

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**30 JUNE 2022**

**HYBRID MODEL OPTIONS FOR FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

**REPORT BY SHARON FAULKNER, DIRECTOR OF HR, OD, DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT AND IAN COCHRANE, DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

**ABSTRACT**

This report provides members with options, costs and risks of delivering future council and committee meetings through either a remote or hybrid model and considers locations which could host the equipment and facilities required to hold hybrid meetings.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Council:

- Considers the 3 options highlighted in this report based on the Options Appraisal (see Appendix 1) for the delivery of future council and committee meetings and;
- Approves the option to be progressed and implemented taking into account that a fully managed technical system will not be operational until February 2023;
- Considers the 2 delivery options for council meetings between August 2022 and February 2023 and approves one of those;
- Notes the financial implications including the varying capital and revenue implications arising from the options for the Council's General Fund and the Forfar Common Good Fund;

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN**

This report contributes to the following priorities in our Council Plan for 2017 – 2022:

- i) Economy: Angus to be a go-to place for business
- ii) People: To maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities
- iii) Place: Our communities to be strong, resilient and led by citizens
- iv) Our Council: Angus Council to be efficient and effective

**3. BACKGROUND**

At the Angus Council meeting of 24 June 2021 ([Report 211/21](#)), options and estimated costs were provided to equip the council chamber with the capability to include audio and video from the chamber into committee Teams meeting streams. This report was to consider the provision of a hybrid meeting option for future council and committee meetings post-COVID, where members and officers could join remotely or be present in the chambers along with facilitating the live streaming and recording of the public parts of these meetings for public viewing either live or later.

The costs for the fully managed service led to discussion around alternatives and whether the chamber would remain as the main location for physically hosting council and committee meetings. Funds had previously been allocated to upgrade the audio system, but other work may be necessary to ensure that the chamber is compliant with future workplace requirements. It also offers limited space for members, officers and the public to attend. It was agreed that further work was required to identify wider options to deliver hybrid council and committee meetings, in terms of physical locations and technical/business requirements.

An update at the Angus Council meeting on 9 September 2021 ([Report 286/21](#)) described the actions planned and approach for identifying options available. This report provides an update on work done to achieve this and details the options for consideration, ranging from a no-hybrid continuation of remote meetings to a fully managed and dedicated solution.

Since September 2021 the DE & IT service has worked with an existing supplier of headsets and audio equipment to identify, purchase and install audio/video hybrid equipment. These have been installed within Angus House and Bruce House and include fixed and mobile equipment that can be configured to pick up different speakers in a physical room and integrate the video and audio into a Teams meeting. This technical set up has proved suitable for smaller meetings only, typically around 8 physical attendees within a room.

In March 2022, [Report 105/22](#) and [Report 118/22](#) led to an agreement to hold the first two council meetings completely in-person in Angus House and gave council officers further input from members on their preferences for future meetings. It further noted that a report would be submitted to the meeting of full Council in June to set out proposals for future Council and Committee meetings.

#### **4. OPTIONS**

Based on input from previous meetings and consideration of future working arrangements, various options have been developed and are detailed in Appendix 1 to show possible technical solutions as well as consider which buildings could be suitable for hosting future meetings or developing into an established chamber. The various Audio-Visual options and Physical Location options were then assessed for compatibility and then finally a number of compatible options were then recommended.

Options have been scored against the council priorities, risk, financial and carbon implications. Suitable weightings are applied to the different factors to arrive at final scores.

From the full list of options officers consider there are three options that provide the most sustainable, long-term solutions for governing our Council.

##### **Recommended technical/location options for consideration:**

##### **Option 1 - Continue with fully remote meetings**

This option would see members have no formal Council Chamber. All meetings would be carried out remotely. Existing spaces in Council buildings could be booked if home network connectivity is poor or for informal business.

This option retains the processes which existed throughout the pandemic around meetings where all attendance was remote through individual Teams sessions. While this suggests remote access at home it could also include situations where an elected member can come into an individual quiet space within a council office and join the meetings through Teams there on their laptop. No change to the streaming method means that Business Support staff still need to be available for each meeting and require additional software to perform the streaming. No change to the recording method means that the meeting papers and recordings remain on different sites and are not linked, making navigation, and viewing difficult for the public.

