
Report To:	Inverclyde Council	Date:	10 June 2021
Report By:	Interim Service Director Corporate Services and Organisational Recovery	Report No:	FIN/31/21/AP/LA
Contact Officer:	Alan Puckrin	Contact No:	01475 712223
Subject:	Proposals for the Future Delivery of Council/Committee Meetings		

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for proposals regarding the delivery of Council/Committee/Board meetings during the period whilst social distancing is in place and thereafter. The report has been considered by the Strategic Leadership Forum who support the proposals.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The former Head of Legal and Property Services submitted a number of reports over the last year to Members regarding the delivery and content of Council Committees and Board meetings. The last report on this matter was considered by the Council in December 2020 and it was agreed that a report regarding the options for the delivery of Committees and the return to “normal” processes would be submitted by June 2021. This report seeks to fulfil that remit.
- 2.2 From the outset it is accepted that the available accommodation and technical solutions are not ideal and a degree of pragmatism has been required from both Members and Officers to find a workable solution for both the shorter and longer term.
- 2.3 Having considered the complexities of operating a hybrid model with limited Elected Member attendance, no public attendance and the current social distancing requirements, it would be the recommendation of the SLF and CMT that fully remote attendance at meetings be maintained whilst social distancing is in place.
- 2.4 It is also proposed that during the social distancing period, public accountability and transparency continues to be delivered via the recording of meetings and the posting of meetings on the Council website.
- 2.5 Once social distancing is no longer a requirement it is recognised that there will still be the desire/necessity for some elected Members to attend meetings remotely. Remote attendance could be for a number of reasons but addresses concerns regarding equalities and provides an infrastructure whereby meetings can proceed even when weather or other unforeseen circumstances intervene and a number of Members cannot physically attend the Council buildings.
- 2.6 The proposal from officers is that the Council Chambers continues to be used for meetings but that meetings move from recording to live streaming in the longer term to address public accountability and transparency issues. It is important that any live streaming looks as professional as possible and to achieve this there will require to be investment in equipment with ongoing costs plus the need for space to be set aside in the Council Chambers for the required equipment.

- 2.7 The above proposals should work well for Council meetings, Committee meetings and some quasi-judicial meetings however for those quasi-judicial meetings where there are legal entitlements for applicants or others to make representation and business can rotate between public and private matters, it is proposed that meetings continue to be recorded rather than live streamed.
- 2.8 In January, the Policy & Resources Committee agreed to emergency governance procedures including delegation to officers to implement critical decisions and the associated minimisation of the number of reports presented. It is proposed that, after taking on board any learning from the last 5 months, the emergency governance procedures cease at the end of June.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council consider the contents of this report and :
- a) Approve the continuation of fully remote/recorded meetings whilst social distancing is a requirement.
 - b) Approve the proposal that Elected Members may attend meetings in person or remotely once social distancing is no longer required.
 - c) Approve that officers develop proposals to move to live streaming of Council/Committee meetings and report back outlining any financial and operational implications to the September Council meeting.
 - d) Approve the cessation of emergency governance procedures for Committees from the end of June.

Alan Puckrin
Interim Service Director of Corporate Services and Organisational Recovery

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The former Head of Legal and Property Services submitted a number of reports over the last year to Members regarding the delivery and content of Council Committees and Board meetings. The approach taken by the Council has been driven by both UK and Scottish Government regulations and advice plus the physical limitations of the current Council Chambers and the significant extra workload being borne by many Council services during the Covid pandemic.
- 4.2 In December 2020 it was agreed that a report regarding the options for the delivery of Committees and the return to “normal” processes would be submitted by June 2021. In January the Policy & Resources Committee agreed to emergency governance procedures including delegation to officers to implement critical decisions and the associated minimisation of the number of reports presented.
- 4.3 From the outset it is accepted that the available accommodation and technical solutions are not ideal and a degree of pragmatism will be required from both Members and Officers to find a workable solution for both the short term and longer term.
- 4.4 In the same way as the return of employees to the building needs a shorter term view and a longer term view of what that will look like in a couple of years, then the same approach has been taken regarding the delivery of Council Committees.

5.0 ISSUES CONSIDERED BY OFFICERS

5.1 Issues considered by the Interim Head of Legal Services

The undernoted Issues have been considered by the Interim Head of Legal Services in connection with the proposals for the delivery of Council/Committee meetings :

a) Resources

Committee Clerks: Prior to the COVID pandemic and introduction of the remote online committee meetings in 2020 it was possible for one Committee Clerk to attend meetings for the purpose of noting and preparing Minutes. Due to the additional challenges of online meetings it has been necessary for a second Committee Clerk to attend meetings to monitor the “ Chat “ function and to monitor connectivity issues. In particular, it is necessary for the second Committee Clerk to minute the time any Member loses connectivity and the time the Member re-joins the meeting.

