

Transitioning to the new normal: Political Governance

1.	Introduction Councils have adapted their political governance arrangements to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, often putting in place new arrangements at rapid pace. This paper summarises key findings on the arrangements in place in Scottish councils, as well as providing a comparative perspective on the political governance arrangements in English councils.
2.	Methodology Solace asked the IS to produce the research at pace to inform councils' thinking on their political governance arrangements. We collated this information by reviewing council papers and websites, and from responses by officers to requests for information. Between 15/05/20 and 22/05/20, three-quarters of councils provided information on political governance arrangements through various officer networks. A summary of the collated information can be found at Appendix A. We had numerous requests from officers for this information to help to review their council's arrangements and we provided this where requested. We propose to update Appendix A following the summer recess (end-August/start September) and again at the end of the year as the 'new normal' becomes clearer. Whilst collating the information, it was apparent many councils were currently reviewing their arrangements or were awaiting approval on proposals. This creates a risk that the information gathering stage of the exercise could continue indefinitely as arrangements change. As the purpose of the exercise was to support councils to learn from one another, we decided to collate information up to 22/05/20. <i>Political Governance in English Councils</i> Our observations on arrangements in English councils come from three main sources, kindly provided by the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) in England: 1. Appendix B summarises the arrangements in place in some English councils during the earlier stages of the pandemic. 2. Appendix C contains virtual meeting case studies from English councils. 3. Forum for democratic services officers in English councils As Appendix A (Scottish Council arrangements) and Appendix B (English Council arrangements) were collated at different stages of the pandemic,

	they cannot be reliably compared and it is not the intention of this paper to do so. We supplemented information from Appendices B and C with information gleaned from democratic services officers in English councils through conversations and online discussion forums. These are merely our insights and not indicative of the complex landscape across English councils, and not the views of ADSO or their members.
3.	Overview of political governance arrangements in Scotland • 23 councils are holding at least one committee or sub-committee remotely. These are either entirely remote or a hybrid of physical and remote attendance. In addition, several councils have indicated that they are exploring options or intend to restart some committees via remote attendance before the end June. • 9 councils have not restarted formal meetings, with decisions being taken by officers under delegated authority in consultation with members. Arrangements for consultation with members vary but tend to involve a mix of Group Leaders, Independents and Conveners, with officers with delegated authority taking the final decisions. Remote consultation meetings are not counted in the remote meeting figures if they are not formal bodies with delegated powers to take decisions. • Some councils use different technology for meetings or offer more than one option. The most commonly used technology for remote meeting access based on the information we could gather is: • Microsoft Teams (9 councils) • Microsoft Skype (5 councils) • CISCO WebEx Video Conferencing (3 councils) • Teleconferencing options (4 councils) • Based on the information we have been able to gather, it appears that only two councils have allowed the public to attend and participate in remote meetings. Most councils are exploring options for, or plan to allow members of the public/media to attend remotely, watch live or participate in some way for future meetings. Others had made provision for, or were exploring, making video or audio recordings available following meetings.

4.	Political Governance Arrangements in English Councils Councils in England were able to hold remote meetings following the introduction of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, which are in effect until 7th May 2021. Information in Appendix B was collated as of 24th March, when English Councils did not have the ability to hold remote meetings. Councils in England were taking similar actions to councils in Scotland, in cancelling meetings, delegating decision-making powers to officers, setting up emergency committees, reviewing standing orders and putting in place arrangements for consulting members. Some were planning to hold remote meetings should legislation be relaxed and the case studies in Appendix C demonstrate that some have been doing so, using various technology (Google Meet, Teams, Skype). The case studies also highlight many of the same issues experienced by councils in Scotland; - Access to technology - Hardware that works with remote meeting software - Equalities considerations - How to involve the public - Training and support for members and officers - Having fit for purpose standing orders While the English Local Government context is different from Scotland, what is not different is councils putting in place arrangements that suit their individual circumstances, thus creating a varied picture in a similar vein to Scottish Local Government.
5.	Observations & Conclusions It is clear from this exercise that councils in Scotland are at different stages with their political governance arrangements and this is to be expected. While reviewing council papers and websites, it was clear that there is a trend towards moving away from relying on officers making delegated decisions in consultation with members, to reintroducing decision-making structures using technology. There are three main reasons for this: - The initial emergency phase of the pandemic is easing and there are fewer instances where urgent decisions need to be taken; - The desire for a return to greater involvement from elected members in decision making; and

- Councils are better prepared to competently and inclusively conduct remote meetings.

In general, councils have worked at pace in exploring technology, amending standing orders, developing guidance, training support staff, senior officers and elected members, and running mock committees in preparation for successfully reintroducing political decision-making structures.

Culture

The cultural shift in some councils has been quite significant, with some starting from a position of long-standing reluctance of moving to paperless meetings and webcasting, to a sudden need to move to remote meetings using new technology.

Some councils were starting from a healthier position with webcasting, paperless meetings and remote access for members and officers to hybrid meetings the norm.

Technology

Councils have responded to the need for remote meetings using technology that is already available to them. New technology is being developed by providers to meet the needs of councils who wish to hold completely remote meetings as well as hybrid meetings with some remote and physical participation. Now there is a need the market should provide more options for councils to consider in the coming months.

Councils should exercise caution when it comes to new technology and consider how 'future proof' it is. The transition to the 'new normal' may bring about opportunities to conduct business in ways not previously considered and therefore 'in scope' during procurement.

New technology and opportunities to do things differently will present challenges however, as councils will need to balance the desire from some members and officers to return to the chamber, with others' desires to continue remote participation. Anecdotal evidence suggests hybrid meetings can require a greater amount of technology, preparation and support compared to fully in person or remote meetings. There will need to be trade-offs between the desired method of participation for members/officers and the resource to do this during a time of severe financial pressure.

Equalities

As arrangements change at pace, consideration needs to be given to how to ensure arrangements do not further disenfranchise or exclude people with disabilities or who don't have the infrastructure or skillset to access public meetings remotely. This includes officers, elected members, partner organisations and members of the public.

