

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer – Regulatory & Regeneration****West Dunbartonshire Council – 28 June 2023**

Subject: Introduction of Online Surgeries for Elected Members**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To enable the Council to consider the proposal to introduce online surgeries for elected members and to identify what technology and training support, if any, is required.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Council agrees:
- (a) to make available online surgeries using Microsoft Teams with immediate effect;
 - (b) that, where possible, broadband Wi-Fi should be used to optimise performance and reduce the risk of disconnection;
 - (c) to note that the traditional method of holding surgeries in venues will continue to be available to all elected members; and
 - (d) that online surgeries will be advertised on the Council's website and social media outlets, similar to traditional surgeries.

3. Background

- 3.1** At the meeting of Council held in April 2023, it was agreed that a report be brought to a future meeting for consideration of online surgeries for elected members.

4. Main IssuesTechnology

- 4.1** There are currently two methods of conducting online meetings available to the Council: ZOOM and Microsoft (MS) Teams. MS Teams is the preferred option for conducting online surgeries for two reasons. Firstly, all Members currently have access to the MS Teams application and therefore no additional licences are required. Council currently holds some additional ZOOM licences (approx. 10) but this would not be sufficient to supply all elected members with an individual licence at an annual cost of £191.88 ex vat per licence (£4221.36 ex vat total annual cost for 22 licences). Secondly, if ZOOM was the preferred choice and the decision was taken not to use additional licences then this would require the organiser of the meeting (this would normally be Members' secretaries) to start the meeting and then pass the hosting of the meeting to the elected member. As most surgeries are held

outwith normal working hours, there potentially could be additional overtime costs.

Data Usage

- 4.2** One disadvantage of using MS Teams is that it uses more data than ZOOM and therefore to ensure continuity for online surgeries, it is recommended broadband Wi-Fi is used. Data usage on Council mobile phones is capped and video calling uses a large volume of mobile data. Therefore, using Wi-Fi eliminates the risk of a Teams meeting being ended due to running out of mobile data.

Equipment

- 4.3** At present Elected Members are offered a laptop and mobile phone, both of which can receive and make MS Teams calls and meetings, furthermore MS Teams Application can be downloaded and securely used on personal devices should members wish to use.

Training

- 4.4** Training on the use of MS Teams will be provided, on request, to any elected member who requires it.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** The proposed use of Microsoft Teams will involve diary management support from Members Secretaries but will not require them to commence the online surgery outside normal working hours, which might be the case when using ZOOM.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The introduction of online surgeries could reduce the number of surgeries held in external premises where there is a small hire cost or in the case of Council premises, where there could be an additional staffing cost if the surgery is held outwith normal working hours. There is also a potential saving to be made in respect of members' travel costs to and from surgery venues but the extent of any saving will vary depending on uptake of the new service and is likely to be below £500 per year in total.
- 6.2** Using Microsoft Teams and Wi-Fi will have no financial implications for the Council. Data usage of mobile phones whilst using Microsoft Teams is capped and no additional costs will be incurred. However, there could be some additional costs in respect of purchase of additional licences if ZOOM is the Council's preferred method of holding surgeries.
- 6.3** There are no procurement implications associated with the recommendations of this report as the Council has already purchased MS Teams licences for all elected members.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The Council has a duty to ensure the security of personal data, the use of the Chat function with MS Team should not be used to ensure that there are no data protection or Freedom of Information implications. Should any Chat be used this would be deleted within 12 / 24 hours which can be set by ICT.
- 7.2** There are no additional risks to the Council as a result of the introducing online meetings but it is clear that there is a reduced risk of physical violence to Members when holding online surgeries as opposed to face to face surgeries.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** An equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and no further action is required.
(See Appendix 1)

10. Consultation

- 10.1** Finance, ICT and Legal officers have been consulted on the content of this report.

11. Strategic Assessment

- 11.1** This report supports the Councils Strategic Priorities: *Our Environment promotes A Greener Future and Our Council is Inclusive and Adaptable.*

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Appendices: EIA screening, Appendix 1

Background Papers:

Wards Affected: All Wards