Legal Adviser: It is essential that the Legal Adviser to the Council/Committee be present in the same room as the Committee Clerks throughout the meeting. The Legal Adviser and Committee Clerk/s work in tandem to ensure the expeditious progress of the meeting, particularly in relation to any Roll Call vote. Moreover, the second Committee Clerk will monitor the “Chat “function and communicate any issues to the Legal Adviser.

b) Revision of the Remote Online Committee Meeting Protocol

The Council’s Remote Online Meeting Procedure and Protocol was approved by the Council at its meeting on 24 September 2020. In terms of the existing procedure and protocol meetings require to be held remotely and the public excluded. Section 8 (a) of the Protocol will require to be amended to reflect that in the longer term the Public will be permitted access to the public parts of all meetings .

c) Privacy Issues

It is considered that no privacy issues will arise if members of the public do not appear on a recording or live stream in that no personal data will be captured. Privacy Notices would be required if members of the public could be seen or heard on a recording or live stream. If so, Privacy Notices will be issued where appropriate

5.2 Issues considered by the Interim Head of Property Services.

Property Services have reviewed the Council Chambers / Board Room 1 locations and have prepared plans indicating maximum occupancy based around 2m and 1m social distancing scenarios. These scenarios have utilised the current Scottish Government guidance on the methods of calculating physical distance based capacity (PDBC¹). The optimum layouts based on the guidance and accounting for the physical characteristics of each space (circulation space, ventilation capability etc.) including consideration of loose and fixed furniture and the location of the viewing screen were 5 Members for 2m distancing and 10 for 1m distancing.

There is no mechanical ventilation within the Council Chambers or Board Room 1 with both spaces served via single sided natural ventilation and opening elements of existing windows. Property Services are investigating the feasibility of improving ventilation in the spaces, however, it should be noted that the nature of the building and restrictions associated with Historic Environment Scotland will limit the options available and it would not be possible to implement improvements in the short term.

When considering locations the main limiting factor was the availability of Council Network access outlined in section 5.3 below. The Town Hall Saloon was also considered however that location also has a lack of infrastructure (single network point). The existing Webex system is also not portable and the management of this in a multi-function space which would require regular removal, storage and setting up is another limiting factor. The acoustic environment also requires to be considered with spaces such as the Saloon being less suitable (hard floor and other finishes).

5.3 Issues considered by the ICT Services Manager.

ICT Services reviewed potential locations for holding meetings outwith the Chambers/Board Room 1. A key requirement is for Council Network access to be available. This excluded all Inverclyde Leisure facilities apart from Greenock Town Hall and other locations such as the Beacon. Greenock Town Hall has very limited connectivity with little scope for expanding to provide suitable coverage.

Both the Council Chambers and Board Room 1 have suitable infrastructure to allow hybrid meetings to be held. This allows a large screen for remote access and for individual attendees to bring laptops and tablets to access the meeting chat and other features, as well as access to online documents.

Officers are engaging with a provider of live streaming services who supply a number of other local authorities. This would require the use of cameras and other AV equipment in the chambers to provide a more "professional" system that could allow a range of online engagement and interaction including electronic voting, attendee management and integration with publically available systems such as WebEx and MS Teams.

6.0 PROPOSALS FOR COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING

6.1 Having considered the complexities of operating meetings with limited Elected Member attendance, no public attendance and the current social distancing requirements it would be the recommendation of the SLF and CMT that fully remote attendance at meetings be maintained whilst social distancing is in place.

¹ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): calculating physical distancing capacity in public settings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/information/coronavirus-covid-19-calculating-physical-distancing-capacity-in-public-settings/)

- 6.2 In arriving at their view the SLF concluded that those Elected members who wished to attend Committee but who were excluded due to social distancing would be placed in a less favourable position from those who could attend. The selection process of those who could attend was also believed to potentially cause division within Groups and be specifically disadvantageous to smaller Political groupings.
- 6.3 It would be proposed that meetings continue to be recorded and posted on the Council website and that officers research the costs and implications of moving to live streaming of meetings once full attendance at Committees/Council meetings is allowed.
- 6.4 It is also proposed that, after taking on board any learning from the last 5 months, the emergency governance procedures introduced on 7 January cease at the end of June.