	<u>Summary</u> Councils are best placed to determine themselves what political governance arrangements to put in place based on their particular needs, culture, political composition, available technology, skill base and resource. Councils that wish to learn from others should be supported by the IS, Solace, COSLA and through various officer groups and networks. We trust this exercise supports that endeavour. The exploration of the political governance arrangements in English Councils was useful, and largely confirmed a similar picture to that of Scotland in terms of the variety in arrangements and readiness for remote meetings. English Councils had additional challenges with legislation not allowing for remote access to meetings, but like in Scotland, officers and members are responding to the challenges and innovating.
6.	Support There is ample evidence that officers have been learning from one another and making use of officer groups and networks of contacts. This does not just happen and requires years of commitment and desire to build and sustain these groups/networks. The IS will continue to support officer groups to share and learn from each other, including through the provision of collaboration tools such as the Knowledge Hub. We will shortly be publishing a case study from Aberdeenshire Council on their use of remote meetings. If any other council is doing innovative work on governance (particularly around equalities considerations, public/partner participation at meetings, training, use of technology) please contact david.barr@improvementservice.org.uk If any council would like to discuss how the IS can support them to review their governance arrangements, please contact david.barr@improvementservice.org.uk Links to useful resources Association of Democratic Service Officers (ADSO) https://www.adso.co.uk/coronavirus-updates/ Local Government Association – Virtual Meetings Hub https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/remote-council-meetings

APPENDIX A

Council	Summary of decision-making arrangements	Remote Council/Committee Meetings	Public Participation
Aberdeen City	In response to the current COVID-19 situation, the Urgent Business Committee on 20 March agreed to cancel all Full Council, Committee, Sub-Committee and Working Group meetings from 23 March to 21 August 2020 inclusive, with the exception of:- • Urgent Business Committee (comprising Group Leaders); • Planning Development Management Committee; and • Appeals Sub-Committee, Business Rates Appeals Sub-Committee, Community Asset Transfer Review Sub-Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee. Meetings of the aforementioned Committees will be held remotely as required.	Yes Meetings are held online using Microsoft Teams. Recordings are uploaded to the councils website approx. one hour after meeting.	No public or media The council are looking at livestreaming meetings. Meetings are recorded and published on councils website
Aberdeenshire	The council agreed the COVID19 Governance revisals making remote participation their default mode of conducting business. Council meetings continuing remotely include: • Full council • IJB • Area Committees • Policy Committees	Yes Aberdeenshire Council currently uses Skype for Business. Currently looking into how they can achieve live webcasting but in the meantime their meetings are recorded and published online after the meeting (with the	Yes The tech allows partners such as Police Scotland to continue to participate in meetings. Skype allows all participants sight of every participants email addresses which causes a

	Licencing Board / Licencing sub-committee Aberdeenshire were the first council in Scotland to hold a Licencing Board to host a remote hearing. Elected Members have taken well to the approach.	exception of the exempt and confidential items).	data protection issue when multiple members of the public are attending. The council therefore allow the public to participate by telephone and ensure that any presentations or additional materials are emailed to them in advance of the meeting.
Angus	The Chief Executive and Senior Officers have emergency delegated powers, and where it is possible to do so in terms of any time constraints, the relevant officers will consult with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition. Regular committee timetable up to 1st June is cancelled. The council has set up two new special committees: Special arrangements committee Remit - To decide any matter which would normally be decided by the Council as provided for in the Order of Reference of Committees subject to certain exclusions Special Education Committee To decide any matter which would normally be decided by the Children and Learning Committee, as detailed in the Order of Reference of Committees which falls within the functions of	Yes The special arrangements and special education committee was held via Zoom	Unknown The public could follow the meeting on zoom

	the Council as education authority within the terms of the relevant legislation.		
Argyll & Bute	The Chief Executive has emergency powers to take urgent decisions which require to be taken in response to COVID-19, after consultation with the Leader, or Depute Leader in the Leaders absence. For other business the council has established a Business Continuity Committee (BCC) which will exercise all of the powers of the Council for a finite period of time. The purpose of the BCC will be to deal with as much normal council business as is reasonable and appropriate and to ensure that there is continued scrutiny by members.	Yes Skype	No
City of Edinburgh	The Chief Executive has decision making powers under delegated authority. The council also originally established a Leadership Advisory Panel for decision making. This has been stood down and the councils Policy & Sustainability Committee, and, Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, and, Development Management sub-committee are reinstated from 1st May	Yes Skype	No Meetings are webcast live
Clackmannanshire	The Council's Chief Executive has emergency decision making powers. If any action proposed by officers would result in a new council policy, or if it would require formal council approval, the matter will be referred to the Emergency	Yes	No

	Decision Making Forum for quick decision making. The Emergency Decision Making Forum has representation from across the political spectrum. Members can participate remotely via video or telephone conferencing. All other scheduled council and committee meetings have been called off until the beginning of June.		
Comhairly nan Eilean Siar	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was scheduled to hold its next series of Committee and Comhairle meetings in week beginning 27 April 2020, and it was clear that it would not be possible for that series of meetings to take place in its usual format. The council has an Emergency Powers Committee with delegated authority to authorise such action as is necessary on any matters of urgency (with certain exceptions) delegated to the Comhairle arising between meetings of the Comhairle. Full Council took place on 6th May	Hybrid Full council met with attendance in the chamber and remotely. The Emergency Powers Committee isn't listed on the councils website and it is unknown how this meets	No Audio recordings are available to the public following the meeting
Dumfries & Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway Council have established a new Ad Hoc COVID-19 Sub Committee. This will be in place for as short a time as possible and the position will be reviewed on a monthly basis. The Sub Committee has responsibility for determining all urgent and/or important business relating to Non-Statutory Exclusions and Council Committee and Sub Committee remits.	Hybrid At least 3 members must be physically present (to meet quorum) along with senior and support officers. Skype or Microsoft Teams (teleconference also available)	No

	The committee is Chaired by the Council Leader and the Vice Chair is the Depute Leader The Sub Committee is excluded from the 'call in' procedure, so any decisions can be implemented immediately.		
Dundee	All committee meetings have been suspended until further notice. Essential Council Business is being transacted under the Council's existing procedures for dealing with urgent business arising between meetings. The Chief Executive and Executive Directors have authority to act on urgent matters, which may arise between meetings in consultation with the Convener, Opposition Groups spokespersons and the Independent members, subject to a report thereon being submitted for information to the next appropriate meeting of the Committee concerned.	No The Council is currently exploring the potential of software platforms to enable remote meetings to take place	No
East Ayrshire	Established an Executive Committee consisting of Leader and Depute Leader, two Labour Members, two Conservative Members and one Independent. Upcoming Planning Committee will be held by the same methods as the Exec Committee. Full Council is still scheduled for 25th June with members having the options to virtually attend,	Hybrid Exec and Planning committee meeting by video conferencing with a physical presence in the chamber from the Chair and small number of officers.	No

	attend in person while abiding social distancing, or submit apologies.		
East Dunbartonshire	Delegated powers to the Chief Executive/Depute Chief Executives with immediate effect up to and including the Council's summer recess. Prior to a decision, the relevant senior officer will consult with the appropriate Convener/Vice Convener on the proposed executive action and thereafter approach the Chief Executive/Depute Chief Executives to authorise the proposed action.	No	No
East Lothian	Chief Executive delegated emergency powers. Chief executive to consult with the three political group leaders. A summary of all business carried out during the Emergency Recess will be brought to the next full Council meeting and that copies of all reports will be lodged in the Members' Library. The three Political Group Leaders(or their deputs), along with the relevant Cabinet Spokesperson(or their depute), will deal in their discretion with the necessary business of the Council presented to them for consideration by the Chief Executive, or officers authorised by him/her to act on his/her behalf. For a matter to be approved, it will require the approval of the Council Leader(or their depute)and one other Group Leader (or their deputs). This will include matters that would normally require approval of two-thirds of Councillors.	No The consultation meeting with the political group leaders will take place electronically but this is not a formal committee	No

