

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 April 2021

### Report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### For Recommendation to Cabinet

#### 1 VIRTUAL MEETINGS

**This report provides an update on virtual meetings and asks Members to approve arrangements for the return to face to face meetings post 7 May 2021. Members are also invited to give consideration to the future streaming of Council meetings.**

#### Background

1.1.1 The scoping report considered by this Committee on 3 December 2020 set out the basis for a review of virtual meetings and homeworking. A number of options for inclusion in the review were set out as follows:

- the effectiveness of the adopted protocol for the use of video-conferencing facilities;
- whether post pandemic, the Borough Council wished to continue with virtual Council meetings;
- the feasibility of rationalising the Borough Council's office accommodation at the Gibson Building, with a view to increasing the amount of homeworking to support the Climate Change Strategy and reduce overheads.

1.1.2 Members recognised that the adoption of virtual meetings had been a necessity during the coronavirus pandemic and had meant that the Borough Council business and decision making continued. A number of Members felt that the virtual meeting experience had been positive as the arrangements were efficient, transparent and aided structured debate. Other Members expressed a preference for a return to face to face meetings. It was suggested that the review should give consideration to hybrid as well fully virtual and fully physical meetings.

In addition, Members supported the continuation of livestreaming meetings so that residents were able to observe proceedings.

1.1.3 Members resolved to include all of the options set out above, subject to the inclusion of exploring options for

- hybrid meetings
- fully virtual meetings
- fully physical meetings; and
- the continuation of livestreaming meetings even if the current regulations were not extended;

1.1.4 At the previous meeting of this Committee on 11 March 2021 Members approved a number of proposed revisions to the existing protocol for the use of video-conferencing facilities. Members also expressed support for the continuation of livestreaming of meetings, in whatever format.

1.1.5 Since the previous report to Members the national position in relation to the continuation of virtual meetings has significantly changed. On 25 March 2021 the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government wrote to all Council Leaders to indicate that the powers to hold remote meetings would not be extended post 7 May 2021. A copy of the letter is attached as **Annex 1**, but the central explanation for not extending the legislative flexibility is contained in the extract below:-

*'Extending the regulations to meetings beyond May 7 would require primary legislation. The Government has considered the case for legislation very carefully, including the significant impact it would have on the Government's legislative programme which is already under severe pressure in these unprecedented times. We are also mindful of the excellent progress that has been made on our vaccination programme and the announcement of the Government's roadmap for lifting Covid-19 restrictions. Given this context, the Government has concluded that it is not possible to bring forward emergency legislation on this issue at this time.'*

1.1.6 The Government has launched a 'Call for Evidence' to understand the experience of local authorities in the whole of the UK regarding remote meetings. The consultation runs until 17 June 2021. A copy of the 'Call for Evidence' is attached as **Annex 2**, together with a draft response (shown in red).

1.1.7 Whilst the Government does not currently intend to legislate for the continuation of virtual meetings, we are aware that legal action has been commenced by Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Hertfordshire County Council to seek a declaration from the High Court to enable such meetings to take place within existing legislation. A one day hearing is due to take place on 21 April 2021.

- 1.1.8 However, unless the above claim is successful, the default position is that the Council will be required to revert to a fully face to face meeting programme post 7 May 2021.
- 1.1.9 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021 do not prohibit meetings indoors which are reasonably necessary for work or voluntary services, so Council meetings can be resumed, with public attendance.
- 1.1.10 It is not known the extent to which social distancing restrictions will remain a central consideration in our future meeting arrangements, as a decision is not scheduled to be taken on social distancing guidance until Step 4 of the Government's roadmap i.e. no earlier than 21 June 2021. However, it is clear that for the period from 7 May 2021 until at least 21 June 2021 we will have to ensure that all physical meetings comply with any covid requirements/ guidance.
- 1.1.11 This report asks Members to approve the arrangements for the return to face to face meetings post 7 May 2021. Separately, the report invites Members to reflect on their remote meeting experiences over the previous year to help inform any action we may be able to consider in the event that the legal action commenced by LLG, ADSO and Hertfordshire County Council is successful.
- 1.1.12 The review of homeworking is dealt with in a separate report.