7.0 PROPOSALS FOR THE DELIVERY OF LONGER TERM COUNCIL/COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- 7.1 Once social distancing is no longer a requirement it is recognised that there will be the desire/necessity for some elected Members to attend meetings remotely. Remote attendance could be for a number of reasons but addresses concerns over equalities and provides an infrastructure whereby meetings can proceed even when weather or other unforeseen circumstances intervene and a number of Members cannot physically attend the Council buildings.
- 7.2 The proposal is that the Council Chambers continues to be used but that meetings move to live streaming to address public accountability and transparency issues. It is important that any live streaming looks as professional as possible and as such there will require to be investment in equipment with ongoing costs plus the need for space to be set aside in the Council Chambers for the required equipment to ensure that live streaming operates appropriately. Live streaming will also require tight management of Committees to ensure all private matters are left until the end of the meeting.
- 7.3 With the end of social distancing then it will be possible for the public to attend meetings as before but to facilitate this it is proposed that officer attendance at meetings is kept to a minimum in order to make the Chambers less cramped but also to make better use of senior officer time.
- 7.4 Quasi-judicial meetings such as the General Purposes Board and the Licencing Board do not lend themselves to live streaming and it is proposed that these are recorded and put on the website as at present.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Finance

The operation of the short term proposals will continue to have resource implications for Legal and ICT services arising from remote attendance, the use of technology and recording of meetings. As meetings return to normal the time/resources required are unlikely decrease given the proposal for remote and physical attendance and officers are assessing the impact on Committee and ICT services.

This along with the one off and on going costs of livestreaming/recording meetings will form part of the report to the September Council.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
					To be confirmed

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
					To be confirmed

8.2 Legal

Once the new arrangements have been approved it will be possible for review of the Remote Meetings Procedure and Protocol for Committees to be undertaken by the Interim Head of Legal Services.

It should be noted that the law relating to the conduct of Committee meetings is generally unaltered by Covid 19 legislation and therefore any divergence in how meetings are conducted from the pre-existing law (unless specifically covered by Covid 19 legislation) would leave the Council open to challenge.

8.3 Human Resources

There are increased risks in the move away from fully remote meetings and it is important that Elected Members take account of this when considering whether to physically attend meetings and that all attendees observe hygiene requirements to protect both themselves and other attendees. A risk assessment has been prepared by the Health & Safety team and is available on request.

8.4 Equalities

Equalities

- (a) Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

YES (see attached appendix)

NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required

- (b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been

	completed.
x	NO

(c) Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO

8.5 Repopulation

There are no repopulation implications arising.

9.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The CMT has considered this report and their preference would be for remote meetings to continue until social distancing is no longer a requirement.

The Director of Public Health has advised that her preference would be to continue on line meetings where possible.

Having considered the short term operation of hybrid meetings the Strategic Leadership Forum would recommend the continuation of fully remote meetings until all members are allowed to attend Council/Committee meetings. The SLF view that officers need to be ready implement the longer term option at short notice and therefore officers need to continue to work towards ensuring this is deliverable at the appropriate time

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.

Equality Impact Assessment Template – Policy, Function or Strategy

This document should be completed when a new policy, function or strategy is introduced or when a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy is recommended. This will ensure equality considerations are taken into account before a decision is made and the policy, function or strategy can be altered, if required.

1. Policy, function or strategy		
a.	Name/description of the policy, function or strategy ¹	Implementation of remote attendance by Elected Members at Council Meetings via a hybrid model
b.	Responsible organisation(s)/Lead Service	Corporate Services
c.	Lead Officer	Alan Puckrin, Interim Service Director - Corporate Services and Organisational Recovery
d.	Date of Impact Assessment	19 May 2021
e.	Partners/other Services involved in the development of the policy, function or strategy	Legal Services, Property Services, ICT Services
f.	Is the policy, function or strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/> New
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reviewed/Revised
g.	What is the purpose of the policy, function or strategy (include details of any new legislation which prompted the introduction of the policy, function or strategy or the substantive change to the policy, function or strategy)?	The revised proposal to allow remote attendance at Council Meetings was an existing issue raised by Members but brought into sharper focus by Covid-19 and the move to 100% remote meetings. The purpose is to provide options for Members who may not always be able to physically attend the Municipal Buildings.
h.	What are the intended outcomes of the policy, function or strategy?	Provide greater equality of access and remove barriers to becoming a Councillor/attending meetings
i.	Geographical area (Inverclyde-wide or a specific location)	Greenock Municipal Buildings (GMB) (at present)

¹ Please attach details of the policy, function or strategy to this Template

j.	Which parts of the Equality Duty will the policy, function or strategy impact on?	X	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by The Equality Act 2010
		X	Advance equality of opportunity between people of different groups
		X	Foster good relations between people from different groups
k.	Will those who may be directly or indirectly affected by the policy, function or strategy be involved in its development?	Yes	

2. Does the policy, function of strategy impact on:		
	Yes	No
a. Protected Characteristics under The Equality Act 2010: Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Sex; Sexual Orientation (see Section 3)	X	
b. Reducing inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage – Fairer Scotland Duty ² (see Section 6)	X	
c. Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2017/22 ³ (see Section 7)		
d. Corporate Plan 2018/22 ⁴ (see Section 8)	X	
3. If 'Yes' is selected for any part of Section 2, please populate the other relevant Sections of this Template.		

