

Hybrid Meetings of Council and its Committees

Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Report for Decision

1 Recommendation

Council is advised that the “Short Life Working Group – Hybrid Meetings of Council and its Committees” recommends to Council that the previous default Remote Working decision for elected members governance meetings, implemented from June 2020, is now revised to permit an in-person meeting of Council on 4 October, 2022.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The Cross Party Working Group meeting on 31 August 2022 considered Hybrid Meetings, combining in person and virtual participants. In discussing the matters members agreed that they would prefer to return to in-person meetings for certain Committee meetings, in particular Council meetings, and discussed the possibility of having the October Council Meeting in person.

Also discussed was the governance around any decision to have the Council meeting of 4 October in person/hybrid with advice that this required a decision of Council, and therefore a Special Council prior to 4 October, 2022.

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Report Contact:

Name: Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place

Tel No: 0131 271 3102

kevin.anderson@midlothian.gov.uk

3 Background

From June 2020 meetings of Council and its Committees have been held virtually using the MS Teams platform due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic such meetings were held in-person in the Council chamber with the ability to webcast the meetings. Whilst arrangements had previously been put in place pre-pandemic to allow very limited virtual attendance these were very much ad-hoc and could not be scaled up for multiple remote attendees.

A hybrid meeting is one where a portion of the participants joins from a designated meeting room and another portion joins remotely, enabled by audio and video conferencing technology. Often participants will also use online content sharing solutions to support collaboration with the option to also use technology to facilitate a vote to be taken where the business under consideration requires one.

The Cross Party Group meeting on 31 August reviewed historical meeting arrangements to identify a technical solution to support hybrid meetings, whilst also allowing for live video broadcast to members of the public and considered options:

- Option 1 - Return to in-person only meetings
- Option 2 - Virtual only meetings
- Option 3 - Hybrid meetings combining in-person and virtual participants

The group proposed that interim hybrid arrangements could be put in place to allow the October Council Meeting to take place in the Chamber with each member and officer attending using the MS Teams platform as a means to support public access by streaming the meeting, with a test meeting to take place prior to the meeting of Council.

Going forward the Cross Party Group endorsed the implementation of Option 3, on the basis of the implementation costs associated with the revised proposed technical solution being significantly less than those reported to Council earlier in the year, and that a report to be drafted for Council on 4th October to recommend this option. However, noting that implementation of option 3 may take until March 2023, the group were to explore the interim hybrid arrangements for scheduled Council meetings in November, December 2022 and February 2023.

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital, Risk and Equalities)

4.1 Resource

The indicative investment required to transform meetings within a defined meeting venue requires to be met from both capital and revenue resources. All installation project costs will be met by capital investment and ongoing costs from revenue and shall be reported to Council on 4 October to consider.

4.2 Digital

The report to next Council will set out the digital implications associated with implementing hybrid meeting technology.

4.3 Risk

Systems are in place to support fully virtual meetings of Council and its Committees and to provide public access. The existing infrastructure in Midlothian House does not support hybrid meetings or support webcasting of physical meetings.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities

Since the Business Transformation Steering Group meeting on 18 October 2021 the focus has been on identifying technical solutions and developing costings in respect of facilitating hybrid meetings. An initial assessment of the equality implications had been prepared and identifies that remote and hybrid meeting arrangements would provide greater access to meetings of Council and its committees than would fully physical meetings. Equality implications would continue to be assessed as part of the implementation and any mitigations necessary would be carried out as part of the detailed work to design the implementation of the systems layout.

4.5 Additional Report Implications

See Appendix A

APPENDIX A – Additional Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The route map through and out of the crisis approved in June 2020 outlines the phases of service recovery and transformation which underpin delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan.

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- ☐ Holistic Working
- ☒ Hub and Spoke
- ☒ Modern
- ☒ Sustainable
- ☐ Transformational
- ☒ Preventative
- ☒ Asset-based
- ☐ Continuous Improvement
- ☐ One size fits one
- ☐ None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- ☒ One Council Working with you, for you
- ☒ Preventative and Sustainable
- ☒ Efficient and Modern
- ☒ Innovative and Ambitious
- ☐ None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report aims to deliver best value.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The focus to date has been on identifying a technical solution including consultation with other Councils. No wider consultation has been undertaken.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The arrangements for meetings of Council and its Committees facilitates the governance to determine outcomes and policies and also the scrutiny of performance and the delivery of outcomes.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The report considers the facilitation of meetings of Council and its Committees the business of which encompasses the adoption of preventative approaches.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

New systems can be assessed to consider energy management and utility consumption alongside consideration of the wider building ownership implications.

Background papers:

1. [Council on 14 December 2021 Hybrid Meetings of Council and its Committees](#)
2. [Council on 24 May 2022, Hybrid Meetings of Council and its Committee](#)