

Meeting Arrangements Workstream:  
Recommendation One  
Virtual Meetings Implementation Options Paper

**Introduction**

As demonstrated throughout the surveys, focus groups and feedback discussions, the way in which meetings have been held in the past has prevented some of our members from participating. The Working Group acknowledged that we need to explore new ways of working to make it easier for a wider group of members to get involved. All audiences said TIME was the key barrier to participation (75%).

The overwhelming evidence was that to make meetings more accessible, people wanted to see more virtual meetings in future and liked the changes to accommodate these, including more structured and purposeful meetings encompassing shorter, timed agendas and regular breaks. All audiences (66%) supported much greater use of virtual time limited meetings.

Activists reported difficulty in getting Facility Time due to the diversity of our membership, particularly for our members in the private and community sector as well as women members. This is compounded for those with caring responsibilities.

As a result, the working group agreed to take forwards the following recommendation:

**Recommendation 1. The Regional Constitution be amended to require that at least 50% of all regional meetings take place virtually.**

Following this, the project lead presented a paper to the November Working Group outlining further exploration demonstrating the improvement in participation following the introduction of virtual meetings and the current barriers to successful hybrid meetings as well as exploring what steps could be taken in the future to resolve this as well as a recommended rule change.

The Group agreed that the introduction of virtual meetings has had a positive impact and that they would like to move towards at least 50% of meetings as virtual, with the flexibility to explore hybrid meetings in the future. However, there was some concern that 50% would be difficult to achieve for those with an odd number of meetings and that there may be some activists that may be oppositional if a mandated rule change. Some feedback was given at Regional Council that echoed these concerns with although overall support for virtual meetings.

The participation project aims to ensure everyone can participate in meetings, both physical and virtual meetings have their pros and cons, with some current committee members preferring physical meetings, the evidence that virtual meetings increase participation from both existing and new activists is indisputable.

Therefore, by ensuring that at least 50% of meetings are virtual it guarantees to new committee members, particularly those with caring responsibilities or no access to

facility time, that they are able to attend at least 50% of the time, with the remaining meeting format determined by the committee to ensure that those meetings that need to be face to face can still go ahead and support those that struggle to participate physically.

As a result, the Group agreed to receive an options paper on how 50% of meetings as virtual could best be achieved.

### **Status Quo – No Change**

The Region is currently operating under a dispensation from the Presidential Team that allows us to act outside of our constitution, this is in order to satisfy the Certification Officer should a complaint be made that we are acting outside of our rules and is justified due to the ongoing pandemic.

Should restrictions continue to ease and/or the pandemic effectively end, the dispensation would no longer be justified and we would need to revert to our previous constitution which we not allow for any virtual meetings. Much as Branches have been advised to amend their rules to allow for virtual meetings, our own constitution needs to be amended. Therefore, a rule change must take place for any virtual (or even hybrid) meetings to be permitted in the future.

### **Motion on Virtual Meetings & Guidance**

A motion would allow the Working Group to set out the positive arguments in favour of holding at least 50% of meetings virtually and would set the expectation that at least 50% of meetings as virtual meetings as Regional Policy that all committee would be expected to follow. Wording such as the following could be used:

‘This council expects that at least 50% of all meetings of regional committees be held virtually’

As regional policy, all committees would have to adhere to this and so therefore it would essentially have the same effect as a rule change. However, this would not actually constitute a rule change and as such would not still not address the issue as outlined above and as such a future rule change would also be required. However, the working group has previously indicated that they felt a motion may be more

### **Rule Change**

A rule change would ensure that each committee was open to new activists and remove a key barrier to participation across the region. It would also satisfy the requirement for virtual meetings to be within unison rules and ‘future proof’ the current use of virtual meetings.

The original proposed rule change was:

Option 1)

### **18. Meeting Arrangements**

*The expectation for Regional Council, Regional Committee, the Strategic Committees, Standing Committees, and the Sub-Groups is that at least half of all meetings per annual cycle will take place virtually using video conference software.*

*The Regional Council's expectation is that all other groups recognised at a regional level (as detailed in section 17) follow the same pattern.*

*For all meetings the region's Access Standards Guidance for virtual and physical meetings must be complied with. For all meetings held in person, reasonable steps must be taken by the officers of the committee to book venues which meet the access needs of committee attendees. The location of meetings should be within a reasonable travelling distance of all committee members, the Region's Access Standards Guidance must be complied with when determining this.*

Re-number subsequent sections accordingly.

Taking into consideration, the concerns raised by the Working Group regarding the need for greater flexibility if unforeseen events occurred that may require an in-person meeting or for committees with an odd number of committee dates, a revised first paragraph is as follows (with the remainder unchanged):

Option 2)

*The expectation for Regional Council, Regional Committee, the Strategic Committees, Standing Committees, and the Sub-Groups is that at least half of all meetings per **rolling two year cycle** will take place virtually using video conference software.*

This would therefore increase flexibility whilst also maintaining the overall goal of a fair balance between virtual and physical meetings to support the increase in participation, although it does not allow for the overall certainty in format that the previous proposed rule change guarantees.

Alternatively, following feedback from Regional Council, if the Working Group has genuine concern that the proposal will be opposed as insufficiently flexible, further wording could be added to also offer additional guarantees that should it be necessary or more appropriate to hold face to face meetings then this will be possible, whilst additionally recognising the importance of the two year cycle.

Option 3a)

- *The expectation for Regional Council, Regional Committee, the Strategic Committees, Standing Committees, and the Sub-Groups is that at least half of all meetings per two-year cycle will take place virtually using video conference software, **although due consideration will be given to exceptional circumstances in which case appropriate advice will be sought.***

Option 3b)

- *The expectation for Regional Council, Regional Committee, the Strategic Committees, Standing Committees, and the Sub-Groups is that at least half of all meetings per two-year cycle will take place virtually using video conference software, **circumstances permitting.***

Recommendation:

- The Working Group agree Rule Change Option 1, 2, 3a or 3b as a rule change to be proposed to Regional Council AGM 2022.