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<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Inverclyde Council</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>22 September 2022</b>
<b>Report By:</b>	<b>Head of Legal &amp; Democratic Services</b>	<b>Report No:</b>	<b>LS/81/22</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Iain Strachan</b>	<b>Contact No:</b>	<b>01745 271271</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Future Delivery of Council Meetings</b>		

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## **1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

1.1  For Decision  For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with proposals around the future delivery of formal Council/Committee meetings.

1.3 The Council has considered a number of reports in connection with the arrangements for remote and hybrid meetings, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The last time the Council considered this in detail was at its meeting on 17 February 2022. Given this, the subsequent passage of time and the Council's move towards a more consistent working environment, it is appropriate for the Council to review its current meetings arrangements, and to resolve what they should be going forward, in order to provide Elected Members, officers and the public with clarity around this.

1.4 This report proposes that the Council take certain decisions, as set out at paragraphs 4.5 and 4.8.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Council agrees the following:-

- that meetings of the Council, Committees, Scrutiny Panels, Sub-Committees and quasi-judicial Boards are all held on a hybrid basis moving forward, in accordance with the previously approved Remote and Hybrid Meeting Protocols, the exceptions to this being as agreed by the Council at its meeting on 23 September 2021;
- that public attendance be facilitated by permitting physical attendance and at the same time continuing with the existing arrangements for live streaming of meetings onto You Tube (or such substitute medium as the Council might subsequently use);
- that, as under the current arrangements, given their particular nature, the Council would continue to adopt the position that it does not live stream its quasi-judicial boards, save where required by law;
- that press access to Council meetings continues as it does currently, namely they have the option of attending in person or by being invited to the Webex/Teams meeting;
- that authority is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Strategic Leadership Forum, to decide whether any Council meetings should instead be held on a

fully in person or fully remote basis, where that is considered appropriate, for example for public health reasons; and

- that authority be delegated to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the General Purposes Board to determine the manner in which a hearing is held in respect of civic licensing matters, in terms of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022.

2.2 It is recommended that Council agrees the following:-

- notes the move to Microsoft Teams, and that Council/committee meetings will still use Webex for the time being, but that these will also, in due course, move over to Microsoft Teams; and
- that authority be delegated to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to update the previously approved Remote and Hybrid Meeting Protocols and replace references to Webex with Microsoft Teams, and any other consequential changes from the move to Microsoft Teams.

**Iain Strachan**  
**Head of Legal and Democratic Services**

### 3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 Elected Members have received and considered a number of reports regarding the delivery of Council/Committee and quasi-judicial Board meetings since the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020. The approach adopted by the Council has been driven by both UK and Scottish Government regulations and guidance.
- 3.2 The most recent key decisions can be summarised as set out below.
- 3.3 At its meeting on 23 September 2021, the Council agreed that approval should be given to all meetings of the Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and Boards continuing to be held on a hybrid basis except in the following circumstances:
- The Chair/Vice-Chair or Convener/Vice-Convener is unable to attend the meeting in person;
  - Holding a hybrid meeting would be contrary to the legislation, regulations and guidance of the Scottish Government regarding the COVID 19 pandemic with regards to public health and the requirement for social distancing measures.
- <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2384>
- 3.4 At its meeting on 23 December 2021, the Policy & Resources Executive Sub-Committee agreed:
- That all meetings of the Council, Committees, Sub-Committees and quasi-judicial Boards would revert to remote online meetings;
  - that public access to remote online Council and Committee meetings would be facilitated by live streaming fully remote meetings via You Tube; and
  - that the arrangements for the continued delivery of the Council, Committees and Council meetings and those of all quasi-judicial Boards would be considered by the Council at its meeting on 17 February 2022.
- <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2414>
- 3.5 At its meeting on 17 February 2022, the Council agreed
- that the Council revert to the Hybrid Committee model approved by the 23 September 2021 Council with effect from 1 March 2022; and
  - that public attendance be facilitated via reverting to physical attendance whilst continuing with live streaming of meetings onto You Tube (or such substitute medium as the Council might subsequently use).
- <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2429>
- 3.6 The Council has supported these arrangements through the adoption of Remote and Hybrid Meeting Protocols, which have likewise been the subject of updating, approved by Council, including most recently at the 21 April meeting of full Council.
- <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2449>
- 3.7 By necessity, the move to remote, and then hybrid, meetings was originally taken quickly, and in response to the pandemic and the changing nature of it, coupled with its impact on the Council and the citizens of Inverclyde. However, what were once thought likely to be short-term and temporary arrangements have now become long-term and more permanent. With the gradual relaxation of UK and Scottish Government Covid-19 related regulations and guidance, and the Council's return to a more normal and consistent way of working, it is suggested that Council now needs to consider and decide what the permanent meeting arrangements should be.

