

Report on	Standing Orders for Council - Amendment
Date of Meeting	Thursday 28 th April 2022
Reporting Officer	Adrian McCreesh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer	P Moffett, Assistant Director (Org. Dev, Strategy and Performance) C McNally, Assistant Director (Corporate Services and Finance)

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To consider an amendment to the Standing Orders of Council following the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) Order (NI) 2022 being approved by the Assembly on 21 March 2022.
1.2	That discussion on same stand adjourned until the next ordinary meeting of the Council, in line with Standing Order 30.2 (Amendment).
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 and local authority meetings.
2.3	Legislation “extending” the ability to hold remote meetings in the form of the <i>Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021</i> (“the 2021 Act”) came into operation on 27 th August 2021. Following the lapse of legislative authority from 6 th May 2021 until the new Regulations came into operation on 27 th August 2021 the Council took proportionate steps to ensure continuity in the transaction of business.
2.4	Amendments were made in September 2021 to the interim Sanding Orders on remote meetings as contained within our Standing Orders. However, this provision

	allowing for remote meetings ceased on the expiration of the relevant Coronavirus Act 2020 provisions on 25 th March 2022.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The 2021 Act allows 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.
3.2	Earlier this year, the Department for Communities undertook a <i>Call for Evidence</i> by way of consultation on whether the ability to extend provision for remote/hybrid council and committee meetings be extended and made on a permanent basis.
3.3	In-light of this 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 st March.
3.4	It remains to be seen whether legislation will be passed to allow the current remote/hybrid arrangements for meetings to continue on a permanent basis. If legislation is passed by the NI Assembly, further changes to the Council's Standing Orders are likely to be proposed.
3.5	This report is recommending a change to the Standing Orders regarding Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules to allow them to continue to apply past 25 March 2022 reflecting the legislative extension referred to at 3.3 above.
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 proper administration in relation to the conduct of Council and Committee meetings that are held wholly or partially by remote means.
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 regarding Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules as attached and highlighted in Appendix 6.1. That when proposed and seconded the matter stand adjourned without discussion to the next meeting of Council, in line with Standing Order 30.2 (Amendment).
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Amendment to Standing Orders of Mid Ulster District Council – Extract