

**REVIEW OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS / MICROSOFT TEAMS ROLLOUT**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report reviews the decisions taken by Members at the Council meeting held on 24 September 2020 relating to meetings and associated matters.

The report also provides Members with an update on the project which is currently in progress to facilitate the move to Microsoft Teams as the preferred platform for online meetings.

The report sets out the 3 strands to the project, provides detail on each strand and outlines the progress and indicative timescales.

The move to Microsoft Teams will allow options to incorporate hybrid meetings following the removal of lockdown restrictions and as we move back to more face to face meetings. It will also facilitate the option to live stream and record meetings which will facilitate greater public access to the Council's decision making processes.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

2.1 This report reviews the decisions taken by Members at the council meeting held on 24 September 2020 relating to meetings and associated matters and also provides Members with an update on the progress of the project which will see Microsoft Teams becoming the preferred platforms for meetings and gives detail on the proposals to facilitate hybrid meetings and live streaming.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 Council is asked to:-

- a) Agree that all committee meetings will continue on a virtual basis, as per the arrangements agreed by Council in September 2020;
- b) Agree that there is no further requirement for the Business Continuity Committee (BCC) and the Leadership Group, that they are discontinued and between the date of this report and the end of the Covid response that the Chief Executive will, in any instance where it is proposed to use emergency powers as set out in the constitution, consult with the Leader, Depute Leader, and Leader of the largest Opposition Group where available;
- c) Note the progress made to date in relation to the rollout of Microsoft Teams as the preferred meeting platform, including for the options relating to hybrid meetings and live streaming;
- d) Agree that testing of Teams as the preferred meeting platform will continue and that a report be brought to the June meeting of Council which will detail progress, address issues with regards to dialling in via telephone, Teams access via iPads and electronic voting, and outline the next steps;
- e) Agree to the recording of strategic committee meetings as set out at 4.7.3 with a view to the arrangements for this being incorporated into the next review of the Council Constitution.
- f) Agree that a further review of the operation of committees on a virtual basis will be undertaken and reported to Council in September 2021.

**4.0 DETAIL**

## 4.1 **Virtual Meetings and Associated Matters**

4.1.1 At the Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 it was agreed that:-

- Meetings of the BCC are suspended meantime;
- The Policy and Resources Committee resumes from 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020;
- All committee meetings continue on a virtual basis; and
- A further review of the operation of committees will be undertaken and reported to Council in April 2021.

4.1.2 The arrangements put in place since September 2020 with regard to virtual meetings have been working well and, taking account of the latest Covid-19 guidance from the Scottish Government where working from home remains the default position, it is recommended that these remain in place until the restrictions regarding mass gatherings/public meetings are relaxed to such an extent that a change in position can be considered. It is proposed that a further review is undertaken and reported to Council in September 2021.

## 4.2 **Leadership Group and BCC**

4.2.1 The Council's constitution gives specific delegations to the Chief Executive. Section 3 Part C paragraph 3(A)(5) gives the Chief Executive 'power in an emergency situation to instruct executive action on any matter after consultation with the Leader or, in his/her absence, Depute Leader of the Council. This provides a basis for any urgent decisions which require to be made in response to Covid-19.

4.2.2 On 31 March 2020 the Council agreed that for the life of the Covid-19 crisis the consultation by the Chief Executive will be with the Leader, Depute Leader, and Leader of the Opposition where available. The decisions taken in consultation with this Leadership Group have been logged and reported on an ongoing basis and details of those taken during the period October 2020 to April 2021 are detailed in appendix 1.

4.2.3 The Council also agreed at their meeting in March 2020 to the constitution of a temporary committee, known as the BCC, to exercise all of the powers of the Council for a finite period of time. A decision was taken by Council in September 2020 to suspend the role of the BCC.

4.2.4 On the basis that all committees, including the Council, are operating well on a virtual basis, it is recommended that the Leadership Group and the BCC are discontinued. The Leadership Group as such will discontinue but, for clarification, in the event that an emergency arises between the date of this report and the end of the Covid response the Chief Executive would, in any instance where it was proposed to use the emergency powers, consult with the Leader, Depute Leader, and Leader of the largest Opposition Group where available on a one off basis.

4.2.5 As part of the usual annual review of the Council Constitution, consideration will be given to any alterations that may be required/beneficial to the management

of virtual meetings on an ongoing basis, with any proposed amendments being reported to Council as part of the review process later in the year.

