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To: Chairpersons of All-Party Groups

Supplementary guidance on remote/virtual meetings of All-Party Groups during the current public health crisis

This note to Chairpersons of All-Party Groups (APGs) provides further explanation and follow-up to the [Guidance to Assembly Members on All-Party Group meetings during the current public health crisis](#) which was issued by the Committee on Standards and Privileges on 21 April 2020.

The purpose of this note, which should be read in conjunction with the Committee's guidance, is to respond to a number of queries on related issues which were received since the Committee's guidance was issued. These include queries on the use of virtual meeting platforms other than Microsoft Teams and on the ability to include external attendees (including officials from the Northern Ireland Civil Service and other external bodies) to virtual meetings of APGs.

The Assembly Information Systems Office has also provided updated advice in relation to simplifying the process for inviting external guests into a virtual APG meeting on Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams and alternative virtual meeting platforms

As outlined in its guidance, the Committee on Standards and Privileges has agreed the principle of APGs holding remote/virtual meetings during the current COVID-19 pandemic and has facilitated this through both the interpretation of certain rules and by setting out a technological option via Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams has been suggested as an appropriate platform to accommodate MLAs using Assembly-networked equipment. The guidance to MLAs is based around this particular video-conferencing platform following advice from the Assembly's Information Systems Office. The Assembly Information Systems Office

will provide MLAs with guidance and support on how to use Microsoft Teams for remote/virtual meetings.

MLAs have access to a range of IT equipment and devices from the Assembly Information Systems Office. The Assembly Information Systems Office recommends the use of Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings of APGs and it is the only secure platform that is readily available across all Assembly devices. I understand that most video conferencing software will have a web-client which does not require software installation but these may have less features and may not be compatible with certain browsers. However, as most people will have access to personal tablets/mobile phones, it may be possible to use Zoom/Skype/Google Hangouts or Microsoft Teams for APG meetings using personal devices.

Whichever platform is used for virtual meetings of APGs is of course a decision for the APG itself to make. However, such meetings should be facilitated in a manner which adheres to the [Rules on All-Party Groups](#) (e.g. by ensuring that all MLAs have access to the APG meeting).

Access for external guests to meetings on Microsoft Teams

Under the Microsoft Teams option, only individuals with Assembly network accounts will have permissions to access the Assembly's Microsoft Teams infrastructure; as such, it would be for the Chairperson (or, in their absence, the Deputy Chairperson) to arrange the virtual meeting by inviting guest access to those with an external email address etc. However, at the discretion of an APG, outside organisations and individuals will often attend meetings to inform and support a group's work. Such guests will not have access to Assembly network accounts so will require guest access to Microsoft Teams meetings.

The Assembly Information Systems Office has recently completed work to simplify the procedure to include the implementation of anonymous guest access, meaning that guest users do not have to register or sign into a Microsoft Teams meeting. External guests simply click on the meeting link to enter a virtual meeting lobby and any APG member with an Assembly account can admit them into the meeting. External guests will appear as normal meeting attendees. We were made aware of early difficulties in relation to external attendees at virtual meetings of APGs. The Assembly Information Systems Office has therefore configured Microsoft Teams to be as open as possible; there are no passwords or special accounts required. Users only need to have Chrome or Edge browsers on their device to connect to Microsoft Teams meetings. Regardless of which video conferencing platform the APG uses, difficulties connecting to meetings may be related to the external attendee's IT environment and, as such, they should contact their own IT support regarding any issues with connectivity.

All-Party Notice (APN)

A template APN for virtual APG meetings is included at **Appendix 1** and should be tailored according to the virtual meeting platform being utilised. The APN template should be completed in the usual manner, with the details of the meeting, and emailed to the Assembly Business Office for issue (copying the APG Chairperson into such a request if made by the APG secretariat) in order that all Members are notified of the meeting taking place.

Joining instructions/link to the virtual meeting should **not** be detailed on the APN and should be provided **directly** to APG members and, on request, to other MLAs who may wish to attend the meeting.