	This is not a replacement committee of the Council or indeed Administration, but a way of making cross-party decisions regarding significant pieces of necessary business, to be supported electronically and through conversation.		
East Renfrewshire	Delegated authority has been granted to the Chief Executive/Officers to take operational decisions in respect of matters within their respective areas of operation that would normally require Council/committee approval. An Emergencies Committee is in place and Officers refer decisions to this committee when proposals are contrary to existing council policy, would be seeking an amendment to existing policy or for reasons that require political approval. At East Renfrewshire Emergencies Committee on 14th May, 2020 it was recommended and approved: - lifting of the suspension of delegations to committees and the proposals to recommence meetings - withdrawing the temporary extension of delegated powers to officers be withdrawn on 30 June 2020 - withdrawing of the temporary extension of delegated powers with the exception of licensing matters in respect of which the Chief Officer -	Yes The 2 Emergencies Committee meetings were virtual meetings Meetings held in June will be virtual meetings. Meetings after the summer recess will continue to be virtual until government guidance changes at which time meeting arrangements will be reviewed.	No Investigation into the possibility of recording meetings for post-meeting publication and also the possibility of live streaming of meetings is under investigation

	Legal & Procurement will continue to take decisions until arrangements to recommence meetings of the Licensing Committee have been put in place. - the reintroduction of a limited number of meetings in June		
Falkirk	Scheme of Delegation implemented and expanded to include consultation with the Leader of the Council and the leaders of the main opposition groups. Meeting of full Council held (6th May) by teleconference (not video) at which an interim decision-making structure has been agreed, allowing Member-level decision making to be reintroduced, including meetings being held by video conference. An Emergency Executive (committee) meets every fortnight until the end of June and is a single decision-making body for all non-regulatory decisions. The Planning Committee will meet remotely and the Scheme of Delegation is extended to the Director to determine some planning applications. Planning applications being "called-in" by a local Member will be considered in the first instance by the Director in consultation with the Convener and Depute Convener of the Planning Committee, who will agree whether they should be considered at a remote Committee or deferred to an ordinary meeting of the	Yes Full council - teleconference Exec Committee / Planning Committee – video conferencing - Webex (Cisco)	No Video recordings of the Exec Committee will be made available online afterwards. Planning committee is not open to the public. Proposed that recordings will be made available to the public

	Committee following a return to normal business. Licensing matters, for the large part, allow for determination after the emergency period.		
Fife	The council have had delegated powers in place for everything but is restarting their Policy & Coordination Committee and two Planning Committees using Microsoft Teams. No plans to restart other committees before recess.	Yes Microsoft Teams	Yes
Glasgow	The council has agreed emergency decision-making processes, designed to reduce the need for face-to-face meetings during the coronavirus outbreak. The city has decided that nearly all committees will be suspended until further notice; with the exception of its City Administration Committee, which will have a reduced membership. The council's Chief Executive, Directors and Assistant Directors will be authorised to deal with a range of matters - for example applications for licences, permissions and grants - in consultation with the appropriate City Convener or Committee Convener. However, any proposed action that is contrary to council policy will be referred to the City Administration Committee for a decision. These arrangements will be kept under review and revoked when appropriate.	Yes City Administration Committee - teleconferencing Plans to use Microsoft Teams for future committee meetings	No

Highland	The council postponed most formal meetings and established a smaller Member 'Member Gold Covid-19 Group' on a cross party basis, to take urgent Covid-related decisions. The council has also established a formal Member Recovery Board PRB, Planning Application Committees, Licensing Board and Committees, Corporate Resources Committee and full Council are all scheduled across May and June. All other committees are being re-established from late June/early July. We are not currently able to hold meetings in public but will soon be making recordings publicly available. We hope to be able to webcast the full Council meeting on 25 June	Yes Microsoft Teams	No Will soon be making recordings available publicly. Intend to webcast full Council on 25th June
Inverclyde	The council suspend Standing Orders and the Scheme of Administration for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency and remitted appropriate powers and all functions delegated to Committees to the Policy & Resources Executive Sub-Committee for the duration of the emergency. All other meetings are suspended for the duration of the emergency. The Policy & Resources Exec Sub-Committee meets fortnightly. No plans to hold a Planning, LRB or General Purposes Board meeting but if one was needed, it would be held via Webex with phone in option.	Hybrid Meeting held in Council Chamber with option for Webex for members/officers	No

Midlothian	Should a decision be required this is being dealt with under the delegation provided to the Chief Executive in terms of Standing Orders Current meetings schedule was cancelled in March but preparations are ongoing to have virtual meetings of the committees where there is a need to determine applications or make decisions. This could include hoping meetings of the Planning Committee, full Council and also the Audit Committee by the end of June.	No Meetings will be held remotely by the end of June. The council will make use of Microsoft Teams/Zoom	No The council is examining options for public participation
Moray	The council has set up an Emergency Cabinet to deal with strategic issues with the Chief Exec using emergency delegation for lower risk issues. The council also changed the planning scheme of delegation to allow more applications to be decided by officers.	Yes Emergency Cabinet meetings held by Webcast VC meeting using public i "connect remote".	No
North Ayrshire	The council has suspended Council and committee meetings until 30th June and are using emergency delegated powers for decision making. The Chief Executive, can deal with urgent issues, subject to reporting back to the Cabinet at the first available opportunity. This power is to be exercised in consultation with the relevant Chief Officer and the relevant portfolio holder. During the period that meetings are suspended, the Chief Executive will undertake consultation with members, via agreed channels, depending on the type of Matter, as defined the Scheme of Delegation.	No	No

