

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 26 JUNE 2023

REPORT ON: HYBRID EQUIPMENT CITY CHAMBERS

REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT NO: 193-2023

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To recommend the investment in equipment for the Council Chamber to facilitate hybrid meetings.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee agrees:

- (a) to invest in hybrid equipment and associated furniture for the Council Chamber as detailed in Section 4.2 (c) of this Report, to be funded from the IT provision in the 2023-28 Capital Plan; and
- (b) to authorise the Executive Director of Corporate Services to make the necessary arrangements for the procurement and installation of the new equipment.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The capital cost of the necessary equipment is estimated at £85,000 and can be funded from the IT provision in the 2023-28 Capital Plan.
- 3.2 The revenue costs of maintaining the system (estimated at £6,000 per year) will be met from the Corporate Services budget.

4 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the Council has been operating formal meetings virtually using Microsoft Teams. As restrictions have eased Officers have been exploring possible options for the delivery of future meetings.
- 4.2 Six options have been considered as set out below.

(a) Fully virtual meetings

Council Meetings have been delivered remotely and effectively since the start of the pandemic. There are no additional costs of operating this way and it means that the public, press and deputations can readily access meetings. In addition, meetings can be broadcast and recorded. However, there is no opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

(b) In person meetings

A return to pre-pandemic arrangements would provide the opportunity for face to face meetings and mean that the public, press and deputations could also access meetings in person. There would be no additional costs in this model, though there would be a return to the pre-pandemic costs of running meetings. However, it would be difficult to broadcast or record meetings. Whilst Covid restrictions no longer apply some limitations on numbers attending and breaks will be needed to ventilate the space in accordance with HSE regulations. The competing uses of the Council Chamber will continue to require the moving and storing of furniture between meetings.

(c) Hybrid wireless meetings in the Council Chamber

This approach would provide the opportunity for both face to face and virtual meetings. The public, press and deputations would have access to meetings through either medium and meetings could also be broadcast and recorded. There would be additional costs, estimated at up to £85,000 for wireless equipment that could be setup for each meeting and allow for other civic uses of the Chamber at other times.

A new layout would be needed, as shown in appendix 1, but the competing uses of the Council Chamber would still require the moving and storing of furniture between meetings though lighter furniture would be used in the new arrangement.

(d) Hybrid wireless meetings in Dundee House

Using a floor in Dundee House would have similar benefits to the Council Chamber hybrid wireless solution but would also: allow for a permanent setup; have no ventilation limitations (as it is mechanically ventilated); could be used for other meetings; and would not require a wireless solution which would reduce the cost. However, this would reduce the potential income from leasing out space in Dundee House which could have an opportunity cost of around £122,000. Additional staffing resources would also be required to manage access in Dundee House by the public.

(e) Hybrid wireless meetings in an alternative venue

Previous surveys identified only the Marryat Hall and Morgan Academy Hall as potentially suitable venues that could be used for meetings. However, investment in wireless equipment would still be required and virtual aspects including broadcasting and recording would be dependent on the facilities available. The logistics for mobilising such a setup would be an ongoing challenge and there may be additional costs for hire and setup.

(f) A combination of options (a) and (b)

The Council could hold some meetings fully virtually and some only in person in the Council Chamber. This would not require any investment and would provide periodic opportunities for face-to-face engagement. However, this would still be subject to the limitations set out for option (b) above.

- 4.3 It is submitted that a modern council should have the ability to hold hybrid digital meetings, especially in the context of the risk or further pandemics. Consequently, it is recommended that the Council progress Option (c) (Hybrid wireless meetings in the Council Chamber).
- 4.4 Subject to approval by the Committee procurement would commence in July and would be followed by installation and testing. Market research suggests an eight-to-twelve-week lead time for this type of equipment so the new solution would be operational around October 2023. To enable the new arrangements to be implemented in this timescale it is recommended that the Director of Corporate Services be authorised to make the necessary arrangements to procure and implement the new equipment.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