Technical support from the Assembly Information Systems Office

As outlined in the guidance from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, the Assembly Information Systems Office cannot provide technical support for APG meetings; however, guidance and training will be provided to Members on how to use Microsoft Teams for remote/virtual meetings, including technical support to invite guest access and arrange remote/virtual meetings. The Assembly Information Systems Office has produced a number of brief “how to” guides in relation to using Microsoft Teams which are provided at **Appendix 2**.

If an APG wishes to be enabled to hold remote/virtual meetings on Microsoft Teams the Chairperson of the APG should make a formal request to the Assembly Information Systems Office Helpdesk at the below email address. The Assembly Information Systems Office will then provide the appropriate guidance for the meeting and address any technical queries.

For advice and requests regarding technical issues, including in relation to the guidance at Appendix 2, please contact the following email address:

ITHelpdeskEmail@niassembly.gov.uk

If you require any further clarification on any aspect of this guidance please email the Standards & Privileges Committee office at the following address:

committee.standardsprivileges@niassembly.gov.uk

Shane McAteer
Committee Clerk
Committee on Standards and Privileges

1 July 2020

CC: APG Secretariat

Appendix 1 – APN Template for providing notice of a virtual meeting of an APG (All platforms)

[date]

APN:

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

ALL PARTY NOTICE

ALL PARTY GROUP ON [insert title of group]

A remote/virtual meeting of the All-Party Group (APG) on [insert title of group] has been arranged to take place on [insert day and date] at [insert time] using the **[insert virtual meeting platform such as Microsoft Teams/Zoom]** platform. **[Complete as appropriate]**

[Further details can be included here, e.g. who will be addressing the meeting and the subject matter, if relevant].

All Members are welcome to attend.

An invite will be emailed separately to each APG member (and, on request, to any other MLAs who wish to attend) providing instruction on how to join the remote/virtual meeting.

For further information and to request the appropriate links and joining instructions for the remote/virtual meeting, please contact [insert name] on [insert telephone number] or email [insert email address].

All Party Notices can only be issued by the Business Office.

Templates should be forwarded to the Clerk of Plenary Business, Room 32, Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Fax: 90 (5)21962) or emailed to the Business Office on business.office@niassembly.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – IS Office “how-to guides”



How to create a remote/virtual meeting in Microsoft Teams - Chairperson

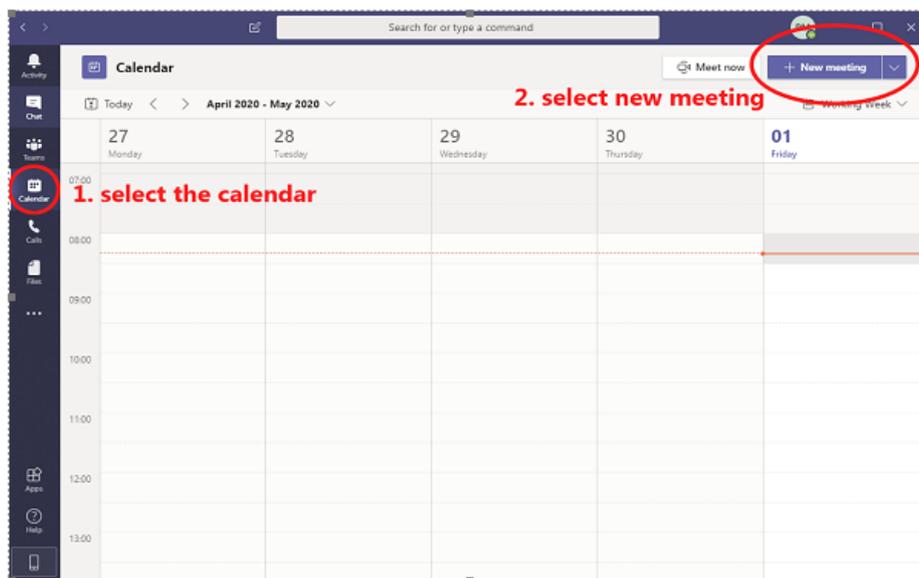
This guidance is for the **APG Chairperson** on how to create, forward and admit attendees to a remote/virtual meeting in **Microsoft Teams**.

