

Report on	Video Conferencing Options for Council and Committee Meetings
Date of Meeting	March 2021
Reporting Officer	Barry O'Hagan
Contact Officer	same

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To advise members of the software options for Video conferencing facilities for Council and Committees meetings remotely attending meetings.
2.0	Background
2.1	The council are currently operating Cisco WebEx remote meeting organised and distributed by Democratic Services and supported By ICT technical staff to stream feeds to YouTube and resolve any technical issues on the fly.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The Council currently has a number of solutions within it application support catalogue that are afforded to staff and members as part the contracted services provided by IT .</p> <p>In summary they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Teams • Cisco WebEx • Zoom <p>Council currently deploy Teams as part of its Office 365 services for all staff with an email address as it's licensed within subscription .Teams has been an invaluable tool that works well internally for staff at home and in the office. It is also used for external inter-council meeting with other staff and Councillors with reasonable success and many staff becoming well practiced and dependant in its use.</p> <p>Cisco WebEx has been deployed to facilitate Council meetings to date with the Council holding 8 licenses across key staff to organise meeting for each directorate costing £1451 per annum. Council meetings have become stable and reliable with Councillors and staff becoming acclimatised and familiar with its operation. However some participants with marginal bandwidth have experienced mixed results and frequently cannot participate fully in a fully immersive video experience.</p> <p>Zoom has been purchased in Autumn 2020 to facilitate Arts and Cultural hosted events from remote artist and classes across Art centres and recently Leisure Zoom classes as a trial . The current subscription costs £599 for 5 licenses. A subscription to accommodate all the service required by Council would be a SME license of 10 users at £1599 approx. per annum.</p>

These three solutions are in the top upper right quadrant of video conferencing solutions as assessed by Gartner in 2020(see table 1).

Table 1



There is currently no need to extend or consider a wider number of video conferencing solutions provided by the IT services. All three solution meet all of the Council current requirements but in very different ways and features within their interfaces.

In assessing and choosing a solution there are a number of quantitative and qualitative intangibles to look at as part of making a decision going forward.

User Experience (UX) : Zoom has the simplest one touch feature favoured by many reviewers requiring little to no end-user training as its clean simple interface allows for easy access to join or start meetings across all devices. This caters well to organizations with a multiple device formats allowing everyone to enjoy all features across all devices domestically or within a business .

Cost: Cost are fairly insignificant with little difference for both WebEx and Zoom , both less than £2k for either solution per annum. Microsoft teams is difficult to assess in terms of cost as this application is bundled with the O365 license bought with the Enterprise agreement from Microsoft.

Security and features are broadly similar across the three solutions, all three solutions are highly secure, hosted on reliable data centres and offer excellent service level availability and support for enterprise use.

	<p>Performance: The availability of all 3 solutions is in the order of 99.99% in terms of availability of their hosted platform. The availability of independent data on which system perform best in low bandwidth is limited. Members have as much if not more experience across multiple platforms and their performance, that can be as good a barometer/score as much of the commentary and reviews(often sponsored) on the web. It is unlikely that any solution will be the panacea for all low bandwidth participants and meeting situations.</p> <p>Invariably the choice any solution is one of personal preference and anecdotally some members have expressed a preference for Zoom based on their experience through widespread use of the free offering within its platform for up to 40mins across political party meetings, other working groups, community and sports clubs use of the platform for vital communication throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>There are fundamentally 3 choices available to members as presented above</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To continue to use WebEx. 2. To trial Microsoft Teams 3. To trial Zoom <p>Any choice can be reviewed quickly and systems can be reverted to current stated if upon review performance of any trial falls short of the current experience. Democratic service supported by IT can trial options 2 or 3 above as the remote meeting platform for committee and Council. Some learning and support will be required. Before go live it would be recommended that short simulations of committee meetings would form part of the familiarisation, testing and introduction before going live to real committee meetings. Member participation would be vital to minimise reputational risk and maintain secure governance processes across Council meetings.</p> <p>Following a suitable trial of up to 2 months(e.g. 2 cycle of committee meetings) officers can collate and analyse members feedback from the trial and present back to committee to evaluate and confirm the choice of solution for at least one year.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial: The system of choice can be accommodated within existing revenue budget for IT.</p> <p>Human: Further training on video conferencing is to be programmed for members by Organisational Development Directorate and coordinated by the learning and Development manager.</p> <p>Risk Management: The potential change to an alternative video conference will require some testing to erode real time disruptions to committee and council meetings and minimise risk.</p>
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments :N/A
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: n/a
	Rural Needs Implications: n/a

5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Council consider the choices presented and determine the preferred approach from the options presented.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	None