

ANGUS COUNCIL

ANGUS COUNCIL – 10 MARCH 2022

COUNCIL MEETINGS – INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

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

ABSTRACT

This report provides an update and seeks approval of the plans for meetings of Council in May and June 2022.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council: -

- (i) notes that a “material change of circumstances” has arisen to the extent that the decision taken at Full Council on 16th December 2021 can be re-visited, due to changes in relation to COVID-19 restrictions;
- (ii) consequently, considers the proposals set out in paragraph 5 of this report:
- (iii) agrees that meetings of full Council in May (the statutory meeting) and in June be held in person in the Council Chambers, Town and County Hall, Forfar and will also be live streamed;
- (iv) agrees that the recording of the in person meetings will be held for a period of 5 years in total from the date of such meetings, for the first 3 years being available by link on the Council's 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; and
- (v) notes that a report will be submitted to the meeting of full Council in June which will set out proposals for future Council meetings.

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

The Council agreed at a meeting of full Council on 16 Dec 2021 “to continue remote meetings up to and including the statutory meeting (26 May 2022).”

On 22 February 2022 the Scottish Government announced that all COVID legal restrictions would be lifted on 21 March 2022. In terms of Standing Order 26(2)(i) this is considered by officers to be a “material change of circumstances” which allows the earlier decision of full Council to be re-visited.

4. CURRENT POSITION

Since April 2020, Angus Council has been holding meetings of full Council and committees remotely in accordance with the provisions of Section 43 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

These arrangements were reviewed in June 2021 as part of an update on remote meetings and the potential for hybrid meetings (Report No 211/21 refers).

The Council agreed:-

- (i) to note the preliminary detail on the options for facilitating hybrid meetings for Council and Committee meetings through an appropriate IT solution.
- (ii) to note that hybrid meetings required a sizeable financial investment by the Council.
- (iii) to note the current estimated limited capacity of the Council Chamber in terms of social distancing requirements.
- (iv) to 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) to note that the business case would be subject to a further Report in the first cycle after the summer recess at which point members would be asked to determine whether to invest in the necessary equipment or not.
- (vi) to note that such a system would if ultimately agreed for deployment continue remote committee attendance in Teams whilst also allowing physical participation in the Council Chamber through audio/video capability installed to integrate with the Teams session;
- (vii) to 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 recommendation (iv) above;
- (viii) to agree that in the meantime remote meetings of the Council and Committees would continue using MS Teams; and
- (ix) to approve the retention of recorded Council and Committee meetings whilst they were being held 100% remotely and were 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 the Council's 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.

At the (adjourned) meeting of full Council on 24 September 2021, the Council further agreed:

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

The Council agreed at a meeting of full Council on 16 Dec 2021 "to continue remote meetings up to and including the Statutory meeting (26 May 2022)."

5. PROPOSALS

As restrictions on social distancing will no longer be in place post 21 March 2022, it is now proposed that the meetings of full Council in May and June take place in person in the Council Chambers. It is also proposed that specialist IT equipment will be hired to allow these meetings to be live streamed on the Council's YouTube channel and recorded enabling the public to continue to view Council meetings with a recommendation that the recordings be retained in the same way as for remote meetings.

Proposals for the longer-term strategy on meeting arrangements, will be submitted to the June 2022 meeting of full Council by the Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support.

Members should note that the proposals in this report relate solely to meetings of full Council. All other Council meetings of service and regulatory committees will continue to take place remotely using Microsoft Teams pending consideration of the report to full Council in June 2022.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Quotations are being sought for the hire of necessary equipment for the live Council meetings proposed in May and June 2022. Following some preliminary investigations on potential costs, there is sufficient underspend in the Members Travel budget for 2021/22 to cover this based on an estimated cost of £7,000. This underspend will require to be subject to a budget carry forward request as part of the Council's Annual Accounts process.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

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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