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Action:	For Decision

Remote vs. Office Hosted Meetings

1. Purpose

At SEC Panel meeting 91, it was suggested that SECAS undertakes a piece of working comparing the costs and benefits of hosting meetings remotely vs hosting them at the Gemserv office. The Panel is requested to consider the benefits of remote hosted meetings including cost savings and to agree the proposed approach for hosting meetings going forward.

2. Background

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, government restrictions have required remote working since 23 March 2020. Since then, SECAS has conducted all bar two of its Panel meetings, as well as Sub-Committee and Engagement Events, online.

SECAS is now considering the optimal approach for delivering meetings going forward, considering the associated costs, benefits, and government restrictions which remain in place.

On 27 July 2020, SECAS issued a survey to the Panel and Sub-Committee members to understand the likely rate of attendance should we return to in person meetings, and to seek feedback on the current remote arrangements. Whilst this information was collected last year, it remains a useful resource for navigating post-lockdown meetings.

Over the last year, the Sub-Committee Chairs and SECAS have regularly consulted with committee members to ensure meetings are run optimally and implement improvements where necessary. One such improvement was to upgrade Elizabeth Room's videoconferencing facilities to enable better sound and video quality for attendees, and Gemserv's IT support is also available on meeting days to support as required.

3. Government guidelines

The government guidance that 'everyone who can work from home should do so' is expected to continue beyond the government's original roadmap date of Monday 21 June. Current press also anticipates that the unlocking date will be delayed by two weeks to a month. Even when the 'work from home' restriction is lifted, there are likely to be some longer-lasting effects on the way we facilitate client activities:

- **Social distancing** - Depending on government guidelines about social distancing, the Elizabeth Room may have a more limited capacity. However, this will not be known until the Government confirms the next stage of its unlocking roadmap.

- **Safety precautions** - Currently, office attendees are required to wear masks in the lobby and elevators. This guidance may remain in place, or guests may still wish to wear a mask. Hand sanitiser will still be readily available, and the Gemserv offices thoroughly cleaned. Gemserv has a supply of rapid lateral flow tests available to its staff, and if there is interest from clients, we can investigate the possibility of making these tests available to guests.
- **Travel** - Travel for the purposes of work is allowed under current guidelines, and other travel restrictions should be lifted on Monday 21 June. However, we understand that individuals and their companies may take different approaches to both working from home and travel.

4. Benefits of Office-hosted vs Remote meetings

Through review of the 2020 Panel Sub-Committee survey responses and noting feedback from the Panel and Sub-Committee Chairs and Committee members, SECAS has identified the following benefits with running office-hosted and remote meetings:

Office-hosted meetings

- The office-hosted meetings benefit from the social aspect of interacting with other members. Whilst this can be beneficial to the running of the meeting, members also benefit from social interaction and business networking beyond the meeting, for example meeting up the evening before.
- Some members have identified that office-hosted meetings facilitate better interaction and discussion, better timekeeping, and more consistent breaks.
- Some survey respondents also found that being in front of a screen for a long period of time was difficult for concentration, and as a result there was less interaction and participation than with an office-hosted meeting.
- Office-hosted meetings benefit from more immediate IT support, and refreshments offered by Gemserv.

Remote Meetings

- Remote meetings and events have enabled easier access for attendees, in particular for those who live further away from London and are practical for presenters who join part of the meeting rather than in full.
- Costs for remote meetings are minimal, as they do not incur fees for Room Hire or Contractor Space Rental. Due to limited travel, Sub-Committee Expenses are much lower when meetings are held remotely. There is more information on costs for office-hosted meetings in section five of this paper.
- Some Panel members have commented on the video feed of the Elizabeth Room, which shows in-office attendees at a distance. A fully remote meeting would benefit from a more consistent view of each attendee dialling in from their laptop.
- MS Teams has several features which are better suited to a fully remote meeting, such as the 'hands up' and the chat tools. These can continue to be used in a mixed attendance scenario but may be less noticeable to those in the office.
- Feedback on remote meetings has been largely positive, with some members identifying improved efficiencies such as meeting timekeeping and stricter control over attendance.

