



**North Ayrshire Council**  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

## Protocol for Hybrid Meetings of the Council and its Committees

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's Standing Orders regulate the conduct of formal meetings of the Council and its committees and allow the following meeting formats:

**Physical** - 'in person' participation (with the option of webcasting to the internet as a means of extending any physical public gallery provision)

**Remote** - online participation, via an electronic platform such as Microsoft Teams (with live streaming to the internet replacing any physical public gallery)

**Hybrid** - a combination of the above, via a technical solution which combines physical and remote participants (with the option of replacing/extending any physical public gallery by live streaming to the internet)

- 1.2 Where meetings involve any remote participation, Standing Orders require them to adhere to an agreed protocol. The following protocol sets out arrangements for the conduct of hybrid (and, as applicable, remote) meetings. It also recognises that the hybrid format requires a technical solution and that no such system is completely infallible. Contingency arrangements are, therefore, a key element.

## 2. The Default Position

- 2.1 There remains a presumption in Standing Orders in favour of physical participation. However, the Council has agreed that, for reasons of accessibility and flexibility, the default position will be that meetings are scheduled on a hybrid basis as a matter of course, still as **predominantly physical meetings, but with some opportunity for remote participation**.
- 2.2 Using the hybrid format in this way aims to strike a balance. It looks to avoid an Elected Member being disenfranchised if they cannot attend a particular meeting 'in person' and offer flexibility for Members to attend meetings in a way that suits their individual circumstances. At the same time, by prioritising the physical element of the meeting, it minimises delays to the Council's formal decision-making process which might arise due to hybrid system failure. This also addresses any potential confusion over which component of the meeting should prevail in the event that the hybrid system fails when both physical and remote elements happen to be quorate.
- 2.3 On this basis, in all but exceptional cases, hybrid meetings of the Council and its committees are expected to comprise:

**Physical Attendees** Chair (or in their absence, Vice-Chair)  
Quorum of Elected Members  
Officers and any invited external parties

**Remote Attendees** A small number of Elected Members

### 3. Contingency Arrangements

- 3.1 Contingency arrangements in the event of hybrid system failure are detailed below and, thereafter, summarised in a flowchart. Their purpose is to ensure as far as possible that:
- there is a consistency of response to any unexpected system failure
  - participants are able to anticipate in advance what action will be taken
  - delays to the Council's decision-making process are minimised

#### ***Individual Loss of Connection***

- 3.2 If an **individual Elected Member(s)** drops out of a hybrid (or wholly remote) meeting due to a failure of their device or because of a broadband issue, this is treated in the same way as if they had left the room during a physical meeting and the circumstances will be recorded in the Minute of the meeting. There is no provision for proxy voting. The Member may, however, re-join the meeting at any time if they are able to reconnect.
- 3.3 It is expected that the **Provost/Chair** will attend 'in person'. If, exceptionally, they are attending remotely and lose their connection, then the remainder of the meeting will be chaired by the Depute Provost/Vice Chair, failing which, a meeting chair elected from the Members present (in terms of Standing Order 9.4). The Chair will, however, assume the chair again in the event they are able to reconnect.
- 3.4 As with a wholly physical meeting, the **loss of a quorum** at any stage in a hybrid (or wholly remote) meeting will result in the meeting standing adjourned.
- 3.5 Only Elected Members are expected to attend remotely. If, exceptionally, **an officer or invited external party** is a remote attendee and loses their connection and if there is no substitute to deputise for them in person, the Chair will determine, on the advice of officers, whether the relevant item(s) of business can be determined in their absence or if it needs to be continued to a later meeting.

#### ***Hybrid Equipment Failure***

- 3.6 If the hybrid meeting equipment itself fails, the remote and physical components of the meeting cannot be combined into a single meeting. Where the cause of the failure can be easily identified and addressed, the Chair may call for a short adjournment to allow the hybrid meeting to proceed. Committee Services will ensure that remote participants are advised if this is the case.
- 3.7 If the hybrid equipment fault is not immediately obvious and cannot be quickly rectified, then the **hybrid format falls and the physical meeting prevails, provided it is quorate.**
- 3.8 In such circumstances, any Elected Member(s) attending remotely cannot participate and the circumstances will be recorded in the Minute. There is no provision for proxy voting. A remote attendee can, however, later join the physical meeting if it is practical for them to do so.