North Lanarkshire	Committee cycle has been cancelled through the end of June with Chief Exec using delegated authority contained within the Scheme of Delegation to Officers. The Chief Executive, or any Chief Officer, is authorised to take such measures as may be required in emergency situations. This is subject always to advising the appropriate Convener and/or Vice Convener and/or local members where possible and to report to the appropriate Committee as soon as possible thereafter on any terms for which Committee approval would normally be necessary.	No	No
Orkney	The Chief Executive holds delegated powers to enable him/her to carry out his/her role in an emergency, as contained within the current Scheme of Delegation to Officers, following consultation with the Convener, the Leader and Depute Leader, and/or the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant service committee. Special General Meetings of the Council are held remotely.	Yes Microsoft Teams	No Audio recordings are available
Perth & Kinross	The council has held or are planning to hold some Committee/Board meetings remotely including Licensing Board, Licensing Committee, Local review Body, Planning and Development Management Committee and Placing Request appeals prior to the traditional summer recess period, including a further Council meeting in June and local trade union meetings.	Yes Microsoft Teams	No The council is working towards introducing a mechanism to allow deputations to participate in virtual committee meetings

	It is intended that all committee meetings will continue after the summer. The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive or any Executive Director is authorised to take such measures as may be required in emergency situations, subject to reporting to Council or the relevant Committee as soon as possible on any matters for which approval would normally be necessary. In the event that there are any urgent decisions to be made during this period that normally require Council approval, where it is practical to do so the Chief Executive / Depute Chief Executive / Executive Director will liaise with elected member representatives of the 'Sounding Board'.		Meetings are broadcast live
Renfrewshire	Commenced Emergences Board which was already part of councils decision-making structure. Board has five members and meets weekly by Skype. Further delegated powers have been passed to the Chief Executive. We are planning on holding our Council meeting in June remotely. No other meetings of Council Boards/committees have been held as yet but we are making arrangements to hold Placing Request Appeals remotely and we have also held, by various remote means, some Joint Board/committee meetings for which we are the lead authority.	Yes Emergencies Board – Skype Making plans to hold Full Council and Placing Request Appeals remotely. Joint Board/committees – remotely via various means	No The meetings are recorded and published on YouTube but not webcast live and do not have any public participation.

Scottish Borders	Council and committee meetings only being held where absolutely necessary for statutory reasons, until 30 September. Where those meetings are necessary, they will be held remotely with video/audio. The council had their first Planning & Building Standards Committee by Microsoft Teams on 18/5/20. It was not open to the public but members of the press joined if they wished – 2 took the opportunity. This was the first formal committee meeting to be held this way and the council will be looking at possibly increasing the number of meetings that could be held this way. The council has 2 meetings of the Local Review Body scheduled to be held this way and as knowledge and expertise with the system increases they hope to be able to allow members of the public to be involved.	Yes Microsoft Teams	No The council are looking into this. Press are allowed.
Shetland	Committee meetings cancelled until 30th May. The existing emergency powers delegated authority has been applied. The Chair or Vice Chair of the service committee which would be affected by a decision is consulted before the action is taken. In place of that the Chief Executive routinely consults or updates all Chairs so that the broader impact of	No	No

	decisions being taken can be understood or influenced by the views of all Chairs. Furthermore, on a weekly basis the Chief Executive provides an update for all Members Decisions taken to implement Emergency Planning functions will be reported to the next available scheduled meeting of the Council		
South Ayrshire	The Chief Exec has emergency delegated powers to determine urgent matters, and where this requires a new/change in policy, the Chief Exec will consult with Group Leaders and an Independent Member and report to the first meeting of the Council, Leadership Panel or other relevant Panel following recess. All meetings of the council have been cancelled till 30th June, though the Chief Exec has powers to arrange meetings, in consultation with Group Leaders/Independents during the pandemic. Meetings will be held remotely if arranged.	No Remote meetings can be held if necessary, following consultation with Group Leaders/Independents.	No
South Lanarkshire	All council meetings have been suspended. The Chief Executive has delegated power, in consultation with the Group Leaders (or their representatives), to deal with any issues that would normally be subject to committee approval. Officers still prepare papers as if they were going to committee meetings and liaise with policy leads/ spokespersons. Papers are shared publicly and with all members who can feed comments to group leaders. The Chief Exec has a remote	No Consultation meetings with group leaders are held on Microsoft Teams.	No

	meeting with group leaders to state intentions to use delegated powers. For quasi-judicial areas, appeals, the same process is used for straightforward planning applications. The council intends to hold a few pilot online meetings next month (the valuation joint board; licensing and appeals) – and if successful try for a full planning committee in June.		
Stirling	Delegated powers had been given to the Chief Executive to make decisions on urgent business only. The council is reinstating Full Council, Audit and Planning & Regulation Panel as remote meetings via Microsoft Teams.	Yes Microsoft Teams	No
West Dunbartonshire	CE (and Senior Officers) using delegated authority to take urgent decisions, in consultation with a small number of members. Full council will be held in June remotely. Other committees/boards (Licensing, Audit, Planning, and Valuation Joint Board) will be held remotely.	Yes Planning – teleconference	No Intention is to audiocast the Council meeting live. No decision has been taken for regulatory committees.
West Lothian	In West Lothian, the Chief Executive was delegated powers to make decisions on urgent business. The Council Executive is restarting remotely and further essential committees (Education	Yes Cisco Webex	Unknown

	Executive, Audit Committee, Governance & Risk Committee, Licensing Committee and Development Management Committee), will be held remotely.		
--	--	--	--

Appendix B

English Local Authority Emergency Powers as of 24 March 2020

Authority	Decision and summary of change of powers	Date decision taken	Press	Report
Birmingham City Council	No changes to constitution – report submitted by solicitor • Cabinet contains Leader and three other Cabinet Members • Public can attend Cabinet only via webcast • Opposition members attend or ask questions virtually • Planning will continue, spaced out, public attending virtually only • Licensing – asking applicants to extend where possible • Scrutiny – suspended unless there is a “compelling reason” to hold one	23/03		https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Decisions/tabid/67/ctl/ViewCMIS_DecisionDetails/mid/391/Id/b1fcef61-c3b1-45d1-a5d7-c6f47d24126c/Default.aspx

Chesterfield	• Council – delegated to Chief Exec in consultation with Leader and Leader of the opposition • Cabinet – delegated to Leader or Deputy Leader in consultation with Cabinet Member and Leader of the Opposition • Non-exec – Delegated to relevant officer in consultation with Chair/Committee	19/03		https://chesterfield.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s31606/Report%20-%20Urgent%20changes%20to%20decision%20making%20delegations%202020%20-%202020-03-19%20-%20final%20version.pdf
Cornwall Council	Item for consideration at Constitution and Governance Committee - Paper to follow	25/03		https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=924&MId=8945
London Borough of Merton	• Chief Executive/officers able to take decisions even if no Cabinet meetings occur • Planning decisions may be delegated to officers – TBC • Virtual meetings will be held if legislation allows	Cabinet meeting – 23/03		https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s32142/decisiontakingmarch2020.pdf

