

Report to Acting Chief Executive

Subject: Remote Meetings Rules

Date: 7 May 2020

Author: Service Manager Democratic Services

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

For the Acting Chief Executive, in consultation with the Mayor, to approve the Remote meetings rules, attached at Appendix 1 to this report, to enable Council and Committee meetings to take place by remote means.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

That the Acting Chief Executive:

- 1) Approves the Remote Meeting Rules, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, enabling Council and Committee meetings to be held remotely, if required, due to social distancing measures implemented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- 2) Authorises the Monitoring Officer to withdraw or amend the rules should the advice on social distancing from Central Government be changed.

1 Background

1.1 The COVID-19 emergency has resulted in local authorities needing to adapt their business to respect the social distancing measures introduced by Central Government. A decision was taken in late March to suspend face-to-face meetings of Council and Committee meetings and to rely on existing provisions in the constitution to make any urgent decisions. On 4

April the [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) came into force which gave local authorities the ability to hold meetings in a “virtual space” so long as certain conditions were met. The Regulations also allow councils to adopt additional rules to manage the new virtual meeting process.

- 1.2 This means that instead of holding committee meetings in either the Council Chamber or a meeting room at the Civic Centre, a meeting can take place between members and officers meeting virtually, using IT equipment in homes and offices. The audio and video from the meeting would be available for the public to access live or for later playback. Where the public would usually be entitled to speak at meetings this will still be possible through written submissions or through audio.
- 1.3 Decision making in respect of meeting rules is a non-executive decision, the constitution permits non-executive decisions to be taken urgently by the relevant Director in consultation with the appropriate committee or meeting chair where necessary. It is not feasible at the present time to hold a Council meeting to approve the attached rules, however, in order to facilitate remote meetings the rules need approval. Given the urgent nature of the decision, with meetings due to re-convene in June, the Acting Chief Executive, in consultation with the Mayor is authorised to take this decision. The Mayor has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the Acting Chief Executive approves the set of rules to enable the Council to conduct its meetings virtually from 1 June 2020. Officers will keep the operation of virtual meetings under review as they progress and if the government advice changes. It is therefore proposed that a delegation is given to the Monitoring Officer to amend or withdraw the rules to keep them compliant with government guidance.
- 2.2 It is proposed, as set out in the attached rules that Microsoft Teams is used as the platform for the Council’s remote meetings. Operational and technical guidance will be prepared for members and officers to ensure the process for remote meetings is clear and effective.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 The rules could not be adopted. This would mean that the processes around virtual meetings would not be compatible with current provisions in the constitution and other relevant legislation in force.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

5 Equality Impact

5.1 There may be positive impacts on citizens who wish to access committee meetings if for example, mobility issues prevent them from attending the Civic Centre. Virtual meetings would enable more citizens to access proceedings from the comfort of their own homes.

6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Rules of Procedure for Virtual Meetings

6 Background Papers

6.1 No specific background papers have been identified.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 To enable effective virtual/remote meetings of the Council and Committees to take place in light of social distancing measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.