- 3.9 It is anticipated that the **Provost/Chair** will attend 'in person'. If, exceptionally, they are attending remotely, then the physical meeting will instead be chaired by the Depute Provost/Vice Chair, failing which, a meeting chair will be elected from the Members present (in terms of Standing Order 9.4). The Provost/Chair may, however, re-assume the chair in circumstances where a short adjournment takes place and it is practical for them to join the physical meeting.
- 3.10 **Officers and invited external parties** attending the meeting to present reports or provide information/advice should be present in the Council Chambers. If, in exceptional circumstances, they have joined the meeting remotely and there is no substitute to deputise for them 'in person', the Chair will consider advice from officers as to whether the item of business can be determined in their absence, or if it needs to be continued to a later meeting.
- 3.11 Where the meeting reverts to a wholly physical format, a very brief adjournment may be required to allow any **presentation materials** to be displayed on the screens within the Council Chambers.
- 3.12 Depending on the nature of the hybrid equipment failure, it may not be possible to **webcast/live stream** the proceedings of the physical meeting, nor will they be recorded for later upload to the internet. In such circumstances, only the physical public gallery will be available.
- 3.13 If for any reason, a physical quorum is unavailable in the Council Chambers, the **physical meeting falls and a wholly remote meeting will be convened**.
- 3.14 In such circumstances, there will be an adjournment of approximately 20 minutes to allow a **wholly remote** meeting to be convened and arrangements made for **live streaming**, if possible.
- 3.15 The feasibility of holding a remote meeting and its timing will depend on a number of factors, including whether those in the Council Chambers (Elected Members, officers and any invited external parties) have access to an ICT device to allow them to join the meeting remotely.
- 3.16 The number of Elected Members and others in the Council Chambers will also determine whether it is practical for them to disperse around the building (to avoid sound feedback/interference caused by multiple devices in close proximity) in order to join the meeting.
- 3.17 The number of people in the public gallery will also be a factor in the decision about whether to proceed with a remote meeting immediately.

*Adjournment to a Later Date*

- 3.18 If it is not possible to establish a wholly remote meeting, the meeting will stand **adjourned until another date**, to be agreed in consultation with the Chair.

3.19 The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Provost/Chair will consider the most appropriate format for the reconvened meeting, taking into account the availability of the hybrid meeting equipment and the circumstances of those attending.