## **1.2 Arrangements for the return of a face to face meeting programme post 7 May 2021**

- 1.2.1 As stated earlier, the Government has indicated that it does not intend to review the guidance on social distancing until Step 4 of the Government's roadmap i.e. no earlier than 21 June 2021. We will therefore need to ensure that any meetings held post 7 May 2021 can be conducted in a covid-secure manner and consistent with national guidance.
- 1.2.2 The immediate period post 7 May coincides with a busy schedule of meetings. The following are programmed to take place during the period 7 May to 21 June 2021. Note that all of these occur on or after the anticipated date for Step 3 of the Roadmap:-

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name of Board/ Committee</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>
17 May	Planning & Transportation Advisory Board	16
18 May	Economic Regeneration Advisory Board	16
19 May	Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board	16
20 May	Area 1 Planning Committee	20

25 May	Communities & Housing Advisory Board	16
26 May	Area 2 Planning Committee	17
1 June	Planning & Transportation Advisory Board	16
2 June	Cabinet	6
3 June	Area 3 Planning Committee	20
7 June	Joint Transportation Board	14
8 June	Street Scene & Environment Advisory Board	16
9 June	Joint Standards Committee	13 members plus 6 parish reps
10 June	Parish Partnership Panel	13
15 June	Licensing & Appeals Committee	15
16 June	General Purposes Committee	14
17 June	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	18

1.2.3 The GOV.UK guides on [working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) explain the control measures that different types of business should consider. These cover construction, factories, offices, vehicle use and other types of work. The guides apply to workplaces in England and are therefore applicable to the Council offices and other locations where formal Council meetings are held. Separately the Government has issued guidance on the safe use of Council Buildings, which includes specific guidance on Council meetings ([COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of council buildings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)). The latter guidance document was updated following the announcement by the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government on 25 March. Members are asked to note that the guidance suggests that consideration is given to range of options, including the following:-

- *Use of your existing powers to delegate decision making to key individuals such as the Head of Paid Service to minimise the number of meetings you need to hold;*
- *Relying on single-member decision making where your constitution allows;*

- *Hold your annual meeting before 7 May, or consider holding it (and any other physical meetings) after 17 May, at which point it is anticipated that a much greater range of indoor activity can resume in line with the Roadmap set out by the Government in February;*
- *Continuing to provide remote access to the public until at least 21 June.*

1.2.4 Members will be aware that the Part 7 of the Constitution already contains emergency provisions allowing decisions to be taken during a period of serious and/ or unexpected disruption. These have been used sparingly to date during the pandemic, and it is not expected that this approach will change post 7 May. In respect of single-member decision making, the existing constitutional position is that individual members of the Executive may take decisions within their respective portfolios, subject to compliance with specific conditions e.g. a written report has been considered by an Advisory Board and that Board has recommended that the decision be made. It is not considered that any changes are appropriate in light of the Minister's letter.

1.2.5 We are required to make every reasonable effort to ensure that any person attending a Council meeting can do so safely. We must therefore make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the Government (2m, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable).

1.2.6 Prior to the pandemic, meetings were held in the Council Chamber, the Committee Room and at the Angel Centre. On the assumption that Members would wish to continue using all 3 of these venues we have considered the options for resumption of face to face meetings in a covid-secure manner. For completeness we have also included the Medway Hall at the Angel Centre as a potential meeting venue, although Members are asked to note that the availability of facilities at the Angel Centre is expected to be very limited post 17 May (the anticipated date for Step 3 of the Roadmap) due to demand from customers of the Leisure Trust.