² [Fairer Scotland Duty: interim guidance for public bodies](#)

³ [Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017/22](#)

⁴ [Corporate Plan 2018/22](#) (agenda item 5)

4. If 'No' is selected for every part of Section 2, please state the reasons for this.

Please sign below and email a copy of this Template to Karen Barclay, Corporate Policy Officer: karen.barclay@inverclyde.gov.uk.

Signature:

Date:

3. Impact – Protected Characteristics

Which of the Protected Characteristics will the policy, function or strategy have an impact upon?

Protected Characteristic	Impact					Reasons/Comments
	Positive High	Low	Neutral	Negative High	Low	
Age		x				<p>Because the time required will be reduced, there could be a positive impact for younger or working age Elected Members who could find it difficult to attend Committee meetings during the day due to work commitments.</p> <p>Older Elected Members will be able to participate in meetings when it may not be possible for them to physically attend.</p>
Disability		x				<p>For Elected Members with a disability, the hybrid model will have a positive impact as there will be no need for them to travel to the GMB and they will be able to participate in meetings from home.</p> <p>While people with a disability may find it difficult to participate in Council meetings remotely, steps have been taken to ensure that Elected Members have the necessary software, skills and knowledge to attend, listen and take part.</p>

Gender Reassignment			x			
Pregnancy and maternity		x				Elected Members will be able to participate in meetings when it may not be possible for them to physically attend the Municipal Buildings.
Race			x			
Religion and belief			x			
Sex			x			
Sexual orientation			x			
Other groups to consider		x				Those with caring responsibilities will benefit from the flexibility afforded by the proposal.

4. Which parts of the Equality Duty will the policy, function or strategy have an impact upon?	
X	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
X	Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
X	Foster good relations between people from different groups

5. Impact – groups

From the information you have highlighted above, describe the positive and negative impacts and the groups affected under The Equality Act 2010.

Positive impacts

+

(Describe groups affected.)

The ability to attend/participate in meetings without having to physically attend the GMB will potentially remove a barrier for underrepresented groups to run for office which may include young people and people of working age, older people, people with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

Negative impacts

-

(Describe groups affected.)

6. Impact – Fairer Scotland Duty

What impact will this policy, function or strategy have on reducing inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage?

Positive impact +	Neutral impact =	Negative impact -
x		
<p>Briefly describe how the policy, function or strategy will impact on reducing inequalities of outcome.</p> <p>The ability to attend/participate in meetings without having to physically attend the GMB will potentially remove a barrier for young people and people of working age, older people, people with disabilities or caring responsibilities to run for office.</p> <p>While people who experience socio-economic disadvantage may not be able to access the technology required to participate in Council Meetings, steps have been taken to ensure that Elected Members have the required equipment.</p>		

7. Impact – LOIP 2017/22

Which Priority/Priorities from the LOIP 2017/22 will this policy, function or strategy impact on?

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Population: Inverclyde's population will be stable and sustainable with an appropriate balance of socio - economic groups that is conducive to local economic prosperity and longer term population growth
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Inequalities: There will be low levels of poverty and deprivation and the gap between the richest and poorest members of our communities will be reduced (This may already have been highlighted at Section 6.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Environment, culture and heritage: Inverclyde's environment, culture and heritage will be protected and enhanced to create a better place for all Inverclyde residents and an attractive place in which to live, work and visit
<p>Briefly describe how the policy, function or strategy will impact on the LOIP Priority/Priorities.</p>	

--

8. Impact – Corporate Plan 2018/22

Which Priority/Priorities from the Corporate Plan 2018/22 will the policy, function or strategy impact on?