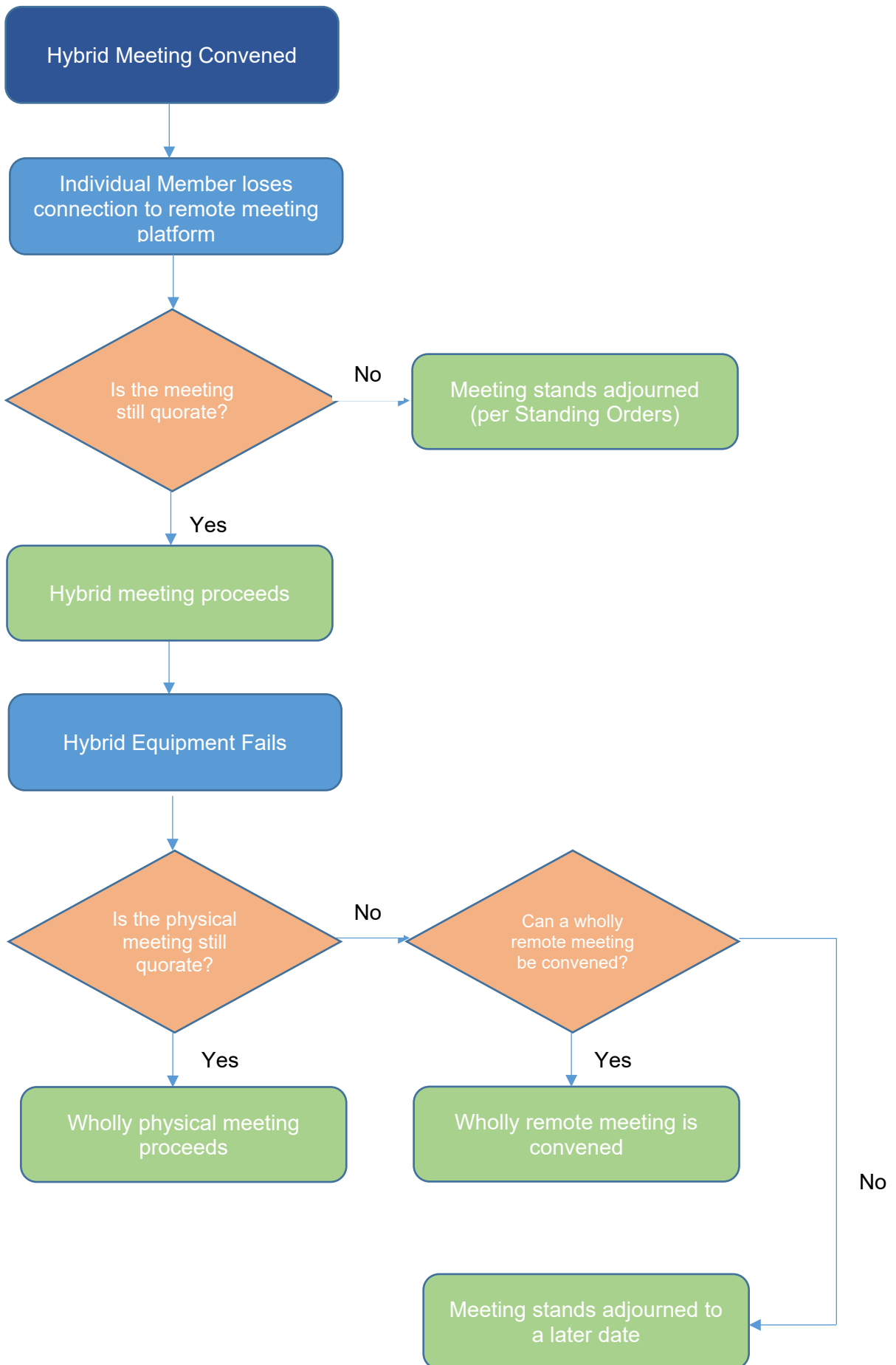
### ***Other Considerations***

3.20 The foregoing contingency arrangements set out the steps which will be followed in the event of unexpected hybrid system failure. However, other circumstances may mean that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Provost/Chair, will exercise their authority in terms of the Council's Standing Orders to determine the appropriate format for a particular meeting(s), including scheduling it as wholly remote meeting from the outset. This may be in response to issues such as:

- adverse weather
- public health considerations
- longer-term issues around the availability or reliability of the hybrid meeting system

3.21 It should also be noted that, while the contingency arrangements set out in this protocol will apply to formal meetings of the Council and its committees, it will be treated as guidance only for those **joint committees/boards** which are subject to their own Standing Orders. In the case of the latter, the appropriate response to any system will be agreed in consultation with the Chair and in accordance with any Standing Orders provision which may apply.

3.22 It should also be noted that this protocol applies to formal meetings of the Council and its committees. Other types of meeting, including Pre-Agendas, may be scheduled in any suitable format, as arranged by Committee Services, in consultation with the Chair.



## 4. The Conduct of Hybrid Meetings

### ***Meeting Invitations***

- 4.1 Electronic meeting invitations issued to Elected Members, officers and invited parties will confirm the physical location of the meeting and provide a Microsoft Teams link. The remote link is **for use by Elected Members**.
- 4.2 A meeting notification published on the Council's website will provide the physical location of the meeting for those attending the public gallery. The published Agenda will then contain a link to view the live stream.

### ***Prior Notice***

- 4.3 As far as possible, Elected Members are asked to give Committee Services advance notice of their remote attendance. This allows the Clerk to confirm to the Chair that there is likely to be a physical quorum present and this will, in turn, inform the contingency arrangements if the hybrid equipment fails.

### ***Officers***

- 4.4 Officers attending the meeting to present a report or provide advice are expected to do so **'in person'**. If they are unable to do so, arrangements should be made for a substitute to deputise for them.
- 4.5 Any officer wishing to observe the proceedings only should do so via the public live stream which is available at <https://north-ayrshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> rather than joining the remote meeting itself.

