

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**SPECIAL ANGUS COUNCIL – 24 MARCH 2022**

**COUNCIL MEETINGS – INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS**

**JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE DIRECTOR OF HR,  
DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT**

**ABSTRACT**

Following the discussion at the 10 March 2022 Council meeting 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) considers the proposals set out in paragraph 5 of this report:
- (ii) agree one of the following in relation to the May and June meetings of full Council, subject to compliance with Scottish Government guidance:
  - a) conduct the meetings online using MS Teams
  - b) given the Covid restrictions lifted on 21 March 2022, conduct the meetings in-person at the Council Chambers, Town and County Hall, Forfar provided that the use of this location is in compliance with relative Scottish Government recommended safety guidance and controls
  - c) given the Covid restrictions lifted on 21 March 2022, conduct the meetings in-person at a temporary Council Chamber set up in Angus House as a test of an alternative venue either (i) as a first option or (ii) in the event that members first preference is to have an in-person meeting at the Council Chambers, Town and County Hall, Forfar and the use of this location is not in compliance with relative Scottish Government recommended safety guidance and controls;
- (iii) agrees that if either of the in-person options is used, the meetings will be live streamed and that any recording made of such 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
- (iv) notes that a report will be submitted to the meeting of full Council in June which will set out proposals for future Council and Committee 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).” At that time the Scottish Government advice was to work from home if possible.

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 was considered by officers to be a “material change of circumstances” which allowed the earlier decision of full Council to be re-visited.

In consideration of Report No 105/22 on 10 March 2022, Council agreed to bring a report to the Special Council Meeting on 24 March 2022 to consider the matter further and to look at alternative options to using the Council Chamber at Town & County Buildings in Forfar.

On 15 March 2022 the Scottish Government gave an update on the Covid situation including the Omicron's BA.2 sub-variant. The legal measures to reduce the transmission of Covid 19 were confirmed to be removed on 21 March 2022, with the exception of face coverings. Face coverings continue to be legally required in certain indoor settings at this time although the Scottish Government's expectation is that this will be converted to guidance in early April 2022. Guidance currently remains in place for workplace arrangements including social distancing.

Thus, by the due date of the 26 May 2022 Council meeting, it is expected that all legal restrictions associated with Covid 19 will be lifted, with guidance remaining for individuals and organisations which will include social distancing, ventilation and face coverings.

#### **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 December 2021 “to continue remote meetings up to and including the Statutory meeting (26 May 2022).”

More recently the debate at Council on 10 March 2022 heard expressed a range of views including that holding the May and June 2022 Council meetings in-person would be beneficial, that remote meetings are appropriate, and some views that the existing Council Chamber is no longer fit for purpose. As a result, Members agreed to include on the agenda for today’s Special Council meeting an update on Report No 105/22 to include recommendations regarding the option for alternative venues and costs to be considered for the Council meetings in May and June 2022.

## **5. PROPOSALS**

It was previously proposed that the meetings of full Council in May and June may take place in-person to be supportive to the new Council and newly elected Members. It was considered that this would help to avoid any potential issues for new Members associated with the use of unfamiliar digital technology as well as providing the opportunity to build relationships and network thereby supporting the new Council and new Members in their role. This was proposed based on restrictions being lifted and the proposals remain subject to the remaining Scottish Government guidance for organisations permitting the proposed arrangements.

It was also proposed that specialist IT equipment be hired to allow the May and June 2022 meetings, if face to face, to be live streamed on the Council’s YouTube channel, and recorded, enabling the public to continue to view Council meetings. It was recommended that the recordings be retained in the same way as for remote meetings.

As it is a legal requirement to allow the public access to a meeting where it is being physically held this must be accommodated in any proposals. Public access to attend the meetings would also be provided.

Members asked at the 10 March 2022 meeting, for consideration to be given to the use of locations other than the Council Chambers to host meetings. Proposals for the longer-term strategy on meeting arrangements are being drawn together by the Director of HR, Digital Enablement, IT and Business Support for consideration at the June 2022 meeting of full Council. These proposals will include options for holding hybrid meetings to accommodate elected members’ competing demands and alternate venues to be determined by the new Council. It is not feasible to implement a hybrid solution for the May and June Council meetings.

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

Members are asked to agree one of the following in relation to the May and June meetings of full Council, subject to compliance with Scottish Government guidance for option b) and c):

- a) remain online using MS Teams for May and June full Council meetings
- b) now restrictions have been lifted conduct the meetings of full Council in May & June at the Council Chambers, Town and County Hall, Forfar
- c) now restrictions have been lifted conduct the meetings at a temporary Council Chamber set up in Angus House as a test of an alternative venue.

Angus House is considered an appropriate venue for a test of change being freely available, allowing desk and seating arrangements to be trialled, as well as being in a central location within the County, accessible by public transport and having adjacent car parking. In addition, ventilation complying with current Scottish Government guidance can be maintained with heating controlled accordingly and the building has known satisfactory connectivity to ensure

broadcasting and attendees needs can be met. Layout designs are being drafted and the venue would be subject to the remaining Scottish Government guidance for organisations permitting the proposed arrangements.

Members are asked to note that a report will be submitted to the meeting of full Council in June which will set out options for future Council and Committee meetings, including the purchasing of technical kit capable of enabling hybrid meetings.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There will be no additional costs if members choose the option of holding the May and June full Council meetings via MS Teams.

If members opt for a meeting in person, it will be necessary to hire audio/visual and recording equipment for this purpose. Quotations are being sought for this but 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 for the two meetings. This underspend will require to be subject to a budget carry forward request as part of the Council's Annual Accounts process.

In relation to the option to establish a temporary Council Chamber, there will be requirements and costs in relation to setting up furniture, electric connections for microphones and laptops etc. These costs can be contained within the above underspend. There will be associated staff time which will place further burden on staff resources.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

An Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

**NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:**

- Report No 105/22 - Council Meetings – Interim Arrangements and Future Plans- Angus Council 10 March 2022

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