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| Subject: | Motion: Continuance of Hybrid Meetings – Response from Department for Communities |
| Date: | 19th August, 2022 |
| Reporting Officer: | John Walsh, Chief Executive |
| Contact Officer: | Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer |

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| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometime in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues |
| 1.1 | To consider a response from the Department for Communities to a motion on the Continuance of Hybrid Meetings, which was passed by the Council at its meeting on 4th July. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | The Committee is requested to consider the response and take such action thereon as may be determined. |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| | <u>Key Issues</u> |
| 3.1 | The Council, at its meeting on 4th July, adopted the following motion on the Continuance of Hybrid Meetings, which had been proposed by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor M. Kelly) and seconded by Councillor Bower: |

Continuance of Hybrid Meetings

“This Council supports taking measures to encourage a broader demographic to stand for, become elected and remain as local Councillors.

It recognises that hybrid meetings enable easier participation from those with young families and caring responsibilities and disabled people, amongst others, therefore, they are more likely to consider elected roles.

The Council, therefore, supports maintaining a mixture of online and in-person access to meetings.

Notwithstanding the outcome of the recent call for evidence from the Department of Communities on Remote/Hybrid meetings, the Council will write to that Department expressing its desire for the ability to continue to hold both full Council and Committee meetings in hybrid form.”

3.2 A response to the motion has now been received from Mr. A. Carleton, Director of the Local Government and Housing Regulation Division, on behalf of the Minister for Communities, a copy of which is attached.

3.3 Mr. Carleton begins by stating that the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021 contains an enabling power to allow the Department for Communities to bring forward further Regulations to provide for remote/hybrid meetings, which would include making permanent provision for such meetings. The Department is developing proposals for the Minister’s consideration on further regulations for remote/hybrid meetings to be made under the 2021 Act, taking account of the responses to the recent call for evidence. A working group, with membership comprising Departmental officials and Council officers, has recently been established to assist in developing these proposals.

3.4 He goes on to point out that the Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of District Council Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which were made under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, are due to remain in force until 24th September 2022, as the Department extended the expiration date of section 78 of that Act until that date.

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| 3.5 | <p>Mr. Carleton concludes by stating that, subject to the Minister’s agreement, the Department for Communities intends to further extend the expiry date of Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, allowing the current regulations to remain in force beyond 24th September. This would afford time for the proposals for the Regulations under the 2021 Act, to be fully developed.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p> |
| 4.0 | Document Attached |
| | Response from Department for Communities |