

REMOTE MEETING SOFTWARE PLATFORMS

Item 5.5

This item is to discuss and agree which remote meeting platform to be used by SPC for the duration of the coronavirus enforced social distancing measures for committee and Full Council meetings, and beyond this period to assist with working party and other meeting coordination and completion.

Below, first there is a precis of the different platforms that have been on offer.

Clearly we have progressed with the Zoom platform thanks to a number of councillors being proactive, and this has already led to the successful completion of our first virtual meeting on Tuesday 7th, so this together with stamp of approval for this system from SALC and NALC does rather suggest there is very little to discuss, however it is nonetheless worth seeing what else is on the market. Second there is a statement from SALC that we have been waiting for regarding a discount offer previously promised.

The idea is that we purchase one or perhaps two of the packages for myself and Hazel to be able to host meetings that can last longer than the hitherto 40-minute free limit. Cllr Campbell has also expressed some interest in other possible add ons and hopefully we can have a short discussion on this at our meeting.

The range of meeting platforms with their advantages and disadvantage along with any pricing information

Google Hangouts

<https://hangouts.google.com> - This is a communication platform that can be used for messaging, video conferencing and calls. The Classic Google Hangouts is free. Google Hangouts 7 Meet is Google's paid video conferencing software — find out more at https://gsuite.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/pricing.html

Advantages:

- It can be used on multiple devices including computers/laptops, Android and Apple devices.
- Screen sharing options are available.
- Participants can use the chat option whilst on the video call.

Disadvantages:

- For video conferencing there is a limit of up to 25 participants.
- Participants must have a Gmail account.

GoToMeeting

<https://www.gotomeeting.com/en-gb> - This is HD video conferencing software that can be used for meetings and collaboration. Find out more about pricing at <https://www.gotomeeting.com/engb/meeting/pricing-ma>

Advantages:

- Meetings can be scheduled in advance.
- Invitations can be integrated with Office 365 or Google Calendar plugins.
- Participants can join meetings through 'call me' option
- GoToMeeting can automatically call participants.
- Screen sharing options are available.
- Can host meetings with up to 250 participants.
- Meetings can be recorded, and meeting transcripts can be shared.

Disadvantages:

- The platform requires fast internet connection.
- Older systems may struggle to operate GoToMeeting.
- There are limitations with the free version — meetings can last 40 minutes and include three participants.

Microsoft Teams

<https://products.office.com/en-gb/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>. This is a collaboration and conversational platform as part of Office 365. Find out more about pricing at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/business/compare-more-office-365-for-business-plans>

Advantages:

- Within meetings you can share screens and record your meeting.
- Participants can join meetings, without joining Teams by clicking on the email link.
- Previous meeting notes and recordings can be accessed.
- The platform allows for 250 participants.

Disadvantages:

- The maximum PowerPoint size is 2GB.
- There are limited features on the Microsoft Teams free platform compared to the paid Microsoft Teams. More information is available on Microsoft Support.

Skype

<https://www.skype.com/en> - This is an online communications tool that can be used with PC/laptop, mobile phone, tablet or web. Skype has HD voice and video calling which helps to host group meetings. Skype can also be used for instant messaging. Skype is free however calls to mobile or landline incurs a charge.

Advantages:

- Screen share is available, which can be used for PowerPoints, videos, pictures and on-screen calls.
- You can save calls and record your screen.
- Conversations can be protected with end to end encryption.
- Skype can be used to reach those without skype using telephone calling services.

Disadvantages:

- There is a limit of 49 people joining group calls
- Skype provides limited customer support.

Slack

<https://slack.com/intl/en-gb> - This is a collaboration hub which provides an alternative to email communication. It can be used for conversations as well as voice or video calls. Find out more about pricing at <https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/pricing>

Advantages:

- Screen sharing options are available.
- Slack operates using channels which helps bring everything together in one place, such as documents and conversations.
- Joining and starting calls is fairly straightforward.
- Slack is known to be a secure platform for calls.

Disadvantages:

- Slack has limitations with how many people can join a call. This is up to 15 people using the paid standard package.
- There is a limitation to how many features are available on the free version.

Zoom

<https://zoom.us> - This is a video conferencing platform. This can be used for meetings, collaborations and participants can also use the chat option. It also supports audio conferencing, allowing people to join by telephone as well. Find out more about pricing at <https://zoom.us/pricing>

Advantages:

- Participants can share screens with each other (e.g. share a PowerPoint presentation).
- Meetings can be made securely. This includes having passwords and meeting IDs for participants to join meetings.
- Meeting invitations can be added to Outlook Calendar, Google Calendar or Yahoo Calendar.

- You can save the chat conversations.
- Meetings can also be recorded for future reference.

Disadvantages:

- The level of support you can receive from Zoom is dependent on the Zoom package being used.
- The free Zoom package limits group meetings to 40 minutes

Discount for Zoom subscription

NALC is very pleased to have worked with the Crown Commercial Service so that local councils are included in the public sector organisations eligible to access a discounted package from Zoom. This discount means that councils can access the Pro plan for Zoom at £7.99 per month. The normal advertised rate for this package is £12.99. This discount is also available to county associations.

To access this discounted rate please email Zoom at jane.ross@zoom.us and quote contract number CCS 020A33. If asked which department or category you are related to please state the National Association of Local Councils.

Of course, councils can also choose to use the free service from Zoom — [set up an account](#). If you do choose to use Zoom, there is a range of free [information and training](#) to help people use the platform which is definitely worth having a look at to help get you started.