

To: Council

On: 24 June 2021

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Governance Arrangements and Appointment of the Chair of the Villages Local Partnership

1. Summary

1.1 The main purpose of this report is to set out arrangements for the next cycle of Board meetings starting in mid-August 2021 up to and including the full Council meeting on 30 September 2021.

1.2 The report outlines arrangements for meetings going forward taking into account a number of key issues, including:

- the announcement by the First Minister on 22 June 2021 which means that although Renfrewshire will remain at Level 2 of the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework it is proposed that this will change to Level 0 on 19 July 2021;
- the Scottish Government's review of physical distancing which means that current social distancing measures for meetings indoors will change from 2 metres to 1 metre on 19 July 2021 and could be removed completely on 9 August 2021; and
- the availability of the Public-i system which enables hybrid meetings to take place.

1.3 The arrangements set out in the report aim to allow maximum flexibility to enable meetings to take place in the most appropriate and safe way depending on the guidance that is in force at the time the meetings are due to take place.

- 1.4 The report also covers the appointment of the Chair of the Villages Local Partnership to replace Cllr Don, who has resigned from that role.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Council is asked to:
- a) note that the installation of the Public-i system has been completed;
 - b) approve the arrangements for the next cycle of Council and Board meetings set out in section 4 of this report which include the option to use hybrid meetings involving the return of elected members to attending meetings in Renfrewshire House should Scottish Government Guidance allow it;
 - c) Authorise the Head of Corporate Governance to put in place protocols for the proper conduct of hybrid meetings in consultation with the Group and Party leaders.
 - d) agree the application of Procedural Standing Orders to hybrid meetings as set out in paragraph 4.7.
 - e) note that a further report on the arrangements for future meetings of Council and Boards will be brought to the next Council meeting on 30 September 2021;
 - f) elect an elected member from the membership of the Villages Local Partnership to replace Cllr Don as the Chair of that Local Partnership.
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3. Background

- 3.1 Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Council has had in place emergency governance arrangements to enable oversight of its functions and services in circumstances where it has not been possible for meetings of the Council's Boards to take place safely in Renfrewshire House.
- 3.2 These arrangements initially involved weekly meetings of the Emergencies Board, held remotely, extended emergency delegations to the chief executive and the cancellation of all Council and Board meetings up to the Council meeting on 25 June 2020.
- 3.3 Board meetings recommenced in August 2020 and several full cycles of Board meetings have now taken place with remote access for members. These arrangements had to be continued due to resurgence of the Coronavirus over the Winter and the imposition of further lockdown restrictions.

- 3.4 The Council purchased a system from Public-i to enable the Council to take advantage of the eventual easing of Covid-19 related restrictions that would allow hybrid Board meetings to take place with some elected members and officers being present in the Council Chamber with others joining the meeting remotely. The system also has the benefit of allowing meetings to be broadcast live.
- 3.5 On 13 April 2021 the First Minister announced plans to accelerate the easing of lockdown and provided an indicative timetable for this to happen. That timetable provided for the whole of Scotland to be in level 3 from 26 April 2021 with a move to Level 2 on 17 May 2021, to Level 1 in early June and to Level 0 by the end of June 2021. That timetable provided sufficient optimism to plan for the re-introduction of meetings in the Council Chamber for the August/September 2021 cycle of meetings either fully in person or by hybrid meeting using the Public-i system.
- 3.6 Renfrewshire has remained in Level 2 of the Scottish Government's Framework since 17 May 2021. The First Minister's announcement on 22 June 2021 indicated that this would remain unchanged until 19 July 2021. However, from that date, Renfrewshire like all other Scottish local authority areas will move to Level 0. The plan is then to remove all legal restrictions relating to Covid-19 on 9 August 2021, which is in advance of the start of the next cycle of Board meetings on 17 August 2021.
- 3.7 The current guidance which applies to office-based working where Level 2 protection levels are in place is that you should only travel to work if you cannot do your job from home. We have demonstrated that it is possible to successfully hold meetings remotely on the Teams platform. The first level where a limited and phased return to offices is possible is Level 0. As indicated earlier, it is planned that Renfrewshire will move to Level 0 on 19 July 2021. The First Minister also announced that the Scottish Government would publish a timeline for a phased return to office working.
- 3.8 The main obstacle to a full return to Board meetings where everyone is present in the Chamber is the guidance in relation to physical distancing in the workplace. That current guidance requires that the participants in any meetings in Renfrewshire House would have to remain 2 metres apart at all times. In the Council Chamber there are 18 seats with microphones that could be occupied taking into account the rule on 2 metres social distancing. In addition there are 5 seats in the public seating area that could be used during meetings although arrangements would have to be made to give them access to a microphone if they are asked to speak. The review of physical distancing was published by the Scottish Government on 22 June 2021. It provides for a move to a general physical distancing requirement for indoor activities of 1 metre on 19 July 2021 and then the removal of all physical distancing requirements on 9 August 2021. These are expressly stated to be indicative dates which are conditional on the review of the epidemic ahead of those dates and the removal of all physical distancing requirements is conditional on over 40s being fully vaccinated by 9 August 2021.

- 3.9 All of the Policy Boards have 15 members except the Education and Children's Services Policy Board which has 20 members including 3 religious representatives. The Leadership Board also has 15 members and the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board has 9 members.

The Regulatory Functions Board has 10 members but a further consideration for the re-introduction of physical meetings of that Board is that arrangements would also have to be made to allow access for those applicants appearing in front of the Board.