Manchester City Council	Until 26 November - - Limited change to executive as Leader has already enabled Deputy and several Cabinet Members to exercise exec decision making independently. - All planning and non-exec decisions delegated to Chief Exec in consultation with relevant Chair, except Licensing - Power for Executive to make decisions outside policy and financial framework (though in extraordinary circumstances) - Scrutiny Chairs have the power to disregard Call-in notices where they would considered to impact on the ability of the council to respond	25/03		Cabinet - https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s16752/Executive%20Functions%20Business%20Continuity.pdf Council - https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s16782/Council%20Business%20Continuity%20Arrangements.pdf
Norfolk County Council	- All meetings cancelled - Individual decisions made by Cabinet Members and published. - Chief Executive to make any emergency decision that would require full Council, and these will be published.	23/03	https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/politics/council-cancel-meetings-amid-coronavirus-concerns-1-6573951	No formal paper considered – announcement by Leader, with statement of support from opposition leader.

Somerset County Council	Consider emergency arrangements - Marked to follow	27/03		https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=137&Mid=1098
South Somerset District Council	- Chief Executive/senior officer to take quasi-judicial and executive decisions with Leader/ward member if committee meetings can't be held - Hold virtual meetings if/when legislation allows - Monitoring Officer and Chief Exec to amend constitution for incorporation of any central government legislative changes - To cease when central government announces Covid-19 crisis is over	19/03	https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/somerset-district-council-grants-emergency-3967914	http://modgov.southsomerse.t.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=137

Stoke On Trent City Council	○ Three levels of contingency arrangement set out, with different decision making processes for each level. Level set by Head of Paid Service or Monitoring Officer. ○ Established a general purpose emergency committee for any business outside the remit of Cabinet. ○ Most severe level of contingency delegates everything to Head of Paid Service in consultation with Leader and Cabinet	26/03		http://www.moderngov.stoke.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=126264
Sunderland City Council	Reported changes to be taken to Council on 26 March, but no papers included in the agenda covering proposed changes – presumably to be tabled on the night.	25/03	https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/politics/council/emergency-powers-be-handed-sunderland-council-chief-amid-coronavirus-crisis-2502801	

Surrey County Council	• Cabinet meeting can now be Leader or Cabinet Member and two other Cabinet Members • Non-exec decisions delegated to officer in consultation with Chair • Six month rule suspended • Chairman of the Council to agree new protocol to cover ie virtual meetings, public attendance etc – Audit and Governance to monitor • Monitoring Officer and Chairman to agree incorporation of any central government legislative changes • Measures to be reviewed October 2020	17/03		https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=7483&Ver=4
Swansea City Council	○ Constitution amended to all remote attendance (as permitted under Welsh regulations) ○ Dispensation of Councillors Leave of Absence to all Councillors (6 month rule)	26/03		• http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s65142/Remote%20Attendance.pdf?LLL=0 • http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s65143/Dispensation%20for%20Councillor%20Leave%20of%20Absence%20-%20All%20Cllrs.pdf?LLL=0

Trafford Council	Emergency powers • If meeting is inquorate, relevant senior officer can consult with Chair to complete agenda business • If Executive is inquorate, Leader plus Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Governance and Community Strategy or relevant Corporate Director can complete agenda business • If Council is inquorate, Chief Exec with Mayor or Chair can complete agenda business • Emergency business between Council meetings – action can be taken by Leader, other political group leaders (if available), Chief Exec and Corporate Director of Governance and Community Strategy or relevant Corporate Director	18/03	https://www.manchesterevealingnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/trafford-council-grants-itself-emergency-17951677	https://democratic.trafford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MId=2964
City of Wolverhampton Council	Check – agenda should go up 24 March			https://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=129&MId=11908

Remote Meetings Case Studies

Brighton & Hove City Council

In response to the COVID-19 emergency Brighton & Hove City Council opted to run council meetings online under new Government regulations to ensure democracy is transparent.

Working closely with IT&D colleagues, the team confirmed that all Members had access to Skype for Business on their hybrid devices and i-phones and internet capability. This was already the council's chosen form for instant communications and was considered the best option to take forward as a video conferencing platform given it has a professional level of functionality, familiarity with users, and resilience for a high volume of attendees.

Working with colleagues from Communications, a guide on the use of Skype for meetings and how to participate in a virtual meeting was then produced and issued to all Members as well as being shared with the DS team and officers who would be involved in the forthcoming virtual meetings.

As the majority of committee meetings were already web cast, contact was also made with our Web Cast provider, Auditel, who were able to update the equipment to ensure skype meetings could be web cast.

In order to prepare councillors, the DS team ran a mock Planning Committee and worked closely with the Groups Political Advisors to ensure all Members were prepared. This included the Groups holding their own meetings via Skype to enable them to practice using the technology and identify learning needs. to ensure they do not encounter connectivity issues.

How is the new approach being sustained?

As of 31st March, a virtual Policy & Resources Sub-Committee was held via Skype and web cast, with lessons learnt taken forward for the Planning Committee meeting on 22nd and then the full Council meeting on the 23rd April 2020. Both are available to view on the council's website.

The full Council being held to consider the City Plan Part 2 and 52 of the 54 Members taking part, with the meeting hosted by the Head of Democratic Services to ensure access and timings of speeches could be managed and chaired by the Mayor.

The meeting also involved the use of a palantypist to meet the accessibility needs of one Member with hearing difficulties. This involved being able to provide the skype link to the person providing the support to the Member, enabling them to join the meeting and for them to send a specific url to the Member so that they could then see the words on their screen. Feedback from the Member has been very positive.

The team will also be carrying on their training sessions with Members and officers to ensure everyone has the skills and knowledge to confidently participate. Pre-registered

public question speakers will also be given the opportunity to join the meetings and offered support with the technology to ensure they are able to participate fully and hold their members and council to account.

The need for two members of the DS Team to be involved will be reviewed, for Planning Committee, there is a clear need if public participation is to be well managed, with people coming into the lobby and then entering and leaving the session.

Lessons learned

- It is important to check with Members and officers involved in the virtual meetings that they are fully up to speed on the use of the technology and have a back-up device.
- Skype works well but has some drawbacks and going forward Microsoft Teams (the replacement for Skype) is likely to be adopted.
- Accessibility needs to be taken into consideration, but these will have additional resource implications and will need to be funded appropriately.
- Continued training sessions for councillors and officers will need to be offered and planned.