1.2.7 In order to comply with 2m social distancing, the safe capacities of the meeting rooms would be reduced as set out in the table below:-

	<b>Councillors</b>	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Press</b>
<b>Council Chamber</b>	20-21	3	10	2
<b>Committee Room</b>	7-10 in total (dependent upon room layout)			
<b>Riverside Lounge, Angel Centre</b>	12 in total		5 in total	

<b>Medway Hall, Angel Centre</b>	14-19 in total (dependent upon room layout)	0-5 (dependent upon room layout)
--------------------------------------	---	----------------------------------

1.2.8 Members are asked to note that any meeting space will need to make provision to accommodate not only Members of the relevant Committee/ Advisory Board etc but also (1) any officers in attendance and (2) any member of the press/ public who wishes to attend to observe the meeting. The guidance for the safe use of Council Buildings (see para 1.2.3 above) suggests that Councils continue to provide remote access to the public until at least 21 June as a means of mitigating the risks during this period. The means of achieving this are considered below. However, this does not remove the legal obligation to make provision for members of the public to attend the meeting in person.

1.2.9 The gov.uk guidance suggests a number of potential mitigating actions in addition to 2m social distancing. In accordance with the guidance, Officers have undertaken a risk assessment for Council meetings. In addition to operating with a reduced capacity within the meeting space it is considered that the following further measures are required:-

- Use of face coverings – all attendees to wear face coverings when not speaking;
- One way system in and out of the meeting room with possible staggered timings depending on final numbers allowed;
- Ventilation - doors and windows to the meeting rooms to remain open throughout the meeting

A full risk assessment is attached as **Annex 4**. This has been prepared in consultation with the Council's Health & Safety Officer.

1.2.10 Another potential mitigating action will be to keep the meeting time as short as possible. Whilst it is important for matters to be debated properly, duration of exposure is an important factor for infection control. It is therefore recommended that the interim arrangements for face-to-face meetings provide that information items will not be taken to any committee, board, panel or cabinet until all coronavirus restrictions are lifted nationally. Chairs and Vice- Chairs of committees should carefully consider the items being reported on their agendas and consider the scope for limiting the duration of discussion on those items or deferring items if necessary.

1.2.11 Members will note from the above that the reduced capacities will cause practical difficulties, particularly for (a) full Council meetings and (b) Area 1 Planning Committee as it will not be possible to safely accommodate all 54 (Council) and 20 (Area 1) Members in the Council Chamber/ Riverside Lounge/ Medway Hall. For other meetings of the Cabinet, Advisory Boards etc it will be possible to

accommodate all members of the specific Committee/ Board in the Council Chamber, although that will leave limited capacity for other non-Board/ Committee Members to attend the meeting. In respect of Area Planning Committees, it is also possible that difficulties may arise in accommodating all members of the public who wish to attend and/ or speak.

- 1.2.12 Officers are continuing to investigate whether other suitable venues may be hired in Tonbridge for the meeting of the Area 1 Planning Committee on 20 May 2021. In the event that no other suitable venues are available, it is suggested that on an exceptional basis the meeting is held in the Council Chamber at Kings Hill. The next meeting of Area 1 Committee thereafter is not until 24 June, by which time social distancing restrictions may have been lifted. If that proves not to be the case then that meeting could also be held at an alternative venue or in the Council Chamber (see 1.2.16 below).
- 1.2.13 It is also immediately apparent from the above table that it will not be possible to hold socially distanced meetings in the Committee Room as there is insufficient capacity for any of the Council's programmed Boards/ Committees etc. It may however be possible to use this space to accommodate up to 10 members of the public, who could view the proceedings taking place in the Council Chamber via a video link. This would then free up additional spaces in the Council Chamber. In all likelihood we expect that most members of the public who wish to view proceedings would opt instead to watch the YouTube stream from the comfort of their own home, but the adaptation of the Committee Room would provide additional capacity on site if required.
- 1.2.14 The Committee Room space could also be used as a waiting area for public speakers at Area Planning Committees, who could be invited to enter the Council Chamber immediately prior to the start time of their speaking slot. Members are asked to note, however, that even with an increased capacity in the Council Chamber, it may still be necessary to limit the number of non-Board/ Committee Members who would be able to attend a given meeting. However, it would be possible to allow remote access for such Members (see 1.2.16(c) below)).
- 1.2.15 In capacity terms, the most challenging meeting to accommodate will be full Council. However, in line with the Government guidance the annual Council meeting for the 2021/22 municipal year has been moved to 4 May in order to ensure it can take place (virtually) before 7 May 2021. The next meeting of Council is not scheduled to take place until 13 July, by which time it may be possible to accommodate all Members in the Council Chamber. We will however keep alternatives under review.
- 1.2.16 We have explored the following alternative options
- (a) *implement additional risk mitigation measures to allow for less than 2 metres social distancing;*

