

Report on	Standing Orders for Council – Amendment
Date of Meeting	Thursday 23 rd September 2021
Reporting Officer	Adrian McCreesh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer	P Moffett, Head of Democratic Services

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 consider an amendment to the Standing Orders of Council following the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 coming into operation on 27 th August 2021.
2.0	Background
2.1	In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council amended its Standing Orders in May 2020 enabling it to transact its business by virtual means if required, with the inclusion of an interim Standing Order on remote meetings and an associated protocol. The ability to do this was under the Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of District Council Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2020 under powers contained in Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.
2.2.	The Meeting Regulations ceased to have effect on 6 th May 2021 because of Section 78(3) of the Coronavirus Act 2020. This expiration date was contained within our Standing Orders in line with the Regulations, applying to all UK council/local authority meetings.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Department for Communities agreed that legislative provision should be extended for the 11 councils in Northern Ireland to hold remote meetings should they wish, in the acknowledgement that councils will be unlikely to resume full public meetings for some time.
3.2	The required legislation in the form of the <i>Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021</i> passed the NI Assembly in July and came into operation on 27 th August 2021. Although there has been a lapse from 6 th May until the new Regulations coming into operation on 27 th August, the Council did take proportionate steps to ensure the continuity of the transaction of business.
3.3	The council agreed at its April Council meeting that it would continue with the meetings in the current format and any decisions made at meetings from 7 th May

	<p>until the new remote meeting Regulations were in place be implemented under the decision and direction of the Chief Executive under 3.3 of the Council's Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers, where it states:</p> <p>3.3 Emergencies and Cases of Urgency</p> <p><i>'Taking such measures, including incurring expenditure, as may be required in emergency situations or cases of urgency, subject to advising the appropriate Chair and reporting to the appropriate committee as soon as possible</i></p>
3.4	Amendments have now been made to the interim Standing Orders on remote meetings as contained within our Standing Orders. This provision for remote meetings will however cease on the expiration of the relevant Coronavirus Act 2020 provisions on 25 th March 2022.
3.5	The legislation recently passed by the NI Assembly does however allow for the Department for Communities to make Regulations to allow councils to hold remote meetings on a permanent basis beyond the expiration date of 25 th March 2022. These Regulations need to be brought forward by the Department and approved by a resolution of the Assembly. Whilst the Department has been given the scope to do this it has not been determined that this will be done.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: not applicable
	Human: not applicable
	Risk Management: Approval is required to ensure the integrity of Council and Committee decisions.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: not applicable
	Rural Needs Implications: not applicable
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	That Council considers and approves the amendment to the Standing Orders with specific reference to the Local Government (Meetings And Performance) Act (NI) 2021 on remote meetings.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Standing Orders of Mid Ulster District Council