### ***External Parties***

- 4.6 External parties invited to address a meeting will generally be expected to attend **'in person'**. Exceptionally, where physical attendance is not possible, the invited party should contact [committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk) to discuss remote attendance.
- 4.7 Only in exceptional circumstances will an invited party be permitted to attend remotely. In the event of a loss of connection or where the meeting itself requires to proceed on a wholly physical basis due to hybrid equipment failure, officers will provide advice as to whether the matter may proceed without input from the remote party.

### ***Public Access***

- 4.8 Where the proceedings are open to the public, a **physical public gallery** will be available in the Council Chambers. Its size will take into account any health and safety or public health restrictions which may be in force.

- 4.9 If possible, the proceedings will also be **live streamed** to the internet and available for repeated viewing at <https://north-ayrshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> in terms of the Council's **Webcasting Protocol**).
- 4.10 Section 3 sets out the contingency arrangements which will apply in the event of hybrid equipment failure. In terms of public access, it should be noted that, if the meeting reverts to a wholly physical format due to equipment failure, the physical public gallery will remain, but live streaming may not be possible, nor will a recording of the meeting be available later. If the meeting reconvenes as wholly remote, the proceedings will be live streamed or recorded and later uploaded to the internet.

### ***Chair's Opening Remarks***

- 4.11 As part of their opening remarks, and in terms of the Council's **Webcasting Protocol**, the Chair will advise if the meeting (in whole or in part) will be live streamed to the internet and capable of repeated viewing afterwards. They will then ask Committee Services to start the live stream.
- 4.12 The Chair will also seek confirmation from the Clerk that there is a physical quorum present and refer to the applicable contingency arrangements in the event of hybrid system failure.

### ***Sederunt***

- 4.13 The Clerk will take the **sederunt**, noting which Elected Members are present in the Council Chambers and which are attending remotely. This will be recorded in the Minute. The attendance of officers and invited external parties will also be noted.

### ***Addressing the Meeting***

- 4.14 In terms of the Council's Standing Orders, anyone addressing the meeting should do so at the invitation of the Chair.
- 4.15 Physical participants will attract the attention of the Chair by raising their hand. Remote participants will use the virtual '**hand up**' function which is available on the remote meeting platform.
- 4.16 For **procedural motions** and **points of order**, which take precedence over other matters, physical and remote participants in a hybrid meeting may instead use their **microphone** to alert the Chair, as they would in a wholly physical meeting.
- 4.17 The Chair, with the assistance of the Clerk, will **determine the order** in which participants are invited speak. Every effort will be made to ensure that requests to declare an interest/ask a question, propose/second a motion/amendment or contribute to debate are taken in the order in which they are made.



- 4.18 It should be noted that there are added challenges associated with managing speakers in a hybrid meeting, particularly one with multiple remote attendees. In a wholly remote meeting, the Chair/Clerk is able to view the remote platform's '**participants**' list, which displays 'hand up' requests in order. However, this view is not available to the Chair in the hybrid format. In recognition of this, for meetings of the full Council an additional staffing resource will join the meeting remotely to access the 'participants' list.
- 4.19 In a wholly remote meeting, the Chair may allow the '**chat**' function to be used to propose motions/amendments and to raise points of order. However, this view will not be available to the Chair and other physical participants in a hybrid meeting and the '**chat**' function should not be used.

### ***Motions and Amendments***

- 4.20 For meetings of the full Council, Standing Orders require motions and amendments to be displayed on screen during the meeting. These should be emailed to [committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk) in advance of the meeting or otherwise as they arise during the meeting.
- 4.21 Committee Services will arrange for the text of the motion/amendment to be displayed to physical and remote attendees. A copy may also be circulated by email (particularly where the amount of text may be difficult to read on screen). In the proceedings are open to the public, the text may also be published on the Council's website.

### ***Voting***

- 4.22 The Council's Standing Orders provide that voting in a hybrid (or remote) meeting will take place by **roll call vote** (unless there an electronic voting system is available).
- 4.23 In a roll call vote, the name of each voting Member will be called out in alphabetical order and the Minute will record the detailed outcome.
- 4.24 When voting, physical and remote participants alike are reminded to use their **microphones** so that they can be heard by those in the Council Chambers, remote attendees and (if applicable) anyone viewing via the internet.

