

MICROSOFT TEAMS/HYBRID MEETINGS/LIVE STREAMING UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report provides Members with an update on the move to Microsoft Teams as the preferred platform for online meetings.

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 using Teams with the addition of video capability which will facilitate greater public access to the Council's decision making processes.

MICROSOFT TEAMS/HYBRID MEETINGS/ LIVE STREAMING UPDATE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report 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 work which is ongoing to facilitate hybrid meetings and live streaming.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Council is asked to:-

- (a) note the progress made to date in relation to the rollout of Microsoft Teams as the preferred meeting platform, including the options relating to hybrid meetings and live streaming;
- (b) agree that all Council meetings will now move over to Teams which will become the default platform from August 2021; and
- (c) agree that a further update report will be submitted to the September 2021 meeting of Council.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 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. As reported to Council in April, 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. Council agreed at the April meeting to begin using Skype for recording of Strategic Committees, however, the move to Microsoft Teams will enable the recording and live streaming of meetings to be provided with enhanced functionality.

4.2 Officers from Legal and Regulatory Support have continued to work closely with colleagues in ICT to take forward the various strands involved in the project:-

4.3 Microsoft Teams Roll Out

4.3.1 We are working towards 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. Familiarisation sessions continue with Elected Members and we are working to develop guidance which will be issued in advance of the move to using Teams.

4.3.2 Key to the success of moving to Teams is the ability to allow participation in meetings for users who may not have access to IT equipment or who have difficulties with broadband reliability. We have worked with ICT to identify solutions and the Committee Team have been authorised to utilise some of the additional features of Teams which do not come as standard e.g. the ability to dial in participants on a mobile/landline. It should be noted, however, that the default position will always be for participants to join the meeting using either the web or app versions of Teams where this is available.

4.3.3 The move to Teams will also mean there will be some minor changes made to the procedures which will be followed during meetings. In Teams there is a facility to use a "raise hand" function which allows the user to virtually raise their hand when they wish to speak during a meeting. This facility allows the Chair to see clearly who wishes to speak and in what order the participants have asked to contribute – this is currently monitored using the chat function in Skype. As Members are aware, the chat function has at times proved to be problematic as it is available to all those who are in attendance at the meetings. The move to Teams removes the need for a chat function as Members will be able to indicate to the Chair using the "raise hand" function when they wish to speak, ask a question or raise a Point of Order. It is proposed, therefore, to disable the chat function for all meetings. Options for those participants joining by phone will remain the same as currently in use, with the Chair/Governance Officer ensuring that they are able to contribute to the meeting.

4.3.4 ICT have also confirmed that an upgrade to the Council's bandwidth capacity is will be complete by August 2021 which will provide a more robust environment for the move to using Microsoft Teams. The doubling of capacity will provide a better quality connection which will enable greater utilisation of video and improved audio quality. It should be noted, however, that the upgrade to bandwidth will not solve any local broadband/connection issues and this will still need to be something which Committee staff will take account of when setting up meetings.

4.4 Hybrid Meeting Solution

4.4.1 The equipment which will facilitate Hybrid Meetings to take place in the Council Chambers has now been installed. Testing of this equipment is currently underway and will continue in the coming weeks to ensure that it offers the functionality requested and in preparation for any move back to face to face meetings. This equipment will give the Council a number of options for operating meetings as well as providing options for Members and Officers who would wish to participate in meetings remotely.

4.4.2 The work to identify options for Hybrid Meetings in area venues will continue over the summer.

4.5 Council Live Streaming and Recording

4.5.1 The Council agreed at the meeting in April that Strategic Committees would be recorded using the functionality which is available in Skype. The first meeting to be recorded was the Policy and Resources Committee held on 13th May 2021 with the recording available on the Council website following the publication of the draft minute.

4.5.2 The Council have awarded the contract to a preferred supplier who will facilitate the live streaming and recording of meetings and officers are working with the supplier in relation to the installation of equipment in the Council Chambers which will enable this to take place. A site survey was undertaken on 26th May by the supplier and it is anticipated that some of the existing equipment in the Chambers will be utilised such as the cameras and microphones and this will be supplemented with additional equipment to facilitate the live streaming and recording. The equipment will also work alongside the Hybrid Meeting equipment which will allow Members/Officers to participate in meetings remotely and also be seen and heard in the live stream.

4.5.3 The supplier works with a number of other Councils in Scotland including City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City – officers are liaising with colleagues from other Councils to utilise their knowledge and understanding of the systems.

4.5.4 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. 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.

4.5.5 For the initial meetings in August, while the Live Streaming and its additional functionality will not be available, meetings will continue to be recorded in line with the decision made at April Council. Following the completion of the first cycle of meetings after recess with all meetings having taken place using Teams, we will work to incorporate the live streaming element. The option to live stream using "Teams Live" is available and can be utilised to offer this facility as an interim solution until the equipment that is referenced at 4.5.2 is in place.

4.6 Timescales

4.6.1 As reported to Council in April it had originally been anticipated that the project would be completed by June 2021 but this has been delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions. A small number of meetings have taken place using Teams and these have proved useful in identifying potential issues. The key dates for implementation and testing are as follows:-

Date	Project Element	Responsibility
June 2021 1 st – B&C 2 nd – MAKI 9 th – OLI 17 th – H&L	Familiarisation Sessions with Area Committees prior to meetings.	Committee Manager
June 2021 1 st – B&C 2 nd – MAKI 9 th – OLI 17 th – H&L	Area Committee meetings held using Teams.	Committee Manager/ Senior Committee Assistant
August 2021 12 th August – Policy and Resources Committee	Transition to Microsoft Teams for Strategic Committees	Committee Team

4.6.2 All Council meetings will now transition over to Teams which will become the default platform from August 2021, with Skype for Business being available as a backup option. Officers will continue to work with ICT to ensure that the Hybrid meeting capability is ready to be utilised when a decision is made to resume some face to face meetings in the Council Chamber.

4.6.3 Work will continue with the supplier and we would anticipate that the ability to utilise the enhanced recording and live streaming functionality will be available at some point in the autumn. In the interim recording of meetings will continue using the basic recording function in Teams.

4.7 Council Constitution

4.7.1 The annual review of the Council Constitution will take place at the Council meeting in September and a revised version which incorporates detail on the operation of remote/hybrid meetings will be included on the agenda for consideration by the Council.

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 have continued to progress the strands of the project and have identified August 2021 for a move to using Microsoft Teams as the preferred platform. Hybrid meeting capability will be utilised once a decision on this has been made by the Council and on the resumption of face to face meetings.

5.3 Recording of meetings will continue in line with the decision taken by Council in April 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.

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APPENDICES

None