Please note, that the **APG Chairperson** will have to be the one to create and organise APG meetings. This is due to the fact that the APG Secretariat in most cases will not have access to the Assembly's **Microsoft Teams infrastructure**.

The creation of meetings within **Microsoft Teams**, works in exactly the same way as setting up a meeting within **Microsoft Outlook**.

To create a meeting:

- Open the **Microsoft Teams Application**
- Click on **Calendar** icon on the left side menu
- Click **New Meeting** button on the top right



When the **New Meeting** form opens, as shown below, you will **need to complete** the following meeting details:

- Title

- Attendees - Enter in the email addresses of all the attendees
- Date and time information

Ignore the following fields:

- Does not repeat
- Channel
- Location

Any details of the meeting can be added in the detail box at the bottom of the screen.

The screenshot shows the 'New meeting' dialog box with the following details:

- Title:** APG (Enter Title)
- Attendees:** RS Scott, Richard
- Date and Time:** 18 May 2020, 13:30 to 14:00, 30m, All day
- Recurrence:** Does not repeat
- Channel:** Add channel
- Location:** Add location
- Rich Text Editor:** Contains the text 'Please find the agenda for the APG meeting below'.

Click **Send** at the top right hand side of the screen. This will save the meeting into your calendar and send out a meeting request to all attendees.

The screenshot shows the calendar view for May 2020. The meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 18th, from 13:00 to 14:00. The meeting details are as follows:

Date	Time	Meeting Title	Organizer
Monday, May 18, 2020	13:00 - 14:00	APG (Enter Title)	Rick Scott



How to admit external attendees to a Microsoft Teams meeting

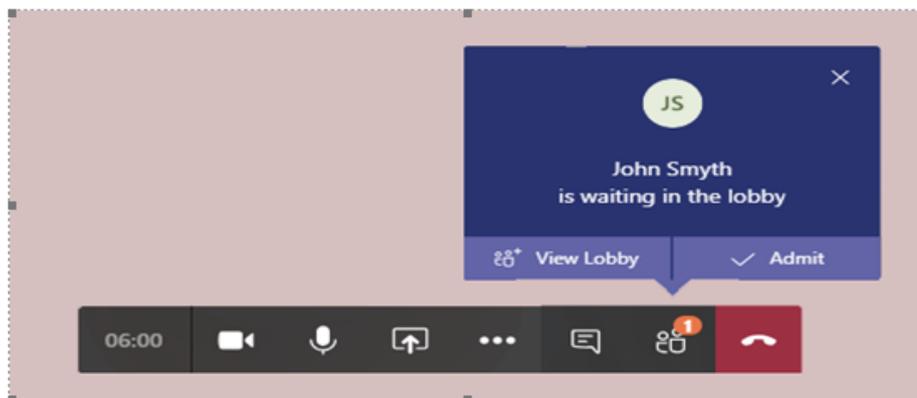
If the external guest wants to connect via web browser option, **they must use Microsoft Edge or Chrome to support audio and video meetings.**

External guests only need to enter their name and click on **“Join Now”** to enter the meeting. They will then be admitted into a Teams meeting lobby from which they can be given access to the meeting.

The meeting organiser is able to see each person as they enter the lobby.

To permit access click on **Admit**.

Teams currently displays the images of up to nine attendees in addition to your own image. The other attendees are displayed by their initials.