## 4.0 PROPOSALS

### Continuation of Hybrid Meetings

- 4.1 It is the view of the Corporate Management Team that the reversion to hybrid meetings has been successful. This approach has continued to help keep Elected Members, officers and the public safe, whilst enabling meetings to be conducted in an efficient and effective manner. In addition, holding meetings in this way makes for a more efficient use of officer time, which is particularly important given the current challenges around resource capacity. There has been the continued application of appropriate social distancing measures, including offering the choice of remote attendance. Members will also be aware that additional measures have been introduced to improve the ventilation in the Chambers. In particular two air purifiers and a CO2 monitor have been installed within the Chambers whilst the main and side doors have been left open during public business. The CO2 monitor readings have been monitored, and to date there have been no instances where CO2 levels have exceeded acceptable limits, even during warm weather, albeit meetings have generally been of a short duration.
- 4.2 It is noted that a hybrid meeting does deliver a different experience to one where all participants are present, and different again to one where all participants are remote. The perceived advantages and disadvantages of each approach will also vary according to the nature of the meeting in question, and the preferences and personal circumstances of each participant. In respect of the quasi-judicial meetings the Council holds it could be said that, given their nature, the default position is they should be held with all participants physically present. However, it is the opinion of the Corporate Management Team that these can still be held in a suitably effective and efficient manner by a hybrid, or even fully remote, approach. This position is supported by the recently enacted Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022, which confirms that hearings in respect of civic or alcohol licensing matters can be held on a remote or hybrid basis, as well as in person. In respect of that it is to be noted that the General Purposes Board and the Inverclyde Licensing Board will be able to determine the approach that is most suitable for any planned hearing, but by law must also take account of the views of those who are participating.
- 4.3 The adoption of hybrid meetings is also consistent with the Council's approach to flexible workstyles. The Council agreed, as part of the Covid Organisational Recovery plan, to operate a hybrid working pilot, and linked to this in December 2021 Council approved a saving, linked to New Ways of Working, the delivery of which is contingent on reductions in the Council's estate, given that many office based staff will no longer require to be in the office as much as they were before the pandemic. This pilot is ongoing, and an assessment of its effectiveness and the identification of potential savings will be reported to the Policy & Resources Committee in Summer 2023.
- 4.4 There has been the following number of views of the Council meetings through the Council's You Tube channel:-

Date	Committee	Number of Views
7 June 2022	Audit Committee	38
8 June 2022	Health & Social Care Committee	53
14 June 2022	Education & Communities – Communities Business	40
14 June 2022	Education & Communities – Education Business	38
16 June 2022	Environment & Regeneration Committee	82
21 June 2022	Policy & Resources Committee	60
23 June 2022	Local Police & Fire Scrutiny Committee	78

28 June 2022	Audit Committee	24
30 June 2022	Inverclyde Council	128

While the numbers are not large, they do support the continuation of the current streaming arrangements.

4.5 As such, it is recommended that the Council agrees the following:-

- that meetings of the Council, Committees, Scrutiny Panels, Sub-Committees and quasi-judicial Boards are all held on a hybrid basis moving forward, in accordance with the previously approved Remote and Hybrid Meeting Protocols, the exceptions to this being as agreed by the Council at its meeting on 23 September 2021 (and summarised at paragraph 3.3 above);
- that public attendance be facilitated by permitting physical attendance and at the same time continuing with the existing arrangements for live streaming of meetings onto You Tube (or such substitute medium as the Council might subsequently use);
- that, as under the current arrangements, given their particular nature, the Council would continue to adopt the position that it does not live stream its quasi-judicial boards, save where required by law;
- that press access to Council meetings continues as it does currently, namely they have the option of attending in person or by being invited to the Webex meeting;
- that authority is delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Strategic Leadership Forum, to decide whether any Council meetings should instead be held on a fully in person or fully remote basis, where that is considered appropriate, for example for public health reasons; and
- that authority be delegated to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the General Purposes Board to determine the manner in which a hearing is held in respect of civic licensing matters, in terms of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022.

