

<b>Report on</b>	Ability to hold Remote/Hybrid Meetings - Update
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> April 2022
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Claire McNally, Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Finance)
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Claire McNally, Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Finance) and/or Philip Moffett, Assistant Director (Org Development, Strategy and Performance)

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update members on legislation that was passed which enables the Council to continue to hold remote/hybrid meetings until 24 September 2022.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, legislative provision was made to allow district councils in Northern Ireland to hold meetings remotely or in a hybrid format during the pandemic. The Council has availed of this opportunity and has been holding hybrid council and committee meetings since May 2020 under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.
2.2	This legislation came into operation on 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2020 and applied up until 7 <sup>th</sup> May 2021. The NI Assembly subsequently passed the <i>Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act 2021</i> which extended the regulations until 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2022.
2.3	The Department for Communities undertook a <i>Call for Evidence</i> by way of consultation with the local government sector on whether the ability to extend provision for remote/hybrid council and committee meetings be extended and be made on a permanent basis. In January 2022 a report was taken through Council in relation to a response to this consultation.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The conducting of council and committee hybrid meetings has permitted the council to progressively move from a position where it initially transacted essential business only to now transacting all business required to be considered. All meetings to date have been in a hybrid form where some members/officers are within the Chamber whilst others have joined remotely over our chosen virtual platform.
3.2	

3.3	Hybrid virtual meetings have become the ‘new norm’ in conducting our council and committee business but remote meetings and remote attendance by members will only be permissible with an appropriate legislative basis.
3.4	<p>In light of the consultation exercise and in the absence of an amendment to the primary legislation (i.e., the Local Government (NI) Act 2014), further interim legislation was passed which extends the period of time for which councils can hold remote/hybrid meetings until 24 September 2022. This legislation is the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) Order (NI) 2022 and was approved by the Assembly on 21 March.</p> <p>It remains to be seen whether legislation will be passed to allow the current remote/hybrid arrangements for committee and council meetings to continue on a more permanent basis.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial: not applicable
	Human: not applicable
	Risk Management: If further legislation is not introduced the legislative basis to hold remote/hybrid meetings will expire on 24 September 2022.
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: not applicable
	Rural Needs Implications: not applicable
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	That Members note the contents of this report .
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
6.1	None