Advice for more effective virtual meetings

To conduct more effective virtual meetings please consider the following advice:

- Use a headset or earphones to provide better audio and privacy
- Microphones are very sensitive and pick up background noise, therefore, **mute your mic** when you are not speaking.
- Be courteous to other participants, especially the current speaker
- Choose a location/room with good lighting.
- For privacy, you can use a background image or blur your background



How to forward a Microsoft Teams invitation

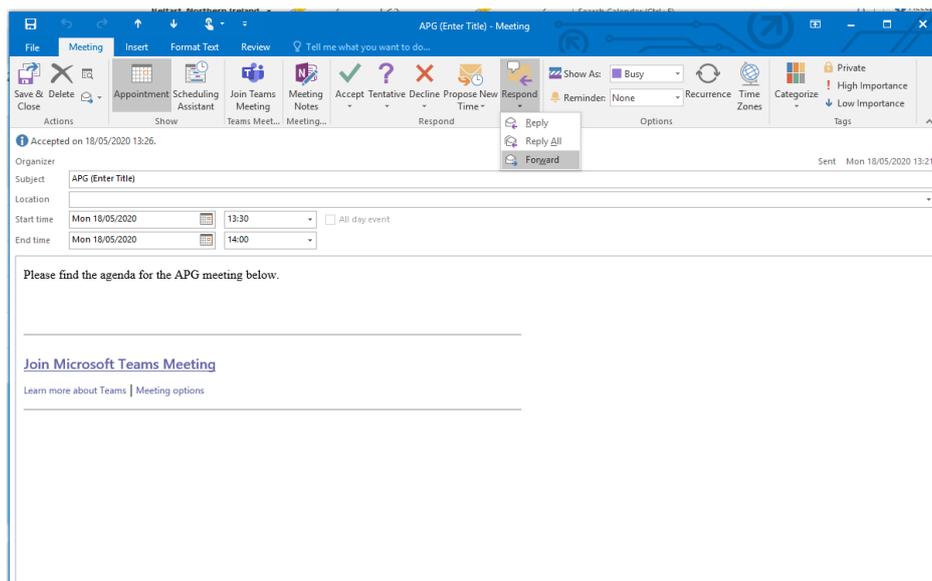
In order to maintain the integrity of APG meetings and in light of recommendations from Cyber Security organisations, joining instructions/link to the virtual meeting will **not** be detailed on the All-Party Notice and will therefore be provided **directly** to APG.

This could mean that other attendees may request to attend the meeting after the initial request has been sent out.

If this is the case, then all that needs to be done is to forward the meeting request to anyone who has requested it by following the steps below.

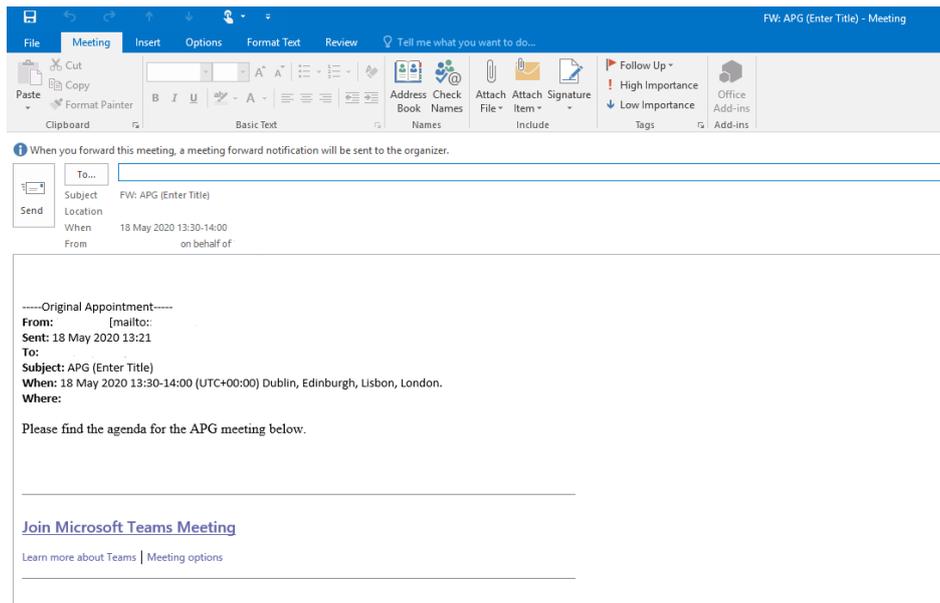
To Forward a meeting request:

- Go to the Calendar
- Open the meeting request
- Click the the arrow under respond
- A list will be displayed - **Reply, Reply All or Forward**.
- Click **Forward**



The **Forward** message screen will appear.