This option would require no capital expenditure and deliver the largest revenue savings of all options through not occupying any buildings or providing new audio/video equipment. The Council's carbon footprint would see the largest decrease. Alternative use for Town & County Hall (a Forfar Common Good asset) would need to be found.

Members should be aware that the option of remote meetings although legally compliant was not intended when introduced in statute to replace live in person meetings albeit was extremely beneficial and necessary during the height of the pandemic when otherwise Council and Committee meetings could not have taken place.

##### **Option 2 – Chamber in Town & County Hall, use new technology fully managed by third party provider (this would include new slimline chairs and tables to accommodate better design & layout)**

This option would see members retain use of the existing Town & County Hall location for all functions. The buildings provide a chamber, public attendance space, four work/meeting/breakout spaces, Provost’s office, Depute Provost’s office and the Canmore function room. The chamber furniture would be renewed with mobile/flexible furniture to allow alternative layouts for different meetings and use of the space. The new layout is shown in Appendix 2. The buildings would be available five days per week.

This option would procure the services of an external audio/video supplier to design a solution suitable to deliver Council/Committee meetings within a purposely fitted dedicated space. This solution would include strategically placed cameras, dedicated wireless microphones, an audio system and display screens to allow in-person attendance as well as remote attendees. As well as providing a dedicated solution for the audio/video and streaming/recording, this solution also provides additional functionality for hosting Council/Committee papers on a web site that streams the meeting and stores recordings. This ties in with the recordings to allow public viewers to go directly to specific agenda items and view the relevant papers while accessing the recording of that specific item. For longer meetings this makes it much easier for the viewer to access items that may be of interest to them without viewing the full agenda or having to skip through a long video recording to find that item of interest.

This option would address members concerns regarding the size and suitability of the chamber for full Council meetings by providing new slimline furniture in a new layout. Having the ability to deliver hybrid meetings would also mean the building would rarely be fully occupied. A physical meeting space would promote positive relationships and collaborative working between members.

This option would require capital expenditure but allow available space at Angus House to potentially generate rental income and as a result offer a significant revenue saving. The Council’s carbon footprint would see a significant decrease. It also maintains a presence in the centre of town with good public transport links from most burghs.

**Option 3 – Chamber in Angus House, use new technology fully managed by third party provider**

This option would see members move all functions from Municipal Buildings and Town & County Hall to the ground floor North wing at Angus House. The building would provide a flexible chamber space, public attendance space, an open plan work/meeting space and the use of meeting rooms A, B and C for breakout space. New mobile/flexible chamber furniture would be purchased to allow alternative layouts for different meetings and use of the space. The new layout is shown in Appendix 3. The buildings would be available on committee days only (Tuesdays and Thursdays) each week. The wing would be dual purpose with council officers using the space out with committee days.

This option would provide the same audio- visual solution as Option 2.

This option would also address members concerns regarding the size and suitability of the chamber for full Council meetings by providing a large open, flexible space on the ground floor of a modern, accessible building. However the space might never be fully occupied by having the ability to deliver hybrid meetings. Again, a physical meeting space would promote positive relationships and collaborative working between members

This option would require the highest capital expenditure and deliver the smallest revenue savings. The Council’s carbon footprint would see the smallest decrease. The property costs for the Town & County Hall would fall to Forfar Common Good until an alternative future use for the building could be found.

**Scoring of Recommended Options:**

Objective	Option		
	1	2	3
Impact on Economy: Angus is a go to place for business	4.5	6.3	5.8

Impact on People: Maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities.	12.9	14	15
Impact on Place: We want our communities to be strong, resilient and led by citizens	6.9	6.5	7
Impact on our council: Angus Council is efficient and effective	15.2	14.3	16.3
Carbon Implications	9.7	5	3.5
Financial Implications	15	9.1	6.1
Risk	3.5	6.5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>67.6</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>58.6</b>

**Further consideration:**

**Recommended options for delivery for council meetings between August 2022 and February 2023:**

Should either technical/location options 2 or 3 be agreed then time is required to procure and install the new technology and furniture allowing these hybrid meetings to take place. Agreement is therefore required on how committee meetings should be delivered between August 2022 and February 2023.