4.3 Since March 2020, meetings of the Council and its Committees have been taking place on a virtual basis and have been facilitated using Skype for Business. The meetings during this period have worked well, however advice from the Council's ICT service is that they consider it would be beneficial to move to Microsoft Teams as the preferred platform for meetings. Microsoft Teams offers additional options for users and it offers the ability for the options in relation to live streaming and recording of meetings to be incorporated.

4.4 Officers from Legal and Regulatory Support have been working closely with colleagues in ICT to develop plans which will take forward the separate aspects of the Microsoft Teams Roll out, as follows:-

#### 4.5 Microsoft Teams Roll Out

4.5.1 The project will involve replacing Skype with Microsoft Teams as the preferred meeting platform. Currently, all Committee staff, Members' Services staff, key officers and all Elected Members have been upgraded to Office 365 and have the Teams App installed on their devices. Initial familiarisation sessions for Elected Members have been undertaken and have been well received. Further guidance will be developed to apply the features available in Teams to the procedural elements of Committee meetings.

4.5.2 The facilitation of meetings will continue to be undertaken by the Committee Team as is current practice. Responsibility for network and technology will remain with the ICT Service. Officers in the Committee Team continue to test the capabilities of the system and are liaising with ICT colleagues to identify possible issues and to work on solutions. ICT have identified that using Teams can cause some network issues due to the increased memory required to operate the system and are currently working on options which should offer a solution. Where possible, departmental meetings are being held using Teams which will increase confidence with users in advance of any proposed move to using Teams for Committee meetings.

4.5.3 At the moment it is proposed that moving to Teams will allow greater utilisation of the video option, however this may be dependent on individual broadband availability.

#### 4.6 Hybrid Meeting Solution

4.6.1 Work is ongoing with colleagues in ICT in relation to procuring a hybrid meeting solution for the Council Chambers and for area venues, where appropriate. This solution will allow for a meeting to be held in the Chambers with the ability for participants to be able to join the meeting using Microsoft Teams – known as a Hybrid meeting. The installation of the equipment which will facilitate this is due to take place at some point in April – Covid restrictions permitting.

4.6.2 Work is also ongoing to look at what equipment will be required to enable hybrid meetings to take place in key locations in each administrative area. Again this will enable the option to be in place for some participants to physically attend the meeting while others can participate using Teams.

## 4.7 Council Live Streaming and Recording

- 4.7.1 The final part of the project will deliver the ability to live stream and record Council and Committee meetings, if this approach is adopted by Council. The Microsoft Teams platform will be used to facilitate this functionality using “Teams Live” which can stream and record meetings as they take place and would be managed by the Committee Services Team.
- 4.7.2 Officers are in the early stages of this part of the project with a preferred supplier recently appointed. The contract supplier will provide the hosting of the live meetings and the recordings and this will integrate with the Committee Management system (Mod.gov) which is used by the Council for all our Committee meetings. It will facilitate greater public access to meetings and provides for access to meeting recordings after the meeting has taken place.
- 4.7.3 The option to record meetings already exists within Skype, however it would not be integrated with Mod.Gov and consequently would not have the capability of signposting individuals to the parts of the meeting in which they may be interested. If however Elected Members wished to agree to record the key strategic meetings: Council, Policy and Resources Committee, Community Services, Environment, Development and Infrastructure, PPSL and the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, using Skype in advance of the rollout of the full Teams functionality, the arrangements could be put in place to incorporate this into the next review of the Council Constitution.

### **Live Streaming Options**

- 4.7.4 The terms of the contract for the provision of the service include live streaming of up to 200 hours of meetings per annum. These meetings will be linked to the Council’s Committee Management System (Mod.gov) and will allow individual agenda items to be bookmarked for ease of access. It is proposed that this option could be utilised for all meetings of Council, Policy and Resources Committee, Community Services, Environment, Development and Infrastructure and the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. It is also proposed that this option should be utilised for the main meetings of PPSL. Additional hours of streaming from the provider can be accessed but this would be at additional cost.
- 4.7.5 For those meetings not referenced above, such as the Argyll and Bute Harbour Board and Area Committees it is proposed to make use of the “Teams Live” option in Microsoft Teams which would allow a link to the meeting to be posted on the website and for access to listen in and view the meetings. The bookmarking functionality will not be available using this option, however, it will still allow public and other interested parties to listen in/ watch the meetings.