- Enter the email address of the person that you wish to **Forward** the meeting to.
- Click **Send** and the meeting request will be sent out.



Anytime a meeting request is forwarded an email will be sent to the meeting organiser as a notification. This will allow the meeting organiser (in this case the Chairperson) to have knowledge of all potential attendees.

Security point - As with all video conferencing software, external attendees will arrive in a virtual lobby before gaining access to the meeting. Each external attendee will need to be accepted before they can access the meeting. This is to provide control so that only those who should be at the meeting are allowed the enter.



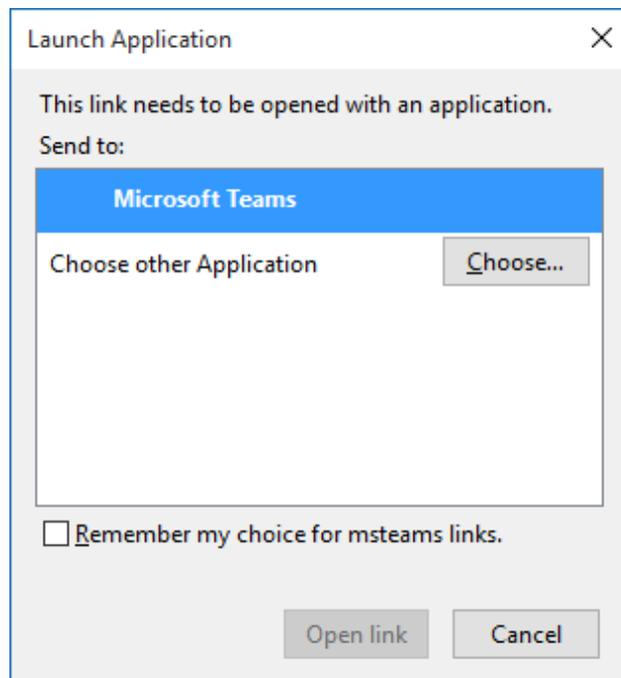
How to join a Microsoft Teams meeting

Joining a meeting

To join a meeting directly click on the “**Join Microsoft Teams Meeting**” link at the bottom of a meeting request.



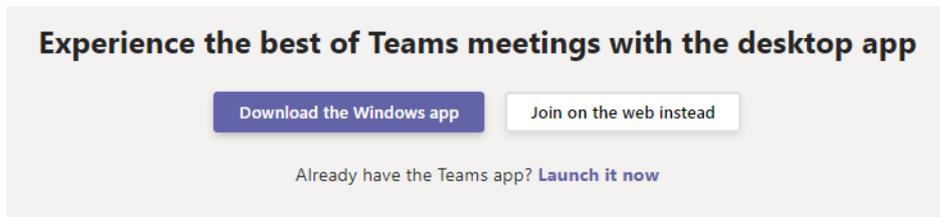
If you have the **Teams application** installed on your computer you will be prompted to launch the application in **Microsoft Teams**.



If you don't have the **Teams application**, you will be presented with the options to **download the Windows App** or **join on the web**.

If you select to join on the web instead, **you must use Microsoft Edge or Chrome** as they are the **only browsers that support audio and video meetings**.

