



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

to
COUNCIL
24 FEBRUARY 2022

COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND FUTURE OPTIONS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider ongoing arrangements for Committee Meetings in light of changes to government restrictions.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That Members review and note the updated risk assessment set out at **APPENDIX A** for physical meetings;
- (ii) That Members extend the emergency decision for physical public meeting attendance, subject to capacity numbers as outlined in **APPENDIX A**;
- (iii) That Members review other mitigations listed and confirm which of those set out in 3.3 they would like to procedurally continue upon consideration of current guidance;
- (iv) That Members confirm continuation of YouTube live streaming of meetings past the removal of Covid restrictions in light of the information set out at section 3.8 of the report;
- (v) That for non-regulatory matters, to allow those members unable to physically attend, to join remotely to ask questions/engage in debate, subject to Chairman approval, (noting that they would not be able to vote).

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Members last considered covid arrangements for meetings on 2 September 2021 based on the legislation at the time.

- 3.2 Mitigations were put in place based on our duty of care for staff, members and residents that would be involved in meetings and legislation that has since been updated.

- 3.3 On 2 September 2021, Members voted to drop social distancing and move back to the chamber for meetings with the mitigations set out in the table below in place:

Measure previously agreed	Current legislation/ guidance
Windows open for ventilation	The guidance- How to stay safe and help to prevent the spread highlights that ' <i>the more fresh air you let into your home or other</i>

Measure previously agreed	Current legislation/ guidance
	<i>enclosed spaces, the less likely a person is to inhale infectious particles’.</i>
One way system for movement around building	The guidance does not refer to one-way systems other than in the context of “still acknowledging covid risks and limiting contacts with each other”.
Registration forms with mask and Lateral Flow Test (LFT) registration before the meeting for Members and Staff	Removal of the legal requirement to wear masks and take Lateral Flow Tests for large gatherings now means masks and tests are guidance only and Members can decide whether to continue this practice, but it could not be compulsory.
Public to watch via YouTube unless participating	<p>Whilst online participation and streaming was considered the best way to deliver Section 100A of the Local Government Act to allow public access to meetings, the need to enable physical attendance is now once again possible and appropriate.</p> <p>However, the Risk Assessment has reviewed physical capacity numbers based on general crowd management and space. This recommends six in the Council chamber and 25 in the Northey room as overflow.</p>
Council to purchase FFP3 (Filtering Face Pieces 3) masks to be available to those in meetings	<p>Guidance now reads:</p> <p><i>“You will not be required to wear a face covering, including in communal areas of schools, but the government suggests you continue to wear one in crowded and indoor spaces where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet”.</i></p>

- 3.4 Additionally, on 23 December 2021, under emergency powers our Constitution was updated to allow for remote public participation via Microsoft (MS) Teams. Participation requires a registration form and MS Teams is our current default method, and once mitigations are removed it will be an option for in person or via MS Teams
- 3.5 From 27 January 2022 the government removed legal restrictions associated with covid, and this is replaced with guidance or ‘suggestions’ for managing covid, as highlighted against each of our original mitigations in the table at 3.3.
- 3.6 A review of the risks around physical meetings in light of the change to restrictions has taken place and identified risks and mitigations are set out at the Risk Assessment in **APPENDIX A**.
- 3.7 On 25 January 2022, the Corporate Leadership Team made a temporary decision to allow physical public access to meetings in light of the change in restrictions. This is because section 100A of the Local Government Act provides for public access, and there are no legislative barriers to allowing this physically now.
- 3.8 Public access is also provided to all our meetings via YouTube at <https://www.maldon.gov.uk/watchlive> and has seen increased engagement with our meetings. We consider this is also more accessible for those who are unable to travel, watch live at the time of the meeting, or have childcare responsibilities etc – but providing it does have resource implication. As of 26 January 2022, over the last

11 meetings that are published to YouTube the average number of views is 166, and for an average meeting of 2 hours it costs an additional £53.91 in officer costs to provide the stream. Members are invited to consider this information, and whether they would like to continue the YouTube stream as a matter of course.

- 3.9 Health and safety advice without the consideration of Covid has been reviewed for size of chamber, and an overflow room for physical public access. This is included in the Risk Assessment at **APPENDIX A**.
- 3.10 We have a number of Non-aligned Members, who are unable to arrange a group substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting. The intention of allowing members to join remotely as per recommendation (v) is to allow for those who are unwell or physically unable to attend non-regulatory meetings remotely. Committee members who join in this way would not be able to vote on items but would still be able to raise questions. This would be subject to Chairman discretion and review.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This paper asks for operational decisions around future meetings in light of Covid requirements moving to guidance only. A temporary decision was made under emergency powers to allow public access until 25 February 2022 – members of the public are invited to complete a lateral flow test and wear a mask. This paper asks members to make a formal decision on this.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 Reviewing our processes for meetings helps to contribute to Performance and Efficiency goal

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Youtube streaming of meetings gives better customer accessibility.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The recommendations provide for multiple options of public access to be as inclusive as possible to the Public and Members.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – This report reviews our risks around physical meetings for Members to confirm future steps – the full risk assessment is attached at **APPENDIX A**.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – YouTube streaming decision could incur an additional officer cost.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Risks to staff and Members are identified in the risk assessment
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – YouTube streaming could reduce carbon emissions of those who would have ordinarily travelled to observe.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** - NA

Background Papers:

National guidance [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-stay-safe)
(www.gov.uk)

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