**Option 1** - Continue with fully remote meetings for council and committee meetings

**Option 2** - Full Council meetings to be in-person in Angus House with all other committee meetings held remotely. The cost for the 3 Full Council meetings would be circa £7.5K

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The full details of the financial implications for all options are included in Appendix 1. There are varying capital and revenue implications arising from the options for the Council's General Fund and (for those options concerning Town & County Hall) for the Forfar Common Good Fund. The table below summarises the implications for the Council's General Fund for the shortlisted and compatible options.

Option	Total		Payback Period Years#
	Capital (One-Off)	Revenue Cost/(Saving) (Ongoing)*	
Option 1 - Continue with fully remote meetings	£0	(£140,200)	0
Option 2 - Chamber in Town & County Hall, use new technology fully managed by third party provider	£105,000	(£84,850)	1.2
Option 3 - Chamber in Angus House, use new technology fully managed by third party provider	£123,000	(£9580)	12.8

\* - the actual impact on revenue costs will depend on member in person attendance patterns and whether spare space in Angus House can be successfully let.

# - this column shows the number of years it would take for the revenue savings to cover the one-off capital costs

If members chose an option which means Town & County Hall is no longer required this will have implications for the Forfar Common Good Fund which would lose rental income currently paid by the Council (£18,649 p.a.) and would have to meet ongoing running costs (circa £19,500 p.a.) until a new use could be found. In line with Council's policy on managing Common Good

assets the cost of any dilapidation repairs to Town & County Hall would fall to be met from the Council's General Fund. The options appraisal assumes no such repairs are required.

In financial terms Option 1 is the most cost effective – this could potentially deliver ongoing revenue savings of £140,200 p.a. The most expensive option is Option 3 which has sizeable one-off capital costs and limited annual revenue savings which would take 12.8 years to cover on a payback basis. If members do not wish to adopt a remote basis for meetings on an ongoing basis and wish to have a hybrid arrangement then Option 2 to use Town & County Hall is the most favourable financially. Not only does these options achieve a quick payback on upfront capital costs it also avoids a potentially significant negative financial impact onto the Forfar Common Good Fund.

In relation to funding for the costs of investment in the options, the only specific budget provision which currently exists is £40,000 for replacement of the audio system in the Council Chamber at Town & County Hall which was set aside previously. . In the event members wish to implement Option 2 or 3, additional funding will be required to cover the shortfall between the £40,000 funding available and the capital costs of that option. It is proposed that the shortfalls arising from those options be met from the Council's uncommitted General Fund Reserves (see Financial Outturn Report No 179/22 also on the agenda for this meeting) should members wish to implement one of those options. This approach to funding the capital costs will enable the full revenue savings to be taken into account for budget purposes from the outset.

In considering the options presented in this report Council is asked to bear in mind the financial context the Council is operating in and the outlook for the next few years. The separate report on the agenda on Revenue and Capital Budgets – Update on Budget Risks and Actions (Report 178/22) sets out some of the immediate and predicted challenges. There is no question that significant further savings in the Council's running costs will require to be made so there is a need to find a cost-effective solution for future meeting arrangements which meets members needs and supports effective local democracy.

In relation to the considerations for delivery for council meetings between August 2022 and February 2023, option 1 (remote meetings) has no financial implications. Option 2 (Full Council meetings to be in-person in Angus House with all other committee meetings held remotely until February 2023) would cost an estimated £7,500. There is no specific budget for these costs, so if members choose this approach it is recommended that the costs be met from the Council's Provision for Additional Burdens revenue budget in the event that the costs cannot be contained within the 2022/23 members services revenue budget.

## **6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

## **7. RISK**

Risks associated with each Option that Council is being asked to consider have been noted in the Option Appraisal in Appendix 1.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and all Directors have been consulted on the content of this report.

**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:

- i) Report 211/21 - Update on Review of Remote Meetings Arrangements and Potential for Hybrid Model for Meetings
- ii) Report 286/21 - Update on Review of Remote Meetings Arrangements and Potential for Hybrid Model for Meetings
- iii) Report 105/22 - Council Meetings - Interim Arrangements and Future Plans

iv) Report 118/22 - Council Meetings - Interim Arrangements and Future Plans

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