

Report

Report to:	South Lanarkshire Council
Date of Meeting:	16 December 2020
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Committee and Council Meetings - Accessibility During the Current Pandemic
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Advise on a proposal to make Committee and Council meetings accessible to the public during the current pandemic

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Council is asked to approve the following recommendation(s): -

- (1) that the recording from committee and Council meetings for the non-restricted element of business be published and made available following the meeting.

3. Background

3.1. South Lanarkshire Council's Committee and Council Meetings have been impacted due to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of public health concerns, some Elected Members and a large number of SLC Officers are currently undertaking their duties from home and members of the public are not permitted to enter public buildings.

3.2. During June 2020, a pilot was undertaken to hold certain committee meetings via Microsoft Teams. Following the pilot, a survey was issued to members on its use and a copy of the outcome of the survey is attached as an appendix to the report.

3.3. Following the summer recess, the full programme of meetings resumed and a blended approach was adopted, whereby members could choose to participate in person within the committee rooms, while observing physical distancing measures, or by virtual means.

3.4. In recent weeks, due to public health concerns, particularly in view of the current level assigned to the South Lanarkshire area, committee meetings have been held via MS Teams only.

4. Use of Teams for Committee and Council Meetings

4.1. Since the survey was issued in June 2020, elected members are now more familiar with Teams and have had access to training, either through the use of guidance/training materials or via IT/the Digital Champions. Further training, however, can be offered to elected members on request. There have also been some small improvements in the software, eg up to 49 meeting attendees can now be viewed on screen at the same time if large gallery view is selected and it is possible to 'pin' a person so that they will always appear on screen.

- 4.2. Prior to consideration of the formal business at committee meetings, as a reminder, the clerk runs through some general protocols and asks that members make them aware of any technical issues so that the Chair and Digital Champions/IT colleagues, as appropriate, can be alerted. It should be noted, however, that, while advice can be provided on reconnecting or user/training issues, if the problem lies with home broadband connectivity, then it is outwith the control of the support mechanisms put in place by the Council.
- 4.3. Currently, for those meetings which would, in normal circumstances, be held in public, a Teams meeting invite is extended to the Local Democracy Reporter as well as the Council's Corporate Communications officers to allow Council business matters to be reported in the press.
- 4.4. It is proposed that, as the meetings are currently recorded for the purposes of the minutes, the recording for the non-restricted element of business be published following the committee meeting on an appropriate channel, such as YouTube, with links from the Council's website.
- 4.5. While a trial of Microsoft Teams Live has taken place in terms of a members' awareness session that was held prior to the return of schools in August 2020, the Council is not yet in a position to stream meetings live as it is resource intensive, requires in-depth training and much more preparation time would be required for each meeting to ensure a smooth run. Should a blended approach be reinstated, there would also be a requirement to procure roving cameras, linked to microphones, to allow the speaker to be pinned.

5. Employee Implications

- 5.1. Assistance from IT and the Communication and Strategy team would be required to support the publishing and streaming of the recordings of the Council meetings if the Council decided to implement this.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no financial implications in terms of this report.

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 7.1. There are no climate change, sustainability or environmental implications in terms of this report.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. There may be a reputational risk to the Council should its meetings not be publicly accessible.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. There was no requirement for an equality impact assessment in terms of the information in this report.
- 9.2. IT, members' services and committee services will continue to work with elected members to meet any specific requirements, particularly in terms of training.

Paul Manning
Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

30 November 2020

Link(s) to Council Values/Visions/Objectives

- ◆ All council objectives

Previous References

- ◆ None

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact: -

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