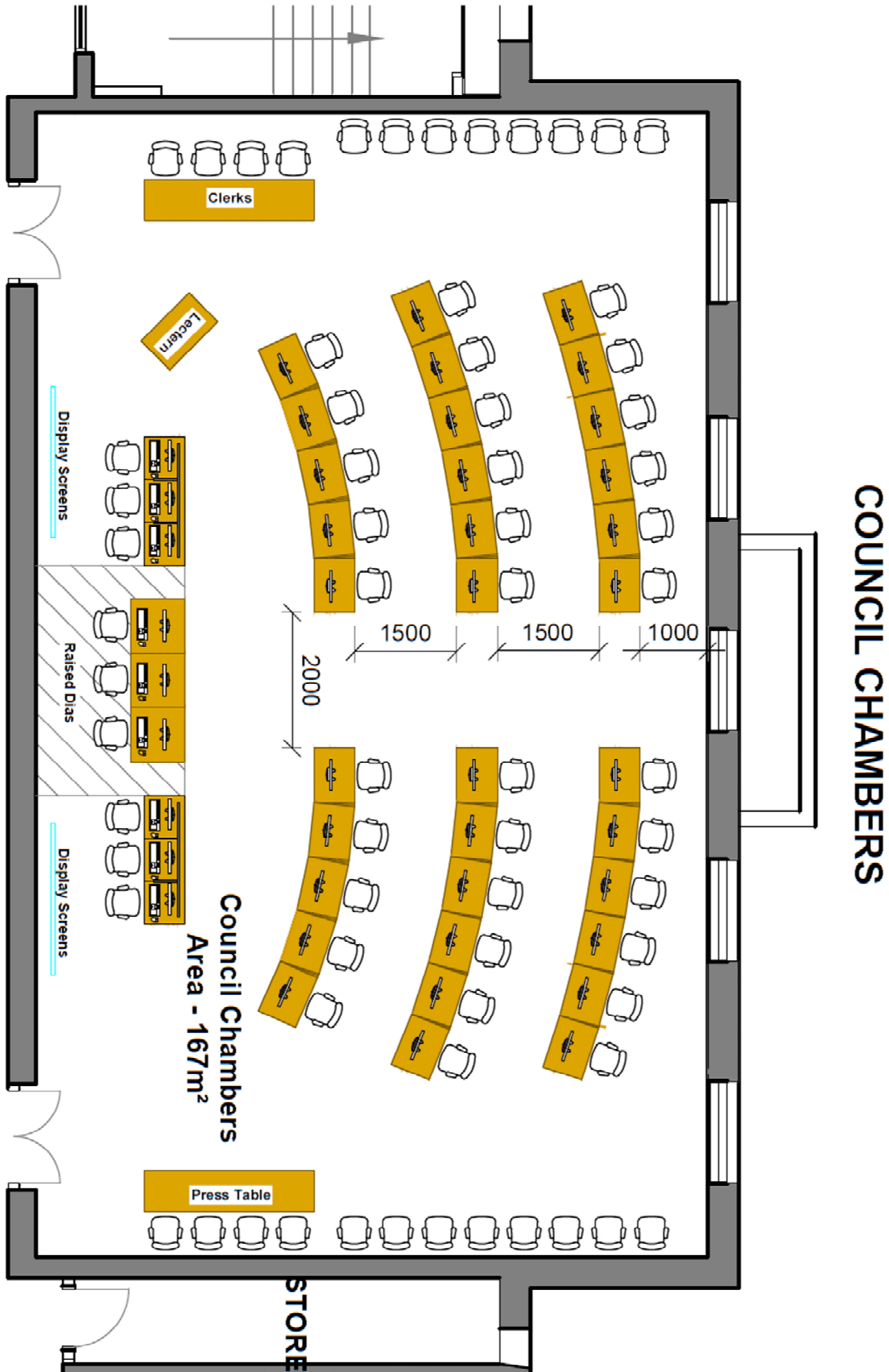
- 5.1 This report has been subject to the Pre-IIA Screening Tool and does not make any recommendations for change to strategy, policy, procedures, services or funding and so has not been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment. An appropriate senior manager has reviewed and agreed with this assessment.

6 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Council Leadership Team have been consulted on the content of this report.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None



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