### **Microsoft Teams/Webex**

4.6 As has been reported elsewhere, the Council is moving to Microsoft 365, with the move expected to be largely completed during the late Summer/early Autumn of 2022. As part of this, Elected Members and officers will be able to organise meetings by way of Microsoft Teams, and will no longer require to use Webex. It is, however, to be noted that the display screen, with integrated camera, that is located in the Chamber and used to support the holding of hybrid meetings is only compatible with Webex. It is proposed that the replacement of the screen is dealt with as part of a wider refurbishment of the Chamber, referred to below. As such, and until such time as alternative Microsoft Teams compatible equipment can be installed, Webex will continue to be used for meetings of the Council, Committees, Scrutiny Panels, Sub-Committees and quasi-judicial Boards.

4.7 A programmed roll out of Microsoft Teams, and associated training and guidance, is expected to commence around mid/late September 2022.

4.8 It is recommended that Council agrees the following:-

- notes the move to Microsoft Teams, and that Council/committee meetings will still use Webex for the time being, but that these will also, in due course, move over to Microsoft Teams; and
- that authority be delegated to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services to update the previously approved Remote and Hybrid Meeting Protocols and replace references to Webex with Microsoft Teams, and any other consequential changes from the move to Microsoft Teams.

**Location of Council/Committee Meetings**

- 4.9 In the period since the Council’s Statutory Meeting on 19 May 2022 all meetings of the Council, Committees, Scrutiny Panels, Sub-Committees and quasi-judicial Boards have (with one exception) been held from the Council Chamber. The Statutory Meeting was held from the Town Hall, as approved by full Council on 21 April 2022. The only exception was the special meeting of the General Purposes Board on 20 July 2022, which was held from Board Room 1, given the Chamber was otherwise unavailable.
- 4.10 As was noted in the above mentioned report of 21 April 2022 there are limitations to the effectiveness of the Chamber as the location for a hybrid meeting, including related to its size, the absence of a suitable video-conferencing system and the lack of ventilation. As such, and recognising the significance of the Chamber, the Council needs to consider and decide where best to hold its formal meetings on a permanent basis going forward, and any investment that might be required to facilitate that.
- 4.11 Officers will undertake further work around this, and bring a proposal back to a future meeting of the Council, including detail on the installation of a suitable video-conferencing/webcasting system and how this might tie in with planned works to Greenock Municipal Buildings.

**5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Financial		X	
Legal/Risk	X		
Human Resources	X		
Strategic (LOIP/Corporate Plan)			X
Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Children & Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing			X
Environmental & Sustainability			X
Data Protection			X

**5.2 Finance**

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report and its proposals.

One off Costs

<b>Cost Centre</b>	<b>Budget Heading</b>	<b>Budget Years</b>	<b>Proposed Spend this Report</b>	<b>Virement From</b>	<b>Other Comments</b>
N/a					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

<b>Cost Centre</b>	<b>Budget Heading</b>	<b>With Effect from</b>	<b>Annual Net Impact</b>	<b>Virement From (If Applicable)</b>	<b>Other Comments</b>
N/a					

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### 5.3 Legal/Risk

There is a need for the Council to ensure that its meeting are suitably accessible to the public and other stakeholders, and at the same time ensure such meetings are conducted in a manner that complies with the relevant regulations and guidelines that have been introduced as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposals in this report, coupled with ongoing review and regular risk assessments, will ensure these legal requirements are met.

### 5.4 Human Resources

The main implication is the impact on staff of the meeting arrangements that the Council wishes to have, both in terms of administrative and also attendance for the actual meeting. It is assessed that the proposals in this report can be supported by staff, as they are now. In addition, there are health and safety considerations, but they too should be capable of being satisfied. Elected Members should, however, be aware of the additional officer support that is needed for holding and webcasting of remote and hybrid meetings that was not previously required for in person meetings.

## 6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Corporate Management Team and the Strategic Leadership Forum have been consulted on this report.

## 7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.