With suitable mitigation, it is possible to accommodate a larger number of people in the Council Chamber. For example, it would be possible to increase the capacity of the meeting space through the use of protective screens. However, the mitigating actions set out above e.g. face coverings would all still be required. Furthermore, given that a number of potential attendees (Members/ staff/ press and public) are yet to be offered the vaccine, and some may also fall within more vulnerable groups, we must consider carefully whether reduced social distancing is in any event appropriate.

It is estimated that the cost of acquiring screens to cover all areas of the Council Chamber (inc public area) would be in the region of £4000-4500.

Given all of the above factors, it is suggested that meetings are instead conducted with 2 metre social distancing and the additional precautions set out in 1.2.9 above.

(b) *relocate affected meetings to a larger venue;*

We have made enquiries of several local venues (e.g. Hadlow Manor, East Malling Research Centre) to see if they are able to accommodate larger meetings. Subject to availability, both are able to accommodate a higher number of attendees as follows –

Hadlow Manor – 65 inc 6 press/ public (1m distancing plus masks). Cost - £1150 (half-day @ £19.50pp)/ £2095 (full day @ £35.50pp)

East Malling Research Centre – 50 inc any press and public (1.5m distancing plus masks). Cost - £600 (4 hours)/ £1020 (8 hours).

If Members were minded to host all meetings up to 17 June in one of these external venues then (assuming a half-day/ 4 hours length) the cost would be between £9,600 and £18,400.

Neither venue offers facilities for streaming, so we would be required to bring our own equipment.

We are continuing to investigate whether other suitable venues are available in Tonbridge for the Area 1 Planning Committee.

Given the costs of moving meetings to external venues, it is recommended that (subject to further investigation in respect of Tonbridge) Council meetings continue to be hosted at the Gibson Building. Should it become necessary in individual cases, or if social distancing restrictions are extended beyond 21 June, officers would liaise with the Leader/ relevant Chairman as to the most appropriate venue for specific meetings that we are unable to accommodate in the Gibson Building.



- (c) *allow non-Members of the relevant Committee/ Board etc to join/ speak remotely*

The law does not prevent speakers who are not members of the particular decision-making body from taking part remotely. So, for example, a councillor who is not a Member of an Advisory Board may speak through a video link, and in the current circumstances it would be appropriate to encourage such Members to adopt this approach. Physical attendance would solely be concerned with the members of the Advisory Board themselves. Similarly officers could be encouraged to attend remotely, which would assist in limiting numbers in the Chamber and might in any event be a sensible approach where their role in a particular item is limited. Public speakers at Area Planning Committees could also be encouraged to use a remote link, although provision would need to be made to allow such speakers to attend in person if they preferred to do so.

In the short term, the most cost-effective way to achieve this would be through all Members continuing to use the MS Teams app on their laptop/ tablet so that they could see/ hear (and be seen/ heard by) non-Members of the Board/ Committee, any Officers, press and public attending remotely. The use of a headset/ muting of microphones by Members would be encouraged, to avoid the potential for feedback. This would also allow for continued streaming of all meetings via YouTube.

Members are asked to note that the facility to join a meeting remotely would apply only to non-Members of the particular Board/ Committee in question. Voting Members of the Board/ Committee etc would need to be physically present in the meeting room.

- (d) *cancellation or postponement of meetings until after 21 June;*

This is regarded very much as an option of last resort. Given the considerations set out above it is not anticipated that any meetings prior to 21 June will need to be cancelled for reasons relating to covid but in the event that the need were to arise (whether for reasons related to covid or otherwise e.g. lack of business) this would be a matter for discussion with Chairman of the relevant Board/ Committee at that time.