Contact: Mark Wall, Head of Democratic Services, Brighton & Hove City Council
mark.wall@brighton-hove.gov.uk

North Kesteven District Council

At North Kesteven District Council, we use Teams meetings. We did investigate Teams Live Events, but to be honest I really didn't like it... it seemed overly complicated and definitely appears more geared up for webinars than effective interactive meetings. The final nail in the coffin was that fact that live events are not compatible with 'presenters' on iPads – all our Members have council-issued iPads...

Teams meetings are so much easier to use, and are so much better equipped for dealing with interactive meetings. Teams meetings can't be live streamed from the meeting itself, so we use AudioMinutes, which links with Modern.gov and streams live to the meeting agenda page. We have a separate tablet that is placed next to a laptop and literally records ambient sounds. It is a bit of a rough and ready solution, but is really straight forward, meets the Regulations and the sound quality is absolutely fine.. We record the Teams meeting too, and then upload the video the day after.

Our first meeting was Council on 23rd April. We had 15 Members present in the Council meeting. We have 43 Members on Council, but group leaders came to an agreement in advance to reduce membership to make the meeting more manageable. We took a report to this Council meeting to recommend a reduction in planning and scrutiny committees for

the time being. You will hear on the recording that things got a little heated in relation to political balance, but the recommendations were approved. www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/Council23April

Indicating a wish to speak – we used the chat function and Members simply typed: ‘speak’. The clerk monitored these requests and advised the Chairman. This worked very well.

Voting – we used roll-call so Members could clearly be heard and seen casting their vote

We have our first planning committee scheduled for 12th May. www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/Planning12May

We are keeping the same process we used for Council.

We will have public speaking, but have suspended the public speaking scheme in part – so no questions of them. You can invite ‘guests’ to Teams meetings. We have tested this extensively (including with our own family!) and are confident in the system. Just in case though – our Protocol and Procedure Rules dictate that registered speakers have to submit their verbal presentation in writing in advance – so if any issues the Chairman will read their speech on their behalf and meeting continues.

Top Tips

- Test, test and test again!!!!
- Have mock meetings with your members and officers (dress rehearsals)
- Agree an ‘etiquette’ for meetings (ours is attached for info)
- We set up a Whatsapp group for the Chairman and key officers – so could message each other ‘outside’ of the meeting – the equivalent of whispering advice at the top table in the Chamber.
- Have a decent script for your Chairman – so they keep on track and feel supported.
- Share the work of the meeting; delegate to other DSOs, IT, legal, planning officers, or even CMT! For our Council meeting we had :

Person 1	Clerk – • provide advice as needed • monitor speakers via chat • take votes
Person 2	Clock watch! • Keep track of each Member’s speeches and advise if over the permitted time. Advise meeting if needed
Person 3	Take minutes
Person 4	AudioMinutes • Live stream meeting
Person 5	Listen via website live stream • advise Clerk immediately via private WhatsApp group if any issues

NKDC Remote Meeting Etiquette

Equipment: You must only access Teams and the meeting via your NK issued iPad. Meetings will be audio live streamed, and the video recording will be uploaded to the website within 2 working days of the meeting.

Remember: the public can hear and see you, even if you can't see or hear them.

Think: – about your surroundings and your body language.

“Councillors and officers should assume at all times that what they are saying and doing is visible to the public in just the same way as it would be in the committee room” - Centre of Public Scrutiny.

Members are asked to adhere to the following etiquette:

Before the meeting:

- Proactive communication with officers. If you have any questions about any reports – please feel free to contact officers in advance of the meeting to discuss.
- Make the remote connection to the meeting 10/15 minutes before the start to ensure no issues
- Switch off your mobile phone / turn to silent to avoid unnecessary interruptions
- **Power:** Remember to charge your iPad in advance of the meeting / ensure you are plugged into a power source.
- **Location and background** –
 - Find a suitable location for the meeting, where you will be comfortable and will not be disturbed.
 - You will need to consider your location for the meeting and what is visible in the background. A plain wall can create a good background for a remote meeting and you should remove anything that you may not wish to be on view such as family photos or recognisable products / brands.
- **Interests** - If you have any interest to declare or you are need advice, please speak with Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

Other helpful guidance:

- Ensure you have read any documents in readiness for the meeting. Agendas will be shared in the usual way with all participants through Modern.gov.
- Prepare some handwritten notes or lists for ease of reference during the meeting. This preparation may save you time when referring to the agenda and participating in the meeting.
- Find a suitable location for the meeting, where you will be comfortable and won't be disturbed.

- You are encouraged to wear smart attire, as you might normally during a physical meeting.

Check your Smart speaker!

- Many of us now have smart speakers in our homes such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or smart music devices. These may be recording phone/video conversations and this could be an inadvertent breach of GDPR.
- If you have any of these devices that connect to the Internet, we strongly advise you to either turn them off or move them out of the room in which you are working.
- This is particularly important for meetings that include consideration of Exempt / Confidential items.

During the meeting

• You may want to drink tea/coffee or water during the meeting, which is fine. Please do check your glass or mug is quite neutral through, with no particular branding, slogans or images, which could be viewed as offensive.

- Mute microphones and video-feed when not talking.
- Only speak when invited to by the Chairman.
- Only one person may speak at any one time.
- When invited to speak - turn on the microphone and camera, then state your name before you make a comment.
- When referring to a specific page or slide, ensure you mention the page or slide number.
- **CHAT function**
 - Please note that all those present in the meeting can view the CHAT area – comments are **not** private.
 - This function is to be used:
 - To indicate you wish to speak, please type 'speak'
 - If you are asked to clarify an amendment, the Chairman may ask you to write this in the CHAT function
 - if you need to leave the meeting early – please indicate this in the CHAT function
- **Voting**
 - Democratic Services will do a roll-call of Members in alphabetical order – please state your vote – for, against, or abstain
- **Exempt Items**
 - Democratic Services will end the live stream to the public website, along with the recording of the meeting.
 - The Chairman will then ask each Member to verbally declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be - either hearing or seeing consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings. Failure to comply could be in breach of Code of Conduct responsibilities.

End of the meeting

- Chairman will close the meeting.
- All Members will be asked to promptly leave the meeting using the red 'hang up' button.
- Members must not participate in any further discussions.

