

Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

CHANGES TO MEETING PROCEDURES

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The Council will be asked to endorse changes to meeting procedures following recent legislation in relation to the holding of meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To endorse the approach that where necessary, full Council meetings and committee meetings will be held remotely while restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic are in place.

- 2.2 To note that the provisions for timing of speeches, voting and public representations will remain unchanged with public representations being made remotely.

- 2.3 To endorse the arrangements for declarations of interest and considering exempt items.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 To enable Council and committee business to be transacted by alternative arrangements where necessary while restrictions are in force.

- 3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

- 3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

- 3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

None – measures on social distancing mean that there is no provision for a meeting to be currently held that can adhere to current restrictions.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The proposed changes will help the Council achieve all its priorities.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Since March 2020, social distancing measures and restrictions limiting unnecessary travel have been placed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 In order to allow local authority meetings to continue where necessary, regulations came into force on 4 April 2020 allowing meetings to be held virtually without the need for members to be physically present. The following requirements apply.

Notice of meetings

5.3 The proper officer will give the requisite notice to the public of the time of the meeting and the agenda, together with details of how to join the meeting which will be available by a link on the Council's website.

Remote attendance - members

5.4 Members' attendance at the meeting should preferably be through video conferencing or if this is not possible, through an audio link or by electronic means.

5.5 Any Member participating in a meeting remotely must, when they are speaking, be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all other Members in attendance, by members of the public who are attending to speak at the meeting, by the public and any others viewing the meeting.

5.6 Other than remote participation, the Council's current meeting procedure rules will still apply including quorum, timing of speeches, only speaking once on each item etc.

Remote attendance and viewing the meeting - others

5.7 Members of the public, press and others must be able to view the meeting through webcasting, live audio streaming, or others means, unless the meeting moves into or is wholly considering exempt items.

5.8 The arrangements for public speakers/others making representations must be the same as for members - i.e. when they are speaking, they must be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all Members in attendance, be able to hear (and ideally see) all committee members and where practicable be seen by members of the public who are viewing the meeting.

Voting at meetings

- 5.9 For clarity, the procedural rules on voting on items remain unchanged and therefore unless a recorded vote is called for (Council meetings only), the method of voting will be at the Chair's discretion and will be by one of the following methods:
- general assent of the meeting
 - a show of hands or a 'roll call' (to ask each member how he/she wishes to vote)
 - vote by electronic means (if this becomes possible).

Declarations of interest

- 5.10 Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or a prejudicial interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. Their departure will be confirmed by the Democratic Governance Officer (or meeting facilitator), who will invite the relevant Member by link, email or telephone, to re-join the meeting at the appropriate time.

Exclusion of the press and the public

- 5.11 There are times when meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or 'exempt' issues (as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972) are under consideration. The Democratic Governance Officer (or meeting facilitator) will ensure that there are no members of the public in remote attendance or remotely accessing the meeting are able to hear or see the proceedings once the exclusion has been agreed by the meeting.
- 5.12 Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present (eg at their home) who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings. The Council's Code of Conduct would apply at all times in relation to disclosure of exempt information.

List of Appendices:

None

6.0 Legal considerations:

- 6.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No 392 allows for meetings to be held in the manner proposed above.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

7.1 None

8.0 Equalities considerations:

8.1 Any meetings held will be promoted on the Council's website and social media channels to increase public awareness.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 There may be some minimal costs relating to licensing costs and adaptations of current devices for attendees to participate in the meetings.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 The proposals will allow the authority to continue to hold meetings where this is essential.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 None.

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Consultation has taken place with the four political group leaders who have indicated their support for the proposals.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.