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. To promote Inverclyde, to both residents and visitors alike, as a great place to live, work and visit
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2. To work collaboratively, to enable strong, connected and empowered communities, particularly in areas of deprivation, so that residents have influence and control over the things that matter to them
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. To grow the local economy in a way that creates opportunities for all our residents, including access to good quality jobs
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. To reduce the prevalence of poverty and, in particular, child poverty in our communities
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. To safeguard, support and meet the needs of our most vulnerable families and residents
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. To improve the health and wellbeing of residents so that people live well, and for longer
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. To protect and enhance our natural and built environment
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. To preserve, nurture and promote Inverclyde’s unique culture and heritage
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9. To deliver services that are responsive to community needs and are underpinned by a culture of innovation, continuous improvement and effective management of resources
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. To develop motivated, trained and qualified employees who deliver quality services that meet current and anticipated service needs

Briefly describe how the policy, function or strategy will impact on the Corporate Plan Priority/Priorities.

Moving to remote attendance shows the Council as a forward thinking and modernising Council.

9. Evidence

What evidence do you have to help identify any potential impacts of the policy, function or strategy?

Note: Evidence could include information from consultations, surveys, the Citizens' Panel, focus groups, interviews, projects, user feedback, complaints, Officers' knowledge and experience, equalities monitoring data, publications, research, reports, and local and national groups.

Evidence	Details
Consultation/Engagement (including any carried out while developing the policy, function or strategy)	While engagement with Elected Members via the Strategic Leadership Forum indicates a strong desire from most Members for physical attendance at the Municipal Buildings for Committees/Council meetings, the proposal seeks to offer a hybrid model, whereby some Members and Officers attend in person and some attend remotely.
Research	Engagement with other Councils regarding their approach shows that they are considering adopting similar approaches to Inverclyde's model.
Officers' knowledge and experience (including feedback from frontline staff)	Detailed discussions have taken place with Officers from Committee Services, ICT and Property Services who have many years' experience in their respective fields on what is required to develop the best way to deliver the proposal.
Equalities monitoring data	It is noted that a number of the Council's Elected Members, in terms of Covid-19 risk assessments, should not be expected to attend meetings and, in compliance with the appropriate advice, should be alert to their risks of attending in person any meetings within the Council buildings.
User feedback (including complaints)	Elected Members' views on remote meetings during Covid-19, from the individual consultations that have been undertaken and from discussion at a Council meeting, is that the operation of the September 2020 cycle of meetings was generally positive.
Stakeholders	

<p>Other: Local residents</p> <p>Press</p>	
<p>Are there information gaps and, if so, what are these?</p>	<p>The Remote Meetings Procedure and Protocol for Committees will be reviewed following approval of the hybrid model.</p>

10. Consequences of analysis

What steps will you take in response to the findings of your analysis? Please select at least one of the following and provide a brief explanation.

a.	Continue development with no changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b.	Continue development with minor alterations	X	When the approach and location for the hybrid meetings has been agreed, it is proposed to run a trial meeting involving Members both attending physically and remotely. Thereafter, it is proposed to live stream the meetings to address public accountability and transparency issues.
c.	Continue development with major changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d.	Discontinue development and consider alternatives (where relevant)	<input type="checkbox"/>	

How will the effect of the policy, function or strategy be monitored following implementation?

Members' feedback and a further report.

When is the policy, function or strategy due to be implemented?

Once social distancing is no longer a requirement.

When will the policy, function or strategy be reviewed?

Ongoing.

What resources are available for the implementation of the policy, function or strategy? Have these resources changed?

Improved sound and ICT equipment will be needed.

11. Please use the space below to detail any other matters arising from the Equality Impact Assessment process, including what action could be taken to mitigate the impact of the policy, function or strategy.

Steps have been taken to ensure that Elected Members have the necessary software, skills and knowledge to attend, listen and take part in the Council's democratic decision-making processes.

At the time of writing, in terms of The Coronavirus Act 2020, the public continue to be excluded from all Council and Committee meetings on health grounds. When the appropriate pandemic restrictions have been lifted, it will be possible for the public to attend meetings as before.

During the implementation of remote meetings, the public will continue to be excluded from physically attending all Council and Committee meetings, however, public accountability and transparency will be delivered via the recording of meetings and the posting of the papers for meetings on the Council website.

Additionally, for the purposes of transparency and public engagement, press representation at any scheduled meetings is offered and this continues to be made available online to local and national press representatives.

Details of the Person(s) who completed the Assessment:	
Name:	Alan Puckrin Karen Barclay
Position:	Interim Service Director - Corporate Services and Organisational Recovery Corporate Policy Officer
Date:	19 May 2021
Authorised by:	
Name:	Alan Puckrin
Position:	Interim Service Director - Corporate Services and Organisational Recovery
Date:	21 May 2021

Thank you for your assistance with the completion of this task.

Please send a copy of the completed Template to Karen Barclay, Corporate Policy Officer at karen.barclay@inverclyde.gov.uk.

27 April 2020

