once we have gathered more information we will develop a business case to show options, costs and benefits of the different solutions that are available. This will allow members to decide which solution best fits for the future hosting and publishing of committee meetings.

In addition to this, we will arrange a demonstration for members of one of the previously costed options, to give a clearer picture of what that type of managed system would offer, with examples of where it has been deployed and what the resulting streams look like in terms of integration between the virtual attendees and others in a shared location. This demonstration will be scheduled for a date in September suitable for members and the supplier.

5. TEAMS PERFORMANCE

Recent work has been done to investigate Teams issues for elected members in terms of network, Surface device and Teams application performance. The IT Team started with six members who had regular issues and have looked into their set-ups;

- IT has run internet speed tests to determine the general performance of elected members home broadband, advising where possible when performance may suffer and how to try and maintain a good Teams connection and network performance;
- IT looked at the Surface device configuration and how it's being used to determine other factors that may affect Teams performance or general Windows issues that could affect connections and network performance;
- IT and OD Teams organised a Teams training session for any elected members who wanted more advice on operating Teams

It seems that elected members could benefit from having an external monitor as a second screen, to manage the necessary committee papers while participating in the Teams meeting. These will also be offered to members who we are now approaching to look at their experience and offer advice if necessary to improve their Teams performance.

None of the members approached so far have requested a replacement device for the Surface tablet. However, these are available and will be offered to other members if the existing device is causing issues. This could either be a laptop or replacement touch-screen device.

Scottish Government advice is that where possible people should continue to work from home and therefore remote meetings should continue. We will continue to support members in resolving their issues around devices, Teams use and network capability while we work to map out future requirements and implement suitable hybrid meeting capability for both officers and members.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications for delivering a hybrid meeting solution will be part of the full business case. There are no other financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required

8. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and all Directors have been consulted on the content 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: Steve Leslie, Manager – Innovation & Development
EMAIL DETAILS: LeslieSD@angus.gov.uk

: