

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 17 November 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Civico Hybrid Meeting Platform Update
Purpose of Report:	To apprise Cabinet of the work that has been carried out to date on the implementation of the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform, and the approach that is being taken to regression testing to inform a decision on how to proceed with public meetings from January 2023.
Report Owner:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member Performance and Resources
Responsible Officer:	Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Chief Executive Director of Corporate Resources
Policy Framework:	This report is a matter for Executive Decision by Cabinet
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose of this report is to apprise Cabinet of the work that has been carried out to date on the implementation of the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform, detailing the issues that have been encountered, and the subsequent fixes that have been applied to mitigate issues. The report also informs Cabinet of the approach that has been devised for 'regression testing' to inform a decision on whether to go live with Civico Hybrid Meeting platform for public meetings from January 2023.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the update as set out in this report.
2. That Cabinet endorses the approach proposed to ‘regression testing’ to inform a decision on whether to go live with Civico Hybrid Meeting platform for public meetings from January 2023.
3. That Cabinet refers this report to Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Performance and Resources) for their consideration with regards the approach outlined in this report.
4. That Cabinet approves the proposal for this report to be sent via email to all Elected Members for their information.
5. That a further report be brought to Cabinet in due course to provide a further update on related matters.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the work that has been carried out to date on the implementation of a Hybrid Meeting platform.
2. To ensure that Cabinet considers the approach being taken to regression testing and decision for go live.
3. To provide the Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Performance and Resources) the opportunity to consider the issues and approach described in this report.
4. To provide an update to all Elected Members.
5. To provide Cabinet with a further update in due course.

1. Background

- 1.1 During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was required that Council and Committee meetings were convened remotely and broadcast live to the internet for public viewing.
- 1.2 These remote meetings were initially facilitated using the Microsoft Teams platform.
- 1.3 With effect from May 2022, Welsh Government legislated that Local Authorities in Wales would conduct their Council and Committee meetings in a manner, whereby those not in the same place for the meeting could attend remotely and provided that the condition is met of persons being able to speak to and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by each other (Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the Act”)).
- 1.4 Section 46 of the Act requires from 5th May 2022, for the broadcasting of certain Principal Council meetings and for the same public bodies to publish arrangements for how it would comply with requirements of Section 46.
- 1.5 In August 2021 Welsh Government published interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings (MLMs) in relation to Sections 46 and 47 of the Act.

- 1.6** The Welsh Government Interim Guidance on MLMs states Principal Councils must:
- Make broadcasts available electronically.
 - Make arrangements for “multi-location” meetings, at which participants can speak to and be heard by each other. Where meetings must be broadcast participants must also be able to see and hear each other (S47).
 - Publish certain information, including notices of meetings, electronically, and electronic information relating to meetings must remain available in this format for six years following the date of the meeting.
 - Put in place facilities for the public who would otherwise not be able to do so, to access meeting documents.
 - Also set out the details of its arrangements for MLMs. These arrangements must be guided by the general principles of Transparency, Accessibility, Good Conduct, Welsh Language, Local Needs and Future Generations.
- 1.7** The Act was the catalyst for the Council to implement a Hybrid Meeting platform that would also, and as set out in the above general principles, facilitate bi-lingual hybrid meetings.
- 1.8** Following a procurement exercise for a technology platform capable of conducting a bi-lingual live meeting that is accessible from both the Civic Offices and remotely and capable of live broadcast on the internet, Civico were chosen as the Hybrid Meeting platform provider. This was on the basis that Civico had been the Council’s existing webcasting solution provider inclusive of all equipment and support services needed to achieve the webcasting of Council meetings from the Council Chamber from 2018 with that contract due to expire in October 2021. The Strategic Leadership Team in July 2021 agreed that a new procurement exercise should be undertaken given that the above contract was coming to an end and due to the likely increased costs of broadcasting meetings as a result of the introduction hybrid meetings from May 2022. As the Council’s current broadcasting provider, Civico were invited under the Council’s Procurement rules to provide a quotation for the provision of a Hybrid Meeting Solution for a 3-year period (with an option to extend for a further year).
- 1.9** During initial implementation testing, a number of issues were identified that required the attention of Civico, and reassurances were subsequently provided to the Council that these issues had been resolved.
- 1.10** Following further testing, it was decided to go live with the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform for Council and Committee Meetings.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** During the meeting of Full Council on 26th September, 2022, it was immediately evident that there were issues with the platform despite the testing undertaken and referenced above.

- 2.2** A number of remote attendees were unable to connect to the meeting, some remote attendees could not be seen or heard, there was interference in the Council Chamber which meant that any translation provided was intermittent through the headsets provided, resulting in a Welsh presentation having to be presented in English, and there were performance issues from the perspective of remote attendees where the video stream on their devices was pixelated and the audio dropped in and out.
- 2.3** The meeting had to be stopped for approximately 15 minutes until the translation functionality was switched off. However once reconvened, the meeting appeared to run smoothly on the Hybrid Meeting platform.
- 2.4** Following this experience, an internal project team was assembled, made up of colleagues from Democratic Services, ICT and Business Improvement. The team reviewed the Council meeting and issues arising and developed a detailed testing schedule to identify the current platform issues and to put in place a detailed mitigation plan for Civico to resolve these issues as they were identified.
- 2.5** Civico has carried out the following work to date to mitigate all of the issues that had been identified during testing.
- Re-configured and re-sized their server environment to manage and route audio and video traffic more efficiently through their Hybrid Meeting platform and across the internet. This is intended to address the issues relating to remote delegates not being able to be seen or heard, and the platform performance issues experienced by remote attendees and those who were viewing the live stream on the internet.
 - Installed a second infra-red (IR) emitter and re-positioned the original emitter in the Council Chamber to provide better coverage for the audio channel that broadcasts the translation to the IR head-sets.
 - Re-configured the IR receivers on the head-sets to enable them to effectively maintain the charge of their batteries to allow them to pick up the translation signal more efficiently.
 - Re-balanced the audio levels in the Council Chamber, in their remote attendance/viewing software and on their live viewing portal so the audio from local and remote meeting delegates (and the translator) can all be heard at the same volume.
 - Replaced a number of faulty and un-shielded cables in the Council Chamber and Audio Visual room to remove the potential for interference.
- 2.6** Following the completion of the above works in line with the mitigation plan, a programme of 'regression testing' has been scheduled through November and December. Regression testing is a term used to systematically test, and retest, a range of different functions and scenarios across a defined time period to ensure that no issues remain.

- 2.7** This regression testing will entail the use of the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform for internal meetings, to ensure that no further issues are found, and that any issues that have recently been resolved, remain resolved.
- 2.8** Based on the results of this regression testing schedule, a decision will be made whether to go live with the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform for public meetings.
- 2.9** If the decision early January is to proceed with Civico for public meetings, it is anticipated that the first public meeting using the Civico Hybrid Meeting platform will be the Cabinet meeting on 19th January, 2023. Should there be any reason not to proceed with the Civico platform, an alternative solution will be proposed for consideration.
- 2.10** Ahead of any recommencement of the use of the Civico platform, all Elected Members will be provided with a reminder of how to access the online training module which has been developed to support their use of the platform. Information will also be provided on the most effective way to access the platform (i.e. the use of Council provided ICT equipment and a stable and reliable broadband connection from their remote location if not attending in person).
- 2.11** In the interim, formal meetings of the Council will continue to utilise Microsoft Teams as a platform to facilitate remote meetings, so as not to disrupt Council business. Technically Members could attend the Council offices in the interim whilst Microsoft Teams is being utilised however this would still require access to the meeting on Microsoft Teams via the Lupus Network.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must comply with the Sustainable Development Principle. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the “well-being goals”.
- 3.2** Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 3.3** An IIA Screening Form has been completed and no adverse implications have been noted.
- 3.4** The Council’s MLM Policy has also been written having regard to the Council’s Project Zero position and Diversity in Democracy Action Plan.
- 3.5** Ensuring Elected Members are able to conduct formal Council business in accordance with the MLM is consistent with achieving the Council’s well-being objectives.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 The implementation and operation of a hybrid meeting system will reduce the need for remote attendees and members of the public to travel into the Civic Offices, in line with the Council's Project Zero commitment.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1 The current remedial works and regression testing costs are being borne by Civico (apart from the Council officers' time to support regression testing).

Employment

- 5.2 There are no direct employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 The legislative requirements to provide for MLMs are set out in the body of this report.
- 5.4 The Council has entered into a contract with Civico which ensures that the Council's legal position is suitably catered for.

6. Background Papers

[Vale of Glamorgan Council Multi Location Meeting Policy.](#)