### ***Presentation Slides***

- 4.25 In a hybrid meeting, presentation slides are shared via the remote meeting platform so that they are visible to all.
- 4.26 Presenters must send a copy of their presentation to [committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk) a minimum of **2 working days prior to the meeting**, to allow it to be shared with Elected Members in advance and, as a contingency, to ensure that it can be shown on the Council Chambers screens if the meeting reverts to a wholly physical format. Unless it pertains to an exempt item of business, Committee Services will also publish a copy of the presentation to the Council's website.

### ***Further Guidance for Physical and Remote Attendees***


4.27 A summary of key information for physical and remote attendees is set out in the appendix. Any questions may be directed to [committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk)




## Attending in Person

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| <p><b>ICT Device</b></p>   | <p>Please bring an ICT device to the meeting even if you are attending ‘in person’. You will need it to access meeting papers and view any electronic documents circulated during the meeting. It may also be needed for remote access to the meeting as a contingency.</p> <p>Before the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">download the Agenda</a> and papers onto your device in case of loss of WiFi</li> <li>• switch on your device to allow any <a href="#">system updates</a> to run</li> <li>• make sure your device is <a href="#">fully charged</a>, especially if the meeting is likely to be lengthy (A small number of charging cables will be available for Elected Members to borrow from the Council officer).</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Seating Plan</b></p> | <p>The system identifies speakers in the Council Chambers according to a pre-selected seating plan, so please sit in your <a href="#">assigned seat</a>. This will be indicated by a nameplate.</p> <p>Services must advise Committee Services if there is any change to the <a href="#">officer presenting</a> a report, so that the Council Chambers’ electronic seating plan can be updated before the meeting.</p> <p>Invited external parties should also advise Committee Services of the names of those attending (and any changes prior to the meeting)</p>  |
| <p><b>Microphones</b></p>  | <p>You must use your microphone when invited by the Chair to address the meeting, so that you can be heard by others in the Council Chambers, remote attendees and (for meetings open to the public) anyone viewing online. (Please note that the system will not register your voice if you speak too softly).</p> <p>It is just as important to <a href="#">switch your microphone off</a> after speaking, as a ‘live’ microphone may pick up conversation not intended for broadcast.</p> <p>Microphones can also pick up extra noises which make it hard for speakers to be heard. <a href="#">Sound quality</a> can be disrupted by things like tapping a pencil against a water glass, shuffling papers, or leaving a mobile ‘phone on the table, even if it is set to silent (as the vibration may be picked up).</p> |
| <p><b>Cameras</b></p>      | <p>Bear in mind that when other people nearby are speaking, you may still be on camera. In particular, please exercise caution if entering an IT password into your device, in case this is picked up on camera.</p>   |

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| <p><b>Presentations</b></p>  | <p>If you are using presentation slides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attend in person, but also join the meeting remotely using the Microsoft Teams link from the Council Chambers, with your <b>laptop microphone muted</b> and <b>camera switched off</b> and share your screen when asked; or</li> <li>• arrange for a colleague to join the meeting remotely using the Microsoft Teams link and share their screen at the appropriate time. This is the only option for any presentation which contains sound.</li> </ul> <p>Remember to provide <a href="mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk">committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk</a> with a copy of your presentation slides at least two working days before the meeting.</p> |
| <p><b>Public Gallery</b></p> | <p>Where the proceedings are open to the public, they may be live streamed to the internet. The public gallery seating in the Council Chambers will not be specifically filmed, but you may be visible in the background if you are seated in this area.</p> <p>Please refer the Council's <a href="#">Webcasting Protocol</a> for more information.</p> <p>If, for any reason, the meeting has to be reconvened as wholly remote, public access to the meeting will only be available via the live stream or a recording uploaded to the internet at <a href="https://north-ayrshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home">https://north-ayrshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home</a></p>  |
| <p><b>System Failure</b></p> | <p>If the meeting has to be reconvened as wholly remote, Elected Members, officers and invited parties may be asked to move to a different part of the Council Chambers or even relocate altogether before joining remotely (to avoid any sound interference caused by multiple users of the remote platform sitting close to each other). If this is not practical, the meeting may be adjourned to a different time/date.</p>  |