Jennifer Swift

Democratic Services Team Leader

Tel: 01529 308243

|

Mob: 07816 294714

Email:

Jennifer_Swift@N-KESTEVEN.GOV.UK

www.n-kesteven.gov.uk

Kesteven Street

,

Sleaford

,

NG34 7EF

Thanet District Council: A Google Case Study

As Thanet District Council is a Google based Council, we use Google Meet to provide video conferencing and virtual meetings, these meetings are then streamed live to the Council's YouTube channel via YouTube Live. We stream the meetings via our YouTube channel as you need to be inside the Council's network in order to watch the live stream sent out by Google Meet. Using YouTube allows the public to view our meetings via a well known, highly visible and easily accessible location. Participation in the meetings is secure and locked down to only invited people.

We find Google Meet to be simple, user friendly and it is well equipped for interactive meetings. The video and sound quality of the stream are very good and whilst a basic broadband connection is adequate, the quality is improved along with the quality of the user's broadband connection.

A concise view of the person talking and anything 'presenting only' is created, via Google's live stream. The Digital Team then live broadcasted to the council's corporate YouTube channel, removing any other cameras or messaging. Our pre-configured software connects to the YouTube channel which enables us to keep the stream constant and crops the live video. Our YouTube channel has all the live streams pre-advertised with corporate thumbnails, with the ability for the public to set reminders. We also publicise this on the Council's social media channels.

Using YouTube live to stream the meetings allows us to maximise the amount of integration with our Modern.gov software via the media tab function. We now have the YouTube link to our virtual meetings set up within both the PDF of our agendas and as an embedded live stream within our [agenda pages](#). After a meeting, a recording of the meeting then replaces the live stream in the same location and is again publicised on the Council's social media channels.

Officers can make use of the present your screen feature within Google Meet which allows them to make presentations. We have used this facility to show photographs and plans at our Planning Committee but it can equally be used to share video or sound. We are also looking to use this functionality in order to adapt our interactive Member training programme to online courses in the coming months.

Our first meeting was on 14 April, which was a Licensing Board wherein the applicant fully participated in the meeting through their own Google account. It also involved excluding the press and public, this meant that Members left the Google Meet hosting the officers and the applicant and moved to an entirely separate one supported by the clerk and the Council's legal officer to deliberate. Everyone then rejoined the original Meet for the announcement of the result.

We have also had a Members' Briefing every fortnight since 8 April, with over 45 Councillors attending each one, with another six or seven officers doing presentations, using the technology, without the streaming to YouTube. These have been a great way of keeping members up to date and act as an opportunity for Members to practise and become more confident with the technology.

In addition, we have also held meetings including our Cabinet meeting that discussed our local plan and a planning committee that dealt with a number of significant applications. Again, both of these meetings went very well. We have upcoming meetings scheduled for and we have agendas published for another [Planning Committee](#), a [Local Plan Cabinet Advisory Group](#) and our [Overview and Scrutiny Panel](#).

Members of the public are requested to utilise an existing clause within our constitution that allows them to appoint a person to speak on their behalf and we have a specific officer that attends our meetings in order to read these out for the public. We also ask them to submit these speeches at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

Training Members and allowing time for them to practice is key, we trained all 56 of our members on a one to one basis in the week before our first meeting and continue to offer refresher training for them whenever they like. We have also conducted a number of practice meetings prior to our actual meetings to iron out any issues.

Our advice would be give members as many opportunities to practice as possible - no-one ever got better at doing something on the odd occasion. We often use Google Meet instead

of telephone calls, as this offers Members more opportunities to build their confidence using the technology.

A good script is paramount for your chairman, as is making sure they follow it closely, there is less room to freestyle in a virtual environment. Making sure everyone is aware of the etiquette for meetings is also a key facet, we created one and circulated it members. One small thing that surprised us, is that if you have any Councillors that are partners or spouses or who happen to live together, make sure if they are in the same meeting that they participate from separate rooms, as this prevents very loud feedback from the microphones.

Our current levels of support for meetings are as follows:

- One DSO to act as clerk and as a compere to the meeting (if the chairman isn't confident)
- One DSO to act as technical support for Councillors (this is accessed by calling them up on their work phone. This can be two if the meeting is large)
- One Digital team member (who takes the Google Meet and streams it via the Council's YouTube channel and watches the stream to make sure it works)
- Occasionally the clerk and compere role is also split, depending upon the type of meeting.

We have also spent a lot of time over the last year to try and get our Members to submit their questions in advance of meetings to allow for proper answers to be given at the meeting. We have also started to ask Members to tell us if they intend to attend a meeting they aren't a part of so that we know in advance how many people to expect. Whilst not everyone will heed our request, both these measures help greatly in being able to plan for how a meeting is going to go.

Hope you've found this useful, if you have any questions please feel free to contact us:
Committee@thanet.gov.uk

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager, Thanet District Council.

Fareham Borough Council

Preparatory Work:

We used Microsoft Teams meetings for our individual member decisions but for our Planning Committee we used live events which seemed a sensible approach as Teams was already available in the Council.

To give us time to investigate how a live event works, test connectivity and have test sessions, we deferred our April Planning Committee to the 6th May.

Our ICT team were already exploring the technology used by Members of the Planning Committee and whether these would support a live event, as ipads don't.

Giving consideration to how members of the public would be involved with the meeting in giving their deputations, we were hesitant to look at a different technical solution as we already had Teams running and had concerns that some members of the public might try to disrupt the meeting for their amusement, but needed to engage public participation so under emergency delegated powers, we changed our Deputation Scheme to allow written deputations of 500 words (approximately 3 minutes' speaking). These deputations would be read by the Committee Officer (she had 15 in the end!)

Ward Councillors who had indicated they wished to make representations were invited to the meeting and were asked to keep their microphone and camera switched off for the entire meeting, unless they were speaking.

A Chairman's script was prepared to assist the Chairman with the running order and the Head of Democratic Services gave an introduction as to the meeting procedure and assisted the Chairman where necessary.

The Committee Team were allocated roles and 3 officers were 'producers' for the meeting with one undertaking this as their main role and two as back-up. One officer provided phone support (as below) and the other as Minute taker. This helped individuals to focus on their main roles.

Our office phones which had been diverted to various Committee Officers were transferred to one Officer who acted as point of contact should any Councillors need any technical support and also for members of the public who had queries. This Committee Officer also watched the meeting as a member of the public and was able to give feedback, as well as sending a few reassuring texts throughout.

We advised our Customer Services team about the meeting in case members of the public called the main Council switchboard. This was useful as it meant they could assist with answering questions such as where the link to the meeting was published.

Test, test, test again (and watch it back!) We had several different test scenarios where Officers tested the meeting together (particularly useful to get to grips with screen sharing and running through power-point this way) and then we ran mock meetings as live events. This enabled the link to the mock meeting to be shared afterwards where Members could see how the meeting would look for the public.

