

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL REPORT**

<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> February 2022	<b>LOCATION</b>	Town Hall
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	Chief Officer		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	Agenda item 15 – Remote public access to meeting		
<b>Background</b>	<p>On the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022 the Council agreed to the procurement of the DTEN Conference system.</p> <p><b>CTC/75/2122 RESOLVED</b> to approve the procurement of hybrid meeting equipment as recommended by the Town Hall, Assets and Services Committee.</p> <p>The principle for the procurement of the system was to enable high quality hybrid meetings for both the council, businesses and individuals.</p> <p>The early usage of this system was mainly for council and partnership working groups to be able to have hybrid meetings which could not be accommodated in the Spencer Suite.</p> <p>During this time the high quality screen has been used for council and committee meetings rather than projecting onto walls, more recently officers were working with the suppliers to understand how this could be more efficiently used by all parties concerned.</p>		
<b>Trials</b>	<p>More recently we have gained a better understanding of its capability and how we can best link people into meetings as well as establishing what it was like for those that do. In principle it is no different to a zoom meeting but on a larger scale.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At recent THAS and Planning meetings we have had someone remotely coming into the meeting with the settings as them being muted and not visible – the feedback was positive in terms of being able to hear what was being said and able to follow the meeting and view the papers as they were on screen.</li><li>• At a Strategy Working Group it was noted that a couple of councillors could not be heard properly mainly due to the fact they appeared not to be using the microphones properly or were too quietly spoken.</li><li>• The Partnership held a working group meeting using the system and also utilised the integrated recording system following agreement with all the attendees. When the meeting was finished there were 2 downloads as options for the recordings, one just audio the other audio and visual, both were of a good standard</li></ul>		
<b>OPTIONS FOR USE FOR COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS</b>	<p>Now we have a better understanding of the system we need to agree how we wish to use this for our Council and Committee meetings.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Should we wish to consider <b>having remote access for residents</b>, all residents would need to be muted on entry and remain muted at all times, those</li></ol>		

	<p>wishing to speak will need to provide advance notice so the officer in control can let them in to speak at the appropriate time .</p> <p>From the officers perspective when they are supporting the meeting, which includes presenting reports, managing the system and taking minutes it presents an additional pressure which in time may become manageable.</p> <p><b>2. Recordings of meetings</b> would be beneficial for officers at meeting as it helps when writing the minutes following the meeting, however a Dictaphone or something similar could achieve this if required. If we choose to record we need to agree on</p> <p>2.1 What the recording is used for and how long will it be kept for</p> <p>2.2 Will it just be for minutes</p> <p>2.3 Will it be on our website, therefore accessible to members of the public</p>
<b>Considerations</b>	<p>Whilst most Local Authorities both live stream and record their meetings councillors are paid and enter into the Council knowing that this is how they operate. Those councils make many high level strategic decisions that have significant, operational and financial implications about the services they provide. In some cases the recordings can be useful to defend the council or in some cases for councillors or officers to be attacked and quoted out of context via social media</p> <p>It is worth noting that many Town and Parish Councils struggle to fill their current councillor quotas, will this create another barrier for those who may have a lot to offer but are not prepared to be micro analysed by certain members of the public . Could this even stifle debate?</p>
<b>Finance</b>	There are no/ minimal financial implications for this decision.
<b>Environment</b>	With residents attending the meetings remotely it is potentially beneficial with regards to their carbon footprint – unless they walk or cycle to the meetings
<b>Equality</b>	Those who are unable to get to meetings for varying reasons, ie childcare, no transport, a disability, will be given the opportunity to attend
<b>Decision Requested</b>	<p>For council to decide upon</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing remote access for residents to all Committee and Council meetings</li> <li>2. Should there be a recording of meeting and for what use</li> </ol>