## Attending Remotely

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| <p><b>Prior Notice</b></p>  | <p>Remote participation is reserved for <b>Elected Members</b> only (unless in exceptional circumstances by prior arrangement with <a href="mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk">committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>)</p> <p>Elected Members are asked to advise <a href="mailto:committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk">committeeservices@north-ayrshire.gov.uk</a> in advance if intending to join the meeting remotely. This allows the Clerk to confirm to the Chair whether there will be a physical quorum available in the Council Chambers, which informs the contingency arrangements for any hybrid system failure.</p>  |
| <p><b>Before the Meeting</b></p>  | <p>Please give your device time to run any <b>system updates</b> before the meeting and ensure your device is either plugged in or <b>fully charged</b>.</p> <p>If you need to join using a mobile phone or tablet, consider how you will keep the device steady and at an appropriate distance for you to be seen on screen</p> <p>Think about your surroundings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• close blinds to avoid glare</li> <li>• remove any items you may not want to be on view, such as family photos</li> <li>• ensure you have privacy if any items of business are likely to involve a resolution to exclude the press and public</li> <li>• switch off any ‘smart speakers’</li> </ul> <p>Please be ready to join the meeting in good time, approximately 10 minutes before the start time</p> |
| <p><b>Joining the Meeting</b></p>   | <p>Your meeting invitation will contain a Microsoft Teams link. Simply click on the ‘<b>Join Microsoft Teams Meeting</b>’ link to join remotely.</p> <p>Alternatively, use the <b>Join Meeting</b>” option which should appear on screen as a calendar reminder some 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.</p> <p>You can use the original meeting link to re-join the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in the event you lose your connection at any point</li> <li>• following a recess/comfort break</li> <li>• if you have declared an interest and temporarily left the meeting;</li> <li>• if the meeting cannot proceed as hybrid or physical and is reconvened as wholly remote</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Microphones</b></p>  | <p>Please mute your <b>microphone</b> before joining the meeting and unless invited to speak.</p> <p>Committee Services may mute participants in the event they have forgotten to switch off their microphone or, at the instruction of the Chair, to prevent disruption to the meeting</p>  |

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| <p><b>Cameras</b></p>                 | <p>Please keep your <b>camera</b> on during the meeting to ensure you are visible as being present.</p> <p>A background 'blur' effect may be used but this requires more bandwidth and can lead to loss of connection.</p>  |
| <p><b>Addressing the Meeting</b></p>  | <p>Use the '<b>hand up</b>' to advise the Chair that you wish to speak and then wait to be invited as you would in a physical meeting.</p> <p>If you are raising a point of order or procedural motion, you may instead use your microphone to alert the Chair as these take precedence over other matters.</p>   |
| <p><b>'Chat' Function</b></p>         | <p>In a wholly remote meeting only, the '<b>chat</b>' function may also be used to make declarations or propose/second a motion/amendment. In hybrid meeting, the 'chat' box will not generally be visible to those in the Council Chambers and so should not be used.</p>  |
| <p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p>   | <p>If you need to leave the meeting due to a declaration of interest, use the '<b>leave meeting</b>' button.</p> <p>Committee Services will contact you via email or MS Teams message to advise when you can re-join the meeting. Please do so using the original meeting link.</p>   |
| <p><b>Loss of Connection</b></p>   | <p>If you lose your broadband connection during the meeting, the hybrid meeting will go ahead provided it is quorate. The Minute will reflect the point at which you left the meeting. <b>There is no provision for proxy voting.</b></p> <p>(Microsoft Teams invitations do include a dial-in (audio only) option but, unless otherwise advised, this will not apply to formal meetings of the Council/committees for data protection reasons (to avoid inadvertently live streaming contact telephone details) and due to the practical challenges it presents in chairing a hybrid meeting).</p> |
| <p><b>System Failure</b></p>   | <p>In the event of a hybrid system failure, you will still be able to see and hear other remote participants but will have no access to physical meeting. In such circumstances, the <b>remote part of the meeting falls</b>, even if there are enough Elected Members on the remote meeting platform to form a quorum and even if the Chair is also attending remotely.</p> <p>Committee Services will confirm by email or MS Teams message if the physical meeting is proceeding or if the meeting will reconvene as wholly remote.</p>   |

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