

CLACKMANNANSHIRE COUNCIL

Report to Clackmannanshire Council

Subject: Council and Committee meetings update

Prepared by: Lindsay Thomson, Senior Manager Legal & Governance

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report summarises the steps that have been taken to consider the introduction of hybrid Council and Committee meetings.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1. notes the content of the report and the work being carried out to assess the potential of hybrid meetings;
- 2.2. notes the current estimated limited capacity of the Council Chamber and Board Room;
- 2.3. notes that, subject to any further restrictions, a trial of a hybrid meeting of a Committee can take place with a view to launching this approach from the Cycle 2 (October 2021);
- 2.4. nominates members to form a working group to continue the trial process;
- 2.5. agrees that in the meantime, remote meetings of the Council and Committees will continue using MS Teams.

3.0 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1. Following the report to Council on 22 April 2021, virtual Council and Committee meetings have continued and in that time there have been significant benefits in terms of travel cost and carbon reduction, greater accessibility to meetings and more effective use of members and officers' time. As confidence in virtual meetings has grown, there have also been improvements to the process including: screen sharing of video and other presentations; availability of breakout rooms for group discussions; and the procedural elements such as raising hands, keeping on mute etc. have become embedded. In addition it is considered likely that the use of video conferencing technology may be an enabler to encourage underrepresented

groups to consider the role of councillor. This reflects recent work carried out by COSLA.

Legal Position

- 3.2. The legislative position currently remains unchanged that the Council can determine to exclude members of the public from meetings for reasons relating to coronavirus, although it is anticipated in time that this provision will no longer be in force as the country progresses with the easing of restrictions. In early August, the First Minister announced a further easing, that retained a requirement to work from home where possible, accompanied with an expectation that employers consider hybrid working as a longer term, permanent option. This position will continue to be monitored closely.
- 3.3. Over summer recess, as agreed with members, there was some initial discussion with Committees services, then IT and Health and Safety colleagues. A session was arranged for Committee Chairs to attend and give their views.
- 3.4. It should be noted that the dates for meetings for the next cycle have already been agreed by Council.
- 3.5. There are a number of assumptions which form the basis of the trial of hybrid meetings. These are:
 - 3.5.1. The meetings should take place in a large room to allow for adequate ventilation. The Council Chamber and the Board room are the largest options available within Kilncraigs. However, they both still have limited capacity at 8 and 6 people respectively. There are three other rooms, Room 2.03, Room 3.03 and the Training Room at Kelliebank, where it would also be possible to allow a small number of members/officers to attend the meeting virtually.
 - 3.5.2. There will be no public able to attend at Kilncraigs until at least October at the earliest. It should be noted that the public do currently have access to recordings of meetings. These are available 24/7 on the Council's website. Members of the public who need to attend or have a particular interest, can make arrangements to attend via video conference e.g. Clackmannanshire Tenants and Residents Federation, planning objectors, licensing board applicants.
- 3.6. Following the discussion with Health and Safety colleagues, the key requirements for a hybrid meeting would be as follows:
 - 3.6.1. Risk assessments. These would be offered to members who may require them, such as those with underlying health conditions, and would have up to a 6 weeks turnaround depending on capacity of health and safety and complexity of the condition. Any officer without a risk assessment who was considered to be high risk would also be subject to a risk assessment before attending the building.

- 3.6.2. Staff – The recent staff feedback indicates a degree of anxiety from some staff about attending the building. This would need to be managed and sufficient reassurance provided.
 - 3.6.3. The room and process for a Council meeting risk assessment would need to be updated. This would include room capacity and ventilation requirements etc.
 - 3.6.4. It is important to consider how the resumption of physical meetings would be viewed by the community. There is a need to ensure compliance and be seen to be leading by example and adhering to the rules.
- 3.7. Following discussion with IT colleagues, the main points for consideration are:
- 3.7.1. The meeting room equipment which is being procured for meetings rooms to facilitate Microsoft 365 has not been designed specifically for Council meetings so there will be no enhanced functionality for larger Council type of meetings.
 - 3.7.2. Officers are currently exploring a technical solution which would use a “bridge” between the existing microphone set up in the Chamber and Microsoft Teams. This should improve the quality of the current set up. There is also the facility to allow a dial in number which would allow Committee services to issue a telephone number for a Teams meeting to admit people into a meeting through dial in (there will be no video). This increases accessibility and provides a business continuity option. It is anticipated that the cost of the bridge would be circa £2,399.00 excluding VAT and professional installation, the cost of which would be met from existing resources.
 - 3.7.3. There are other permanent solutions, including those being explored by other Councils, for example, Public-i. This would likely require capital investment following development of a business case. There is currently no budget identified so this is not being pursued until the trial of existing software, or bridging fixes to that software are explored. In the meantime, officers will maintain a watching brief on wider solutions.
 - 3.7.4. Member equipment and support. It is considered beneficial to look at standardising the issue of laptop/tablet/phone – so members can be better supported in terms of capability of equipment to handle technology and better provision of members support.
- 3.8. There are a number of practical changes that are being worked through to facilitate hybrid meetings. These are in outline as follows:
- Business continuity arrangements
 - Accessibility and equalities considerations
 - Process – scheduling, set up, order of meeting

- Meeting protocol
- How decisions are made – order of moving, seconding and debate
- Standard script
- Retention of recordings

3.9. Proposals to be considered by the Working Group:

3.9.1. Identifying which Committee should run an initial trial prior to wider rollout?

3.9.2. Considerations for undertaking a trial run through meeting – working group with members

3.9.3. Consideration of who comes in for hybrid meetings? Officers and Members

3.9.4. Consideration of room options

3.9.5. Considerations relating to the process for questions/voting/points of order/ moving and seconding.

3.10 Benchmarking

It would also be helpful to carry out some additional benchmarking work with other Councils to identify any good practice. This could be reported into the working group.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1. This paper indicates some further developments in the work to deliver a hybrid option for meetings of Council or Committee.

5.0 Sustainability Implications

5.1. None, although the benefits of increased use of video conferencing may have some positive environmental impacts.

6.0 Resource Implications

6.1. *Financial Details*

6.2. The full financial implications of the recommendations are set out in the report. This includes a reference to full life cycle costs where appropriate.

Yes

6.3. Finance have been consulted and have agreed the financial implications as set out in the report. Yes

6.4. *Staffing*

7.0 Exempt Reports

7.1. Is this report exempt? Yes (please detail the reasons for exemption below) No

8.0 Declarations

The recommendations contained within this report support or implement our Corporate Priorities and Council Policies.

(1) **Our Priorities** (Please double click on the check box)

Clackmannanshire will be attractive to businesses & people and ensure fair opportunities for all

Our families; children and young people will have the best possible start in life

Women and girls will be confident and aspirational, and achieve their full potential

Our communities will be resilient and empowered so that they can thrive and flourish

(2) **Council Policies** (Please detail)

9.0 Equalities Impact

9.1 Have you undertaken the required equalities impact assessment to ensure that no groups are adversely affected by the recommendations?

Yes No

10.0 Legality

10.1 It has been confirmed that in adopting the recommendations contained in this report, the Council is acting within its legal powers. Yes

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Please list any appendices attached to this report. If there are no appendices, please state "none".

None

12.0 Background Papers

12.1 Have you used other documents to compile your report? (All documents must be kept available by the author for public inspection for four years from the date of meeting at which the report is considered)

Yes (please list the documents below) No

Author(s)

NAME	DESIGNATION	TEL NO / EXTENSION
Lindsay Thomson	Monitoring Officer	2084

Approved by

NAME	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
Stuart Crickmar	Strategic Director Partnership & Performance	