5. Cost of office-hosted meetings

In 2020/2021 there was a saving of £252,000 as a result of working remotely across Accommodation, Contractor Space Rental as well as Panel and Sub-Committee Expenses.

The SEC Approved Budget for 2021-2024 recognises a partial return to office-hosted meetings, and has accounted for 54 out of the 213 meetings being held in the Gemserv offices with a total budget of £54k. The Panel and PFCG has been allotted six of these meetings, although we can be flexible in the allocation per committee.

Meeting Type	2021-22 Meeting Estimate/ Committee	2021-22 No. of office-hosted meetings budgeted
Panel/Board and PFCG	16	6
Change Board	12	4
Change Sub-Committee	12	4
Working Groups	26	9
SMKI PMA	12	3
SSC	24	6
TABASC	18	6
Operations Group	24	6
TAG	18	6
Party Engagement Events	51	4
Ad-hoc	0	0
TOTAL	213	54

Table 1: Meeting Forecast

6. Approach to running meetings

Sub-Committee Meetings

SECAS met with the Sub-Committee Chairs on Tuesday 8 June to discuss their preferred approach for running meetings going forward on a per Sub-Committee basis.

The Chairs agreed they had no plans to return to office-hosted meetings or to make use of Gemserv desk space (Contractor Space Rental) for the foreseeable future, and proposed quarterly office-hosted meetings to commence from December 2021 to provide for face-to-face interaction. This is in line with the assumptions made in production of the 2021-24 Approved Budget. The Chairs agreed that social events timed to take place after these meetings would be welcome.

We will ratify the discussion held with the Chairs at the upcoming Sub-Committee meetings, however, it was noted that a significant proportion of Sub-Committee members have already expressed a preference to retain remote meetings.

Panel Meetings

SECAS can continue to facilitate office-hosted meetings for the Panel, as with its October 2020 and May 2021 meetings which ran smoothly.

The Panel is asked to agree its preferred approach for hosting Panel meetings going forward, and to consider whether a quarterly social gathering would be a welcome addition.

Budget

Costs for office-hosted meetings can be broken down into Meeting Room Hire & Refreshments, Panel Chair Office, and Contractor Space Rental. Based on the discussions that have taken place so far, we estimate a maximum of 20 office-hosted meetings be delivered in the Regulatory Year, the Contractor Space Rental budget will not be utilised and the Panel Chair office be used twice a month. These assumptions would result in a saving of £85,200.

Cost	2020/21 Outturn	2021/22 Approved Budget	2021/22 Estimated Outturn	Variance
Meeting Room Hire & Refreshments	£1,000	£54,000	£20,000	£34,000
Panel Chair Office	£300	£24,000	£7,000	£17,000
Contractor Space Rental	£0	£34,200	£0	£34,200
Total	£1,300	£112,200	£27,000	£85,200

Table 2: 2020/21 Accommodation Cost Outturn and 2021/22 Budget

Next Steps

In order to give members a clear view of upcoming meetings, we propose:

- SECAS draft a meeting schedule proposing quarterly office-hosted meetings until March 2021 to be agreed by each Sub-Committee;
- SECAS to arrange quarterly meetings in Elizabeth Room where possible to make use of enhanced functionality; and
- SECAS to investigate options for business networking events to take place after these meetings.

7. Recommendations

The Panel is requested to:

- **CONSIDER** the benefits identified for operating remote and office-hosted meetings;
- **AGREE** the proposed approach for hosting meetings going forward; and
- **AGREE** to recommend to SECCo Board the release of some of the Accommodation budget to fund Panel and Sub-Committee business networking events as required.

Cecily Bain

SECAS Team

11 June 2021