

## REPORT TO BANFF AND BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE – 30 AUGUST 2022

### REVIEW OF HYBRID MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 This report provides the Committee with an update on the hybrid testing in the Faithlie Centre undertaken by officers using existing equipment. Despite extensive testing a hybrid solution has not been identified that would enable a successful hybrid meeting therefore officers are proposing that online meetings remain the default until such time as the barriers presented by existing equipment can be overcome. In accordance with the decision of Full Council on 23 September 2021, where the Council agreed a Choice Based Blended Model for Fully Virtual and Hybrid Meetings, fully in person meetings would only take place where all participants have chosen to attend in person, creating an in person meeting by default, and meeting venues must have a functioning hybrid option for any online attendees.

1.2 The report also seeks feedback from the Committee on future arrangements for hybrid meetings, and in particular preferred locations, equipment and livestreaming, with a view to informing the report to Full Council on 29 September on the wider review of hybrid meeting arrangements.

#### 1.3 The Committee is recommended to:

1.3.1 **note the outcome of the hybrid testing in the Faithlie Centre;**

1.3.2 **note that there is not currently a venue in the Banff and Buchan area that can fully support a hybrid meeting; and**

1.3.3 **consider and comment on the future arrangements for hybrid meetings, and in particular the issues outlined in paragraph 3.5 of the report.**

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 The hybrid meeting arrangements for Committee meetings have previously been considered by Full Council, most recently at its meeting on 29 April 2022 ([Item 11](#)).

2.2 On 23 September 2021, as the Covid-19 restrictions began to ease, Full Council considered options for hybrid meeting arrangements and agreed to transition to a Choice Based Blended Model for fully virtual and hybrid meetings. In practice, this means that any meeting that is held in a venue must have a hybrid option for virtual attendees. The Model does not allow for fully in person meetings, unless all participants choose to attend in person, thereby creating an in person meeting by default. On 29 April 2022 Full Council agreed to receive an options appraisal for hybrid upgrades across

Council venues and agreed that Committees could meantime agree meeting formats, including the option for hybrid where possible using existing equipment.

- 2.3 This Committee expressed a wish to meet in a hybrid format and instructed officers to report back with the outcome of testing using existing equipment. This report provides an update following testing undertaken over the summer recess.
- 2.3 Full Council will receive the options appraisal at its meeting on 29 September 2022. Any feedback from the Committee will be provided to the meeting.

### **3 Discussion**

#### **3.1 Hybrid Testing update**

Testing was undertaken in the Chamber at the Faithlie Centre using existing mics and a Surface Hub. Regrettably the audio quality was not acceptable, with many online attendees being unable to hear the attendees in the room. Efforts have been made to identify whether the issues can be resolved, by looking at a similar setup to that currently in Committee Room 5 in Woodhill House, but these have so far proved unsuccessful. The recording of the meeting was therefore of poor quality.

- 3.2 Other venues in the area have been considered, however the same hybrid setup as was trialled in the Faithlie Centre would also have to be used and therefore it would still not be possible with existing equipment to achieve the necessary audio quality that would be required for a fully accessible hybrid meeting.
- 3.3 Accordingly it is the view of officers that the limitations of the existing equipment means that there are presently no available venues in the area that could successfully support a hybrid meeting. Officers will continue to explore interim solutions but meantime it is suggested that online meetings will require to remain as the default, if the Committee is keen to meet in the Banff and Buchan area.

#### **Future Hybrid Arrangements**

- 3.4 Full Council will consider options for hybrid upgrades at its meeting on 29 September 2022. Consultation will be undertaken with Area Committees in advance of that report, seeking feedback as to the Committee's preference for meeting arrangements moving forward.
- 3.5 In particular the Committee is asked to comment on:-
- (i) *What venues should be in scope for any hybrid upgrades in the Banff and Buchan area* – at present the venues considered by officers include the Fraserburgh Community and Sports Hall, the County Hall in Banff, the Deveron Centre and the Faithlie Centre;

- (ii) *What equipment may be required* - Carrying out an extensive upgrade to a meeting room could involve the installation of cameras with tracking ability, microphones, speakers and associated audio and visual equipment including screens. However given that the current challenges faced relate to the audio quality of the meeting, as opposed to the visual quality, it may be possible to install an audio solution to address the issues currently faced, and not include the installation of additional cameras to reduce costs.
- (iii) *Whether Committee meetings should continue to be livestreamed* – the livestreaming of Area Committee meetings commenced during lockdown, as a legal requirement to ensure public access in the absence of meeting venues. Prior to Covid only meetings of Full Council and Policy Committees were livestreamed.

3.6 Soft market testing is currently ongoing to identify the potential costs of any room upgrades and these will be reported to Full Council in September for consideration.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1 This report supports delivery of the Council's Six Priorities by ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for Committee meetings, and the underlying principle of right people, right places, right time.

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Infrastructure Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economy & Enterprise Estate Modernisation

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

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

- 4.3 There are no direct staffing or financial implications directly arising from this report. Full Council will be asked to consider the financial implications of any proposed upgrades at its meeting in September.
- 4.4 An Integrated Impact Assessment process is not required as this report seeks feedback from the Committee on hybrid meeting arrangements and no substantive decisions will arise from the report.
- 4.7 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- ACORP004 – Business and Organisational Transformation
  - ACORP006 – Reputational Management
  - ACORP009 – Operational Risk Management (including health and safety)

## **5 Scheme of Governance**

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report \*\*\*\*complete the sentence with either:- “and had no comments to make” OR “and their comments are incorporated within the report “AND\*\*\*\*\* and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section B.1.2 of the [List of Committee Powers in Part 2A](#) of the Scheme of Governance as it seeks comments from the Committee on matters which impact the Banff and Buchan area.

### **Ritchie Johnson, Director of Business Services**

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Date 17 August 2022