1.2.17 Save for any upcoming meetings of full Council, it is considered that the combined use of the Council Chamber/ Committee Room plus the remote access afforded to non-Members, Officers, press and public as set out at 1.2.5 to 1.2.16 above offers the most practical way forward until all social distancing restrictions are lifted.

### **1.3 Meeting arrangements**

1.3.1 Members are reminded that the default position post 7 May 2021 will be a return to physical meetings. It nevertheless remains timely for Members to reflect on their experiences of the previous year, as it will help inform any action we may be able

to consider in the event that the LLG/ ADSO Court action is successful. However, it is not possible to predict the outcome of those proceedings so the considerations set out below and at Annex 3 are provided for information only.

### **Remote (or virtual) meetings**

- 1.3.2 A fully remote meeting is one in which everyone is joining separately via PC (inc laptops and tablets) or phone. These have been the default position for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council since May 2020. All participants join remotely. Under these circumstances provision is not made for physical attendance by the public, who will also join remotely.
- 1.3.3 Public streaming of remote meetings is currently delivered via YouTube, with a member of staff remotely recording/ streaming the meeting.

### **Face to face meetings**

- 1.3.4 All participants (Councillors/ officers and members of the public) attend the meeting physically with no provision for remote attendance. This was the default position at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and (subject to the outcome of the LLG/ ADSO legal action) will once again become the default position post 7 May 2021.
- 1.3.5 The Borough Council has not previously streamed face to face Council meetings. However, it is possible to do so - the options for supporting livestreaming are considered in Annex 3.

### **Hybrid meetings**

- 1.3.6 These are meetings where some, or most, participants attend the meeting physically, with some also attending remotely. Provision may be made for the physical attendance of the public in the Council Chamber or a committee room. The public may also be permitted to participate remotely. The options for supporting livestreaming of hybrid meetings are considered in Annex 3.

### **Analysis**

- 1.3.7 Attached at **Annex 3** is a table analysing the advantages/ disadvantages of the various types of meeting arrangements, including the financial, equalities and climate change considerations.

## **1.4 Levels of attendance at meetings**

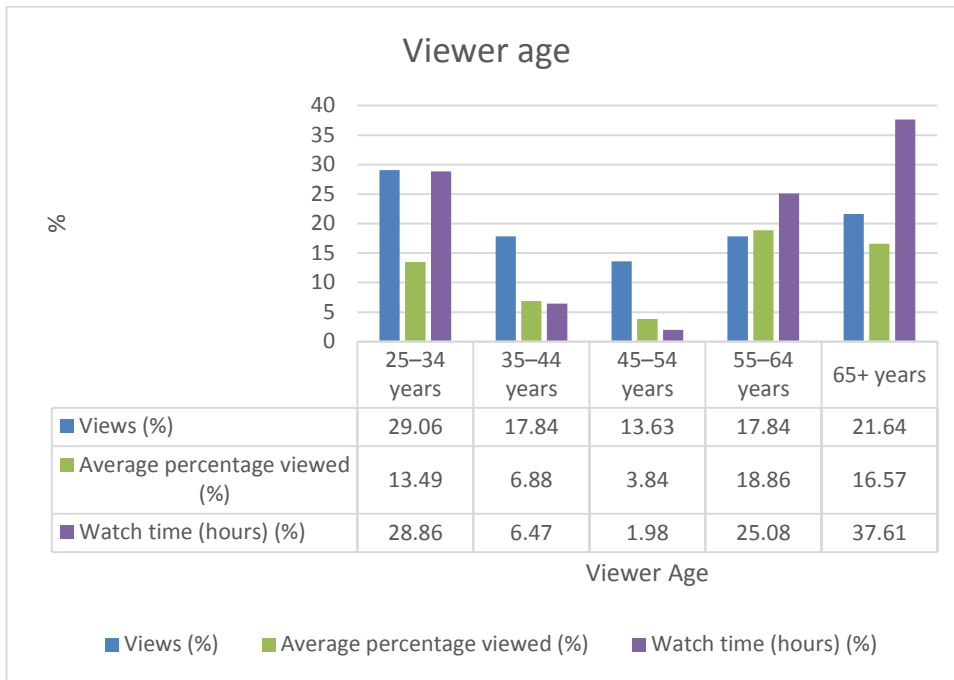
- 1.4.1 The move to remote meetings has seen an increase in attendance at meetings by Members. For example, 70% of Members have attended 90-100% of Boards/ Committees etc of which they were a member during the municipal year 2020/21 (up to 31 March 2021). The equivalent percentage figure for the municipal year 2019/20 was 31%.
- 1.4.2 The number of meetings attended by Members as a non-member of a Committee/ Board has also increased during the 2020/21 municipal year (up to 31 March 2021). 50% of Members attended 6 or more meeting of a Committee or Board of

which they were not a member during 2020/21 compared to an equivalent percentage figure of 30% for 2019/20.

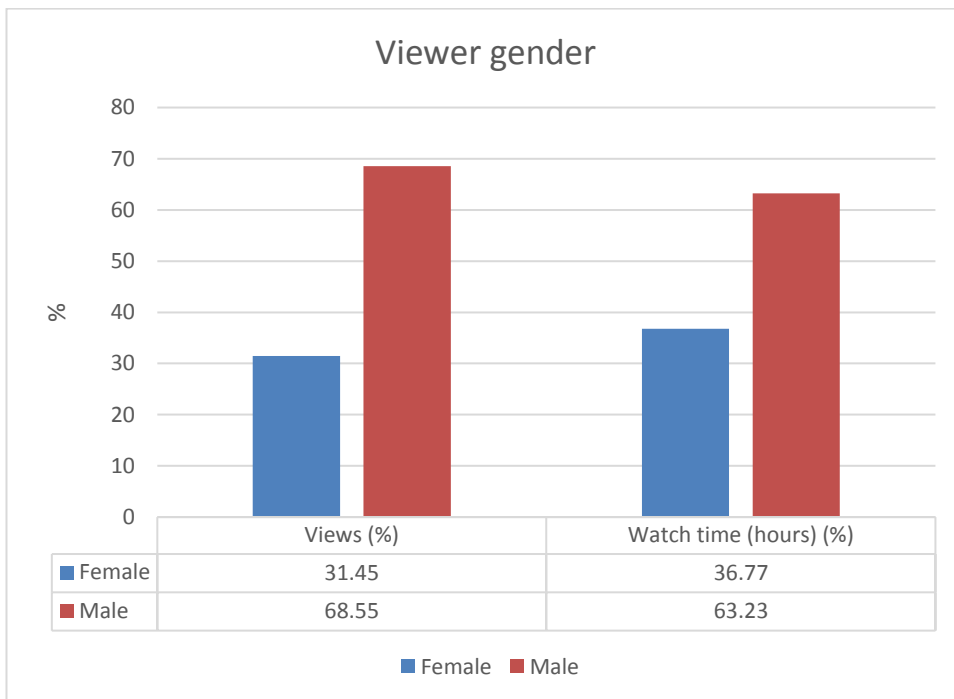
## **1.5 YouTube Streaming**

- 1.5.1 The streaming of Council meetings has undoubtedly had a positive impact on democratic involvement. Prior to May 2020 the Council had not previously livestreamed meetings (as it is not a legal requirement in respect of face to face meetings open to the public), but it is clear from the viewing figures available via YouTube that the facility to watch live meetings has been well received. For the assistance of Members, Officers have undertaken an analysis of the viewing data available via YouTube for the period 1 May 2020 to 28 February 2021.
- 1.5.2 For the period analysed viewing figures for meetings (including the Local Plan Examination Hearings) range from 1189 to 23. Members are asked to note that the number of views per meeting does not necessarily equate to the number of unique views i.e. by individual viewers. However, we are unable to access unique viewing data for meetings more than 90 days old so are unable to compare meetings throughout the entire period from May 2020 to February 2021.
- 1.5.3 There has been a total of 11,709 views of the council meetings (whether viewed live or retrospectively), with an average view duration of 18 mins 14 seconds. The most watched meeting video to date is the Area 3 Planning Committee on 9 July 2020 with 1189 views followed by the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board on 3 November 2020 with 813 views and the Joint Transportation Board on 21 September 2020 with 796 views. The flexibility associated with recording and streaming via the Council's YouTube channel allows people to engage with broadcasts live or retrospectively at their convenience.
- 1.5.4 Overall, there has been an increase in residents engaging positively in our remote meetings, indicated through viewing analytics on YouTube, as well as the amount of subscribers to the channel (set up in May 2020) which now stands at 198 (April 2021). Further metrics in respect of the viewing data are set out in the tables below.

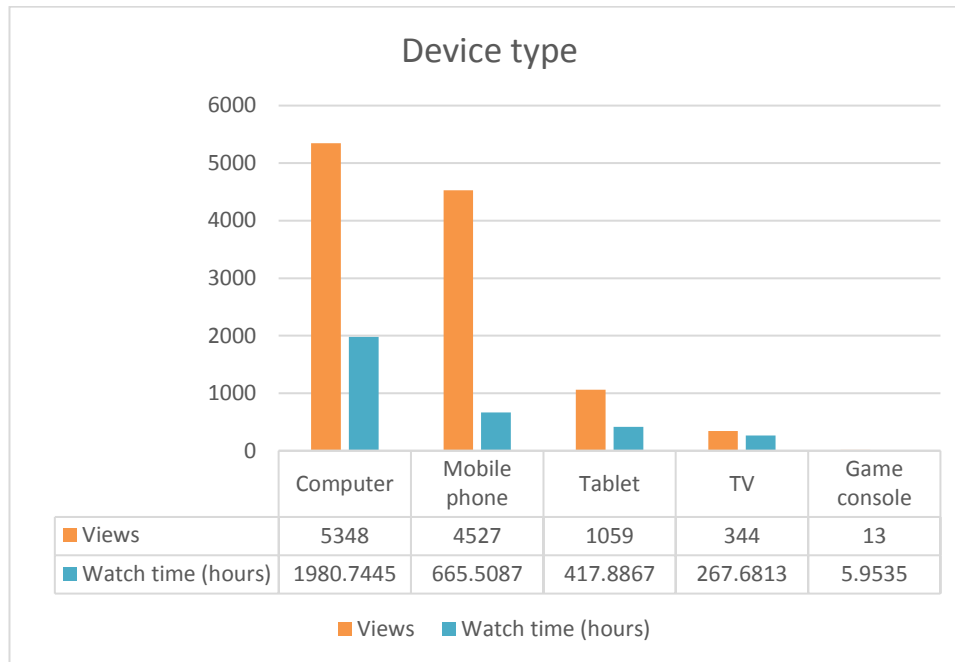
### Age



### Gender



## Device type



- 1.5.5 Other than members of the public who attended a face to face meeting to exercise a right to speak, we have not historically recorded data for public attendance at Council meetings. Anecdotally we believe that public attendance was generally restricted to Area Planning Committees and a small number of other meetings at which high profile or controversial issues were being debated.
- 1.5.6 Members of this Committee have previously expressed support for the continuation of livestreaming. The data set out above supports the view that livestreaming has been a positive addition to the adopted arrangements. It has therefore been assumed that livestreaming is a desirable component of whichever approach is adopted towards future meeting arrangements. However, continued livestreaming may represent budget growth.
- 1.5.7 Members of the Committee are invited to confirm their agreement to the above assumption (see recommendation at paragraph 1.11.1)).