These test scenarios identified that when MS Teams ran updates, these disrupted the App and we had the situation where we had Councillors' devices were working well but an update would take place which threw everything out!

The tests also gave us a chance to see that slowing things down a little really helped with the production side which ultimately resulted in a more professional meeting because there was little/no lag due to the producer having to send people live.

Our Hints and Tips guide circulated to Members echoes most of the points already raised via documents available on the ADSO website, and we felt it was important to give Members a steer for things to consider which they may not have done already (happy to share this).

The link to the live event was published on the meeting page on our website (via ModGov) and the recording will be available for 14 days following the meeting.

If we had to adjourn the meeting for either a short period of time or to another day, we prepared power point slides so these could be displayed on the live event for the public to see. Members were briefed that if their cameras failed, as long as they could be heard (and hear), then the meeting would be legal.

We were told that MS Teams Live Events had a 4-hour limit, so things got a little nervous after 3½ hours. Having a 'remote' Committee Officer was really beneficial as she set up another meeting and had this ready to send to Members and publish the link in the event the meeting got cut-off (it didn't). The Head of Democratic Services had advised the meeting of the potential for this technical hitch, so anyone watching would have been aware what was happening.

The Meeting:

All Members and Officers had their cameras and microphones switched off through the meeting, unless they were speaking.

We decided not to engage the 'chat' function in Teams and instead if a Member wanted to speak, they turned their camera on and waved. The 3 committee officers would see this and advise the Chairman, if he hadn't seen this. When invited, Members switched their camera on to confirm they could see and hear the meeting and gave their introductions. The Chairman ran the order of Members as they would usually be seated in the committee room and Declaration of Interest, comments and voting took place in this order with Members answering a rollcall.

We did have one Member whose connectivity dropped out during an item and the Chairman advised the meeting of this and that Member was unable to take part in the debate or vote. He remained 'unconnected' to the meeting until the end of that item.

Learning Points:

Despite all of our extensive planning, 20 minutes before our Planning Committee was due to go live, MS Teams Live Events experienced a UK and Europe wide outage, so despite the

Democratic Service Officer's motto being "Prepare for the worst, hope for the best", we are reliant on technology so some things cannot be prepared for as they are totally out of our control. We dusted ourselves off and tried again (successfully) on 20th May.

Have your Comms team available to put out messages on websites/social media in the event of meeting deferral scenarios.

And finally, thank you to all ADSO members who have shared their experiences on the forum and whose meetings we have watched. Also, a very big thank you to Jess at Crawley BC who gave up some of her valuable time to have an old-fashioned telephone conversation with me to chat through their experiences.

Samantha Wightman
Information & Committee Manager
Fareham Borough Council
swightman@fareham.gov.uk

Lambeth Council

The solution:

Following work undertaken by the Council's Constitutional Working Group in January, the Democratic Services team at Lambeth had already made a good start on a remote council meeting project even before the covid-19 situation. This meant they were in an advantageous position when the regulations changed to permit virtual council meetings.

On 22 April, Lambeth was the first council in the country to hold their AGM online despite the regulations allowing councils to defer and postpone this meeting to a more suitable occasion. In line with the council's covid-19 policy, they sought to continue to operate processes as they would under normal circumstances to allow activities to carry on as much as possible.

The team decided to work with the Council's strategic partner Capita after looking at capacity across Democratic Services. Capita with guidance from the Council, were able to fast-track implementation, design and build bespoke training and also act as "meeting producers" for all virtual meetings.

The solution Lambeth has chosen is Teams Live Events. The team have used previous experiences to help script the flow of meetings to ensure the timings do not overrun or items do not become too time consuming. This has required developing detailed guidance for chairs', and committee members, which has ensured proceedings stay on track. The team also introduced an 'administrative advice line' for the chair separate to the main meeting chat to offer support.

Lambeth has taken the approach of leading virtual meetings through a single person – this being the chair - as it provides this individual with the authority to direct the meeting as would normally be done in usual council meetings. This includes the Chair conducting a pre-meeting briefing.

It's important to note that the ICT team also oversaw a rapid deployment of devices to councillors as Teams Live is not compatible on iPad devices so laptops were rolled out to the appropriate councillors to enable them to participate in the meetings.

As it stands at the start of May, the next stage of this process is to increase public participation. This is likely to be incremental and is dependent on the technology choices available. Capita are liaising with Microsoft to expand functionality while an options paper has been developed. Each option will be thoroughly reviewed and tested before deployment, with the ultimate goal to allow live, and interactive, participation by the public in council meetings.

In addition, the team are looking at how to make voting more efficient as the method currently being used is a roll call approach. An alternative is Microsoft Forms which is an e-voting solution that provides an option for faster voting, especially with a high number of members in attendance e.g. Full Council. The e-voting will be opened at the time announced in the meeting and closed in a set timeframe. Members can vote by either responding to the poll in the chat feed or by being issued a link and supplying their vote. The results can be displayed live so the audience will be aware of the result in real time. There is also a report function to check if any votes are missing or to highlight if votes have to be withdrawn or redone for any reason. Microsoft Forms is already a product in Lambeth's Microsoft subscription so will not result in any additional costs.

How will you sustain the new approach?

The team will continue to test and work with their supplier to ensure they are addressing the most pressing challenges for the remote council meeting project. This will include providing ongoing support and guidance for councillors, and officers, to enable all participants to become comfortable and confident when using this new technology for all types of committee meetings.

The team will also explore if hybrid meetings are implementable post covid-19 and are open to the new possibilities this presents. The team are conscious that the resource required to operate these types of meetings is high with 4 members of staff required to do what 1 person would do in normal circumstances. However, if this works out in the long term and the team overcomes its challenges this could become the new BAU.

Lessons Learnt:

- Empowering the chair of the meeting is key – this gives the individual more confidence to carry out this role effectively, invest the time and training to ensure they are comfortable in that position of authority as chairing can be distorted on video conferencing.
- Early identification of IT and Democratic Services capability is also important.
- In the test runs the team found out that if the quality of the call was low that it was often because too many participants on the call had their camera enabled. It is important to keep this low on big calls to avoid unnecessary quality dips. To avoid other bandwidth related issues, where possible connect directly to your hub (with a cable) and ensure families / households are not downloading / streaming on other devices during the meeting.
- It is always worth ensuring that all members are briefed on items and reminded on code of conduct to ensure that online behaviour via the video conferencing platform is upheld.

Contact:

Wayne Chandai, Head of the Chief Executive's Office and Democratic Services Manager,
WChandai@lambeth.gov.uk