- 3.10 Officers will assess the capacity of the Council Chamber to calculate how many people can be safely accommodated for the next cycle of meetings taking into account the First Minister's statement on 22 June 2021 and the publication of the review of physical distancing.

4. Arrangements for Future Cycles of Meetings

- 4.1 The dates for the next cycle of meetings are shown on the attached appendix.
- 4.2 The installation of the Public-i system creates the possibility of holding hybrid Board meetings in Renfrewshire House with at least some elected members and officers being present with others accessing the meeting remotely and in recent weeks, officers have been making plans for the return of meetings in the Council Chamber in Renfrewshire House. However, those plans have always been subject to meetings being held in accordance with government guidance in force at the relevant time.
- 4.3 Committee Services staff have been trained on the use of the system. Elected members and senior officers will be given the opportunity to receive training at a suitable time over the summer. This means that the system will be available for use at formal Board meetings beginning in August 2021, should holding meetings this way be possible in terms of the Scottish Government's Strategic Framework and relevant guidance.
- 4.4 The First Minister's statement on 22 June 2021 and the publication of the Scottish Government's review of physical distancing have confirmed that the Council can continue with preparations for a return to meetings in the Council Chamber with at least some elected members and officers being physically present.
- 4.5 Although the First Minister has outlined a clear framework for the removal of Covid-19 related restrictions which would allow the return of meetings to the Council Chamber, it was made clear in the announcement that whether these changes were implemented on the dates announced would be contingent on meeting vaccination milestones and the revised strategic aim of alleviating the harms of the virus.

The pace at which the lifting of restrictions will happen will be dependent on the data available at the scheduled review points. The next review point is 19 July 2021 although the position will be confirmed one week in advance, on 12 July 2021. Until the position is absolutely clear, which will not be known until later in the summer, it is proposed that the option remains for the next cycle of meetings to take place using the Teams platform and that the arrangements as previously approved by Council for the last few cycles of meetings by remote access remain in place. Should there be sufficient clarification on the removal of restrictions ahead of the commencement of Board meetings in August 2021, the intention is that meetings will take place in the Council Chamber either with all elected members and officers present or by hybrid meetings using the Public-i system.

- 4.6 The Head of Corporate Governance should be asked to identify whether any formal protocols require to be developed to ensure the efficient management and conduct of hybrid meetings. Any protocols that are drafted should be prepared in consultation with all the Group and Party Leaders.
- 4.7 For the purposes of the Council's Procedural Standing Orders, where a hybrid meeting is being held, any elected member accessing the meeting remotely while other elected members are physically present at the meeting, will be regarded as being present at the meeting and they will have the same rights and obligations as the members physically present at the meeting in terms of the Procedural Standing Orders, including the right to speak to any item on the agenda and to take part in any vote.
- 4.8 Where the Public-i system is used, the meetings will be webcast live. This will enable the Council to meet its commitment prior to the pandemic for all Council and Board meetings to be broadcast live.
- 4.9 The arrangements for future Council and Board meetings will continue to be reviewed in light of Scottish Government guidance and will be the subject of a further report to Council on 30 September 2021.

5 Election of Chair of the Villages Local Partnership

- 5.1 Cllr Don has submitted her resignation as Chair of the Villages Local Partnership.
- 5.2 Standing Order 3.4 of the Standing Orders for Local Partnerships provides that where a vacancy arises in the office of Chair, an election to fill the vacancy shall be held as soon as practicable at a meeting of Renfrewshire Council.
- 5.3 Therefore, the Council is invited to elect an elected member from those who are members of the Villages Local Partnership to the office of Chair of the Local Partnership.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – None
4. **Legal** – As detailed in the report.
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – The report includes proposals to begin using a new system from Public-i which enables meetings to be undertaken with some members being present in the Chamber with others accessing remotely and also for those meetings to be broadcast live.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – The proposals in the report recognise that it is formal Council and Board meetings will only take place in Renfrewshire House when it is safe to do so. The report also acknowledges that where meetings can take place in Renfrewshire House, the number of attendees will be limited by the social distancing restrictions that are in place at the relevant time.
9. **Risk** - None
10. **Privacy Impact** – The report refers to the introduction of live broadcasting of Council and Board meetings.
11. **Cosla Policy Position** - None
12. **Climate Risk** - None

List of Background Papers –

- 1) Minute of the Council meeting on 25 June 2020.

Author: Ken Graham, Head of Corporate Governance.

July 2021 recess						
August 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 public holiday	3 recess	4 recess	5 recess	6 recess	7
8	9 recess	10 recess	11 recess	12 recess	13 recess	14
15 - 1/1	16	17 – 1pm: Communities, Housing, & Planning 3pm – Police, Fire & Rescue Scrutiny	18 – 10am: Regulatory Functions	19 – 1pm: Education & Children’s Services	20	21
22 - 2/1	23 – 10am: Audit, Risk & Scrutiny	24	25 – 1pm: Infrastructure, Land & Environment	26 – 9.30am: Appeals	27	28
29 – 3/1	30 – 2pm: Petitions	31 – 2pm: Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff				
September 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 – 2pm: Finance, Resources & Customer Services	2 – 10am: Regulatory Functions	3	4
5 – 4/1	6	7 – 2pm: Local Review Body	8	9	10	11
12 – 5/1	13	14	15 – 1pm: Leadership	16	17	18
19 – 6/1	20	21	22	23	24 Public Holiday	25
26 – 7/1	27 Public Holiday	28	29	30 – 9.30am: Council		