## 4.8 Timescales

- 4.8.1 Indicative timescales for the project had been identified with a completion date of June 2021, however due to the current restrictions in relation to Covid-19, procurement processes and installation of equipment have been delayed.
- 4.8.2 It is therefore recommended that testing of the systems to ensure that they are robust and will provide the required level of service will continue and a report will be provided to the June meeting of Council which will provide a further update

and will seek agreement on the proposals for live streaming and recording of meetings. The report will also outline any changes which will be required to the Council Constitution to update Standing Orders to allow hybrid meetings to take place. The report will further address issues such as dialling in via telephone, using Teams on iPads and electronic voting.

- 4.8.3 Officers will continue with testing and will identify meetings in the period to June 2021 which can be trialled using Teams.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Virtual meetings have been successfully undertaken by the Council since March 2020. ICT advice is that it would be beneficial for the Council to move to Microsoft Teams as the preferred platform for meetings.
- 5.2 Officers are working to ensure that this can be taken forward, and are progressing the 3 strands of the project – Microsoft Teams roll out, hybrid meetings and live streaming.
- 5.3 A further review of the current arrangements in respect of conducting meetings will be carried out and reported to Council on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Policy – in line with ICT guidance that Microsoft Teams is the preferred option for the future.
- 6.2 Financial – budget has been identified and the project for the initial costs of equipment with ongoing revenue costs built into future years.
- 6.3 Legal – prior to live streaming of meetings, all necessary permissions in terms of data protection and privacy will be highlighted.
- 6.4 HR - none
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
  - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – options for subtitling of meetings will be available.
  - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - none
  - 6.5.3 Islands – will offer greater flexibility for access to meetings.
- 6.6 Risk – manage risk around the reliability of broadband connections which could cause difficulties in areas with limited capacity.
- 6.7 Customer Service – improving customer experience and engagement in the Council's decision making processes.

**Douglas Hendry**

**Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support**

**Policy Lead - Councillor Mary Jean Devon**

5<sup>th</sup> April 2021

**For further information contact:**

Shona Barton, Committee Manager (01436) 657605

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1 – Leadership Group Decisions - October 2020 to March 2021**

Appendix 1 – Leadership Group Decisions – October 2020 to March 2021

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Decisions made and detail</b>
29 <sup>th</sup> October 2020	<p>Extension to Relaxation of Planning Enforcement in Town Centres in Response to Covid 19:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leadership Group agreed to the recommendation to extend existing measures for relaxation of planning enforcement in relation to recovery of town centre business activity be extended until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, subject to periodic review in the event of updated guidance being provided by the Scottish Government.</li> </ol> <p>Extension to Permission Under Covid 19 Emergency Powers to Waive Fees for Use of Public Space for Business Use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leadership Group agreed to the recommendation to extend until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 a waive of fees for use of public space for business space in relation to Covid 19.</li> </ol> <p>Both decisions to be reported to the next Council meeting.</p>
18 <sup>th</sup> December 2020	None
6 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	None
11 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	<p>Key Worker Protocol:</p> <p>Agreed a revised Key Worker protocol which will now be used by Education and HR to determine and allocate key worker and vulnerable children placements in schools.</p>
19 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	None
17 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	<p>£60m Discretionary Fund to Support Businesses – agreed recommendations within report:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve the eligibility criteria for the discretionary fund outlined in appendix 1.</li> <li>2. Approve the scheme is advertised as providing grants at a flat rate up to a maximum of £6,000.</li> <li>3. Note the timescale for launching and managing the fund</li> <li>4. Note that the proposed scheme is consistent with the four principles established by the Policy and Resources Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020.</li> </ol>
9 <sup>th</sup> March 2021 (via email)	<p>Council Tax on Empty Properties – Proposed Extension of Temporary Amendment due to Covid-19 – agreed recommendations within the report:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve a temporary policy amendment to allow management the discretion to remove the double charge of Council Tax for an extended period of 6 months between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021</li> </ol>

where there is conclusive evidence that efforts have been made, or are being made to, bring the empty properties back into use and that the homeowners' ability to bring the home back into use is affected by Covid-19.

2. Approve a temporary policy amendment to allow management the discretion to remove the double charge of Council Tax f for an extended period of 6 months between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021 in exceptional circumstances where there is conclusive evidence of financial hardship of the taxpayer caused by Covid-19.

Use of Public Spaces for Business Use – agreed the recommendations within the report:-

1. Approve the use of public spaces by business for temporary business use with priority being given Business Improvement Districts (BID groups) in their capacity as acting on behalf of the wider business community, to the 31<sup>st</sup> November 2021. These sites are to be made available, free of charge and that the charges relating to on-street car parking spaces which are identified for use, are waived.
2. That the Council should not accept new applications for the use of Council land or properties for outdoor markets in the period of “Stay at Home” restrictions.