

REPORT OF BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AND IT MANAGER

SUBJECT:
COMMITTEE MEETING FORMAT OPTIONS POST COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Purpose of Report

To set out future meeting format options for Committee Meetings once Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted and to seek the views of Members.

Introduction/Background

It is generally accepted that video conferencing as a meeting platform delivers many benefits which include increased productivity, time saving, effective collaboration and supports a low carbon economy through reduction in travel. The advantage of video conferencing is the ability to facilitate all of those benefits without requiring travel for face-to-face communication.

Pre-Pandemic, the common platform for delivering a video conference capability was through a dedicated video conferencing room system comprising of a video camera, microphone, speaker and screen which, utilised with a video conferencing software solution, would enable a group of people to meet with other groups of people in other locations.

Since the Pandemic there has been a complete shift to personal video conferencing via the desktop since the majority of people are working remotely and adhering to social distancing guidelines.

As and when restrictions are eased, it is likely that, for the most part, video conferencing will continue on the desktop platform.

For the Authority however there is one scenario in particular (Committee Meetings) for which there may be a desire to revert in part to meetings undertaken by a % of attendees located in a room and the remaining % joining remotely – this is known as a hybrid scenario.

Looking ahead, a decision is needed as to how Authority Committee meetings will be held once restrictions have been lifted. Should a hybrid scenario be required, time is of the essence as this option will require planning and investment.

Comparisons

A poll of the other National Parks indicate they are all at the very early contemplation stage. There appears to be general appetite to maintain the flexibility of remote working post restrictions and, coupled with the related benefits of carbon reduction and increased productivity, a hybrid solution (facilities/funding permitting) is likely to be desirable across the parks. To check whether or not this is a National Park specific view, a further engagement with Qualifications Wales confirmed a wider desire to provide a hybrid solutions for meetings.

Options

#	Option	Option Description	Financial Implication
1	Video Conference Only	Welsh Government regulations permitting, all committee meetings will continue to be held via video conference with all attendees joining remotely.	Provision of Video Conference Software ¹
2	Physical Attendance Only	All committee meetings will revert to the pre-pandemic platform, i.e., physical attendance in one location (Green Room).	None
3	Hybrid Scenario - Video Conference or Physical Attendance	Committee meetings will be held on a hybrid platform allowing members, officers and the public to attend in person or join the meeting via video conference.	Provision of Video Conference Software ¹ , Video Conference Room Equipment ² , provision and outfitting of a suitable video conference room ³ .

Notes

1. Video Conference Software. The current National Parks wide licence agreement with Lifesize ends in August 2021. The majority of National Parks have or are deploying Microsoft 365 which includes a video conferencing solution within Teams. It is likely that the cost increase for a new deal with Lifesize for the small number of National Parks who have not yet moved to 365 will be significant and therefore alternative options are being sought.
2. Video Conference Room Equipment. Typical equipment required to facilitate a video conference for large meetings include a camera, speakers, microphone pods, connection hubs and display screens.
3. Video Conference Room Facility. The Green Room is essentially a porta cabin and as such, primarily due to the audio challenges precipitated by weather events, is not suitable for use as a Video Conference Room. An alternative

location would need to be identified, possible alternatives are listed below but are not exhaustive. Please note, detailed feasibility studies for any of the options below have not been undertaken to date.

- a. Re-purpose and fit out the Planning Office and provide public access through the old entrance from the Enforcement Office.
- b. Fit out the St. Davids Meeting room at Oriol y Parc and reserve for committee meetings.
- c. Investigate option to utilise Pembrokeshire County Council conference facilities.
- d. Hire an external video conference facility (note: searches for a suitable facility within Pembrokeshire have not to date been successful).

Financial considerations

1. Video Conference Software. As highlighted in the notes, the current National Park wide contract with Lifesize ends in August 2021. Those National Parks who are not moving to Microsoft 365 are meeting in March to discuss Video Conference software platforms and will seek to secure costings. Note – whichever video conference option the Authority selects for Committee Meetings, the need for an Authority wide video conference software solution will remain.
2. Video Conference Room Equipment. Whilst the Video Software Platform may have a bearing on the type of equipment required, essentially the basic requirements list will include a Camera, Speakers, Microphone pods, connection hubs and a large display screen. Compatibility with the mainstream video conference software packages will be a must. The approximate cost of the hardware will be £8K. There is money available in the Sustainable Landscapes Fund, however the availability is subject to time constraints.
3. Video Conference Room Facility. The cost and type of cost would depend on the option selected. For an external facility the cost would be a room hire and video conferencing charge, estimates would be required for internal options and the investment requirement dependent on the extent of fit out that would be required, for example, it is likely that the Planning Room option would be more expensive than OYP.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Whether as a fully virtual meeting or to facilitate a hybrid scenario, utilising a video conference platform will continue to have a positive impact on carbon footprint reduction as a result of reduced travel.

Welsh Language considerations

Members of the public have always, and will continue to have, the ability to address the Committee through the medium of Welsh (irrespective of the platform upon which the meeting is held), with appropriate notice as set out in the guidance.

Wider implications

The format options for Committee Meetings have been presented to the Leadership Team for consideration, a recommendation was received to discuss with and seek views from Members.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are asked to review the report and comment on the Committee Meeting Platform options presented.

(For further information, please contact Debbi Church, Business Improvement and IT Manager debbic@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)

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