## 1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 Remote meetings are currently permitted by the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. These regulations are of temporary effect, as they apply only to meetings required to be held, or held before 7 May 2021. The Government has indicated that the regulations will not be extended.
- 1.6.2 Section 100A(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 requires that meetings of the Council shall be open to the public unless the meeting has resolved to go into

private session to deal with confidential or exempt information (as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

- 1.6.3 However, during the coronavirus pandemic, the Government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person. 'Open to the public' is given a wider meaning to allow purely remote access, and includes access through remote means including (but not limited to) video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming and where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.
- 1.6.4 The most common means of allowing remote access is to webcast the meeting, but a meeting can be held by purely audio means and so public attendance can also be purely audio. Note however that the public would only attend by remote access if they are able to observe in real-time. Having the meeting recorded and broadcast later is not sufficient.
- 1.6.5 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021 do not prohibit meetings indoors which are reasonably necessary for work or voluntary services, so Council meetings can be resumed, with public attendance. The Council will of course need to ensure that it complies with any covid-related guidance applicable to such meetings.
- 1.6.6 As an employer, the Council is responsible for employees' welfare, health and safety 'so far as is reasonably practicable' (s2, Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974). It must also conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of all the work activities carried out by employees to identify hazards and assess the degree of risk (Reg 3, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999).
- 1.6.7 In addition to the statutory duties, the Council has a common law duty to take reasonable care for the safety of its employees e.g. a duty to see that reasonable care is taken to provide staff with a safe place of work, safe tools and equipment, and a safe system of working. It is also an implied term of employment contracts that employers will take reasonable care for the health and safety of employees and provide a reasonably suitable working environment for the performance of the employee's contractual duties.

## **1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.7.1 As set out in the report.
- 1.7.2 At the time of preparing this report, further information on pricing for the installation of hybrid meeting technology/ streaming was expected from our supplier. We expect to be able to share this information with Members at the meeting.

## 1.8 Risk Assessment

1.8.1 As set out in report and Annex 4.

## 1.9 Equality Impact Assessment

1.9.1 As set out in the report and Annex 3.

## 1.10 Policy Considerations

1.10.1 In the addendum to the Corporate Plan for 2020/21, Cabinet agreed the following as part of the 'Decision Making Capability' theme within the Review, Reorientation and Recovery strategy:-

*'Undertake review of effectiveness of virtual meetings and decision making processes generally. Note that regulations empowering Councils to hold virtual meetings are to expire on 7 May 2021 unless extended by the government.'*

1.10.2 Members are also asked to note that Cabinet resolved (30 June 2020) as follows:-

'Management Team be asked to conduct a review of all the Borough Council's assets, including use of the Gibson Building, to cover all areas as well as the need, function and capability of the Council Chamber and Committee Room for Council, Cabinet, Advisory Board and Committee meetings, in line with the Digital and Climate Change Strategies.'

1.10.3 The Draft Climate Change Action Plan for 2020 includes the following targets under the theme of 'TMBC Estate' –

- Undertake an assessment of business mileage for all staff and develop a policy to support tele-conferencing and skype meetings to reduce business travel;
- Amend the homeworking policy to encourage greater take up of homeworking/ flexible working where possible, to reduce home to work travel.

1.10.4 Members have also endorsed the Kent & Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy –

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/kent-and-medway-energy-and-low-emissions-strategy>

1.10.5 Priority 6 of the Strategy concerns Transport, Travel and Digital Connectivity. It seeks to achieve the following outcome:-

*'Greenhouse gas emissions from transport and travel are significantly reduced and air quality is improved'*

1.10.6 Priority 6 also identifies the following as a short term (by 2023) high level activity –

*‘Develop and expand sustainable travel policies that reduce car use and business miles, through a hierarchy of travel options to reduce the need to travel, encourage modal shift to walking, cycling and public transport or increase car sharing.’*

## **1.11 Recommendations**

1.11.1 Members are asked to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet that:

- (a) The arrangements set out in the report for holding physical face to face meetings post 7 May 2021 are APPROVED;
- (b) The draft response to the ‘Call for Evidence’ at Annex 2 is APPROVED
- (c) The Borough Council shall continue to livestream all Council meetings.

Background papers:

None

contact: Adrian Stanfield/  
Allison Parris/ Kevin Toogood

Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive  
Adrian Stanfield