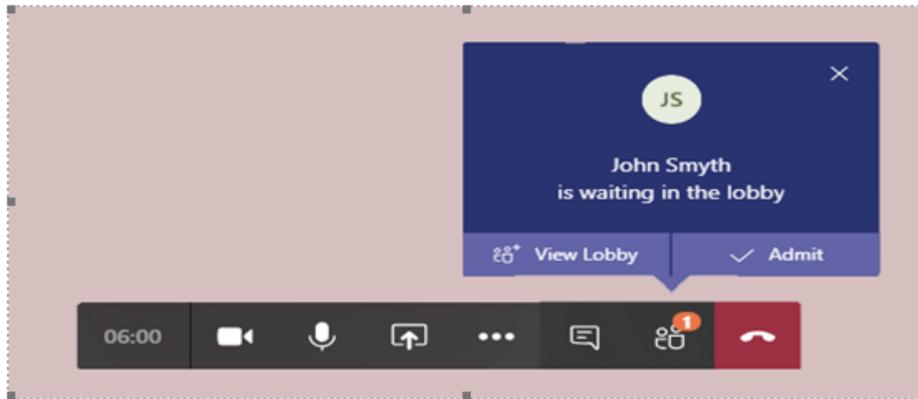
When someone without an Assembly Teams account clicks on the link to join a **Teams meeting** they will be presented with three options: “**Download the Windows App**”, “**Join on the web**”, or if they **already have the Teams App**.



If the external guest wants to use the web client, **they must use Microsoft Edge or Chrome to support audio and video meetings**. External guests only need to enter their name and click on “**Join Now**” to enter the meeting. They will then be admitted into a Teams meeting lobby from which they can be given access to the meeting.



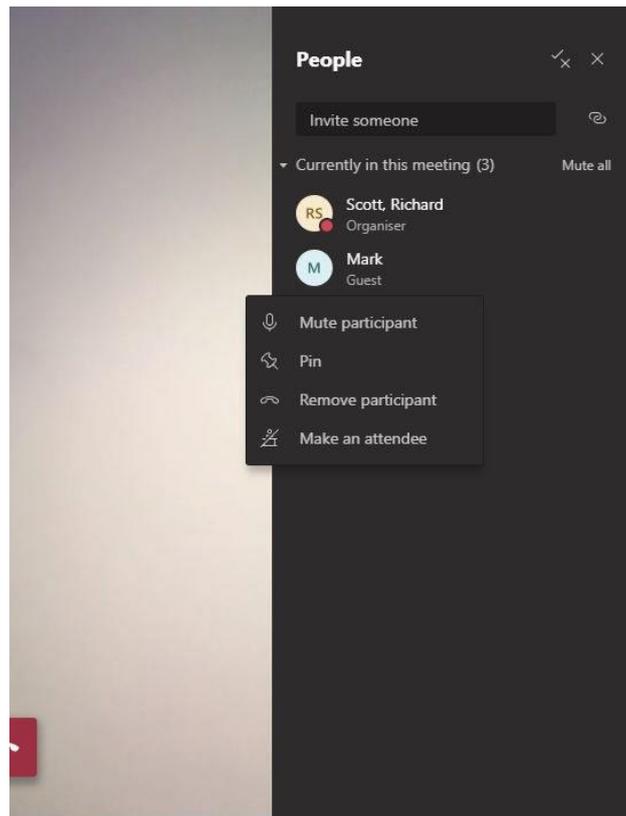
How to mute or remove attendees from a Microsoft Teams meeting



Once the meeting has started the organiser has the ability to mute attendees. This can be useful if there is background noise coming from one or more of the attendee connections.

To mute an attendee, open the attendees list - this is the icon directly beside the red handset icon in the picture above.

- Find the attendee that you wish to mute and right click beside their name.
- A menu will be displayed which will give the ability to mute the attendee or remove them as a participant.



Once the participant has been muted it is not possible for the organiser to unmute that person.

The reason for this is that you do not want to put people into situation that suddenly somebody unmutes a microphone in the middle of the conversation which should not be heard on that particular meeting.

All participants can unmute themselves when needed and desired.

Advice for more effective virtual meetings

To conduct more effective virtual meetings please consider the following advice:

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