

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 97

Date of meeting 27 January 2022

OFFICER AMENDMENT

Arrangements for Council and Committee Meetings

That the recommendation 2.2 be amended with the deletion of the text as struck through and paragraphs 3.14.2, 3.14.5 and 3.15.1 (3) be amended as shown with strike throughs and amendments as shown below in ***bold italics***

2.2 That the Committee agrees option A (14) ~~or option B (40)~~ regarding number of attendees at full Council meetings as set out in paragraph 3.12 and recommend them to full Council for approval.

3. Context and background information

3.14 POLICY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

3.14.2 **Reduce items coming the *Policy Committees***: reports coming to committee should be essential business and, unless there is good reason, reports for information or noting should generally be avoided ***or dealt with in public engagement meetings, if this can be agreed with opposition spokespersons at pre-meets.***

3.14.5 **Limiting speakers**: it is proposed that on matters debated at the main meeting, ***groups are encouraged to limit their number of speakers*** be generally limited to one per group.

3.15 Enhanced Officer Delegations

3.15.1

~~(3) To comply with legal requirements such delegation shall be unfettered and, although the Officer is required to consult with Group Spokespersons on the issue of whether delegated powers should be used and the merits of the proposed action, he/she shall not be obliged to follow the views of the consultees on the substantive decision.~~

Recommendations and updated paragraph 3 to read if carried:

- 2.1 That Committee agrees the proposals set out in this report regarding arrangements for Council and committee meetings (except paragraph 3.11 dealing with attendance numbers) and recommends them to Council for approval.
- 2.2 That the Committee agrees option A (14) regarding number of attendees at full Council meetings as set out in paragraph 3.12 and recommend them to full Council for approval.

3. Context and background information

3.12 Attendance- numbers

- 3.12.1 For the budget Council meeting on 24 February, we are anticipating a full attendance of all 54 Councillors. For other full Council meetings, Members are recommended to consider reduced attendance. Reduced attendance can only be implemented by voluntary agreement. If there is no agreement, each Member and each group will have to decide for themselves. Given the restriction on available seating and lack of suitable alternative venues, Members are recommended to adopt options A or B from the following options:

A. Minimum attendance to meet the requirement for a quorum

The quorum for full Council meetings is 14. If the 14 seats were allocated proportionately to the Groups and the Independents, the party split would be:

Greens:	5
Labour:	4
Conservative:	3
Independents:	2

B. Reduction to accommodate 40 Members in the main Chamber- This would mean about 40 Members attending in the main chamber with no members in the public gallery. If this were agreed, the party split would be:

Greens:	15
Labour:	11
Conservative:	10
Independents:	4

C. Reduction to 46 with 6 Members sitting in the public gallery-We have had an update from security that, if Members are to be seated in the public gallery alongside members of the public, they would have concern. There are also complications on the selection of members and suitability of the seating area. Relocating the seating for the press may release 2 seats on the ground floor, but it would still be not very convenient. If this option were adopted, the proportional party split would be:

Greens 17
Labour: 13,

Conservatives: 11
Independents 5.

D. Full Attendance

It would be possible to provide seating for all members with the minimum social distancing and screening provided. But this is an option that is not recommended.

3.14 POLICY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- 3.14.1 There are a number of committee meetings taking place over the following months and it is proposed that Committee Chairs, following consultation with opposition spokespersons and Officers are encouraged and authorized to adopt the following proposals.
- 3.14.2 **Reduce items coming the *Policy Committee*:** reports coming to committee should be essential business and, unless there is good reason, reports for information or noting should generally be avoided or dealt with in public engagement meetings, if this can be agreed with opposition spokespersons at pre-meets.
- 3.14.3 **Engagement sessions:** If none of the reports coming before the committee require an actual decision, Members should consider, instead, holding a virtual engagement session. Where this is agreed, it is important to note that the meeting will not have the status of a committee meeting and it should not be described as such. It will be an engagement session with members of the committee attending virtually.
- 3.14.4 **A mixed arrangement:** Members could agree to take the public engagement items that do not require a decision (public and member questions) and items for information only in an engagement session before the main meeting limiting the in-person attendance to matters that require decisions or are required by law to be considered by the Committee.
- 3.14.5 **Limiting speakers:** it is proposed that on matters debated at the main meeting, groups are encouraged to limit their number of speakers.
- 3.14.6 **Decision-making process for the above:** It is proposed that the above arrangements, if applied, are agreed by the Chair following consultation with opposition spokespersons and advice from officers. Where the Chair so decides, it may involve moving the whole meeting to an engagement session or transferring some items of business to the engagement session to be dealt with virtually.
- 3.14.7 It should be noted that any matter that requires a decision or is required by law to be considered by full Council or a Committee cannot be dealt with at the engagement session and has to be discussed at the in person meeting of Council or Committee.

3.15 Enhanced Officer Delegations

3.15.1 Given the increased risk and the need to minimise the length of meetings, it is proposed to introduce an enhanced officer delegations scheme. The delegated powers will be in addition to existing normal and urgency powers and are exercisable after consulting the Chair and Opposition spokespersons in each committee. This requires P&R approval and a separate report on the matter is on the agenda. In summary, the proposals are as follows:

- (1) Subject to first consulting with relevant Group Spokespersons, Executive Directors or Members of ELT with delegated powers shall have enhanced delegated authority to make decisions on all matters related to their area of responsibility. This is in line with government advice and reflects the need to reduce the duration of meetings.
- (2) To facilitate consultation with members of all groups, such consultation may take place during committee pre-meetings, or separately if necessary.

3.16: Duration and status of protocol

3.16.1 The above proposals, once agreed, will form the binding protocol for Council and Committee meetings. The Council's Standing Orders shall be applied subject to the above modifications to the extent that is necessary. Without prejudice to the powers of the Mayor or relevant Chair to make a ruling at the meeting, the Chief Executive, after consulting the Monitoring Officer, shall be authorised to rule on the interpretation and application of the rules where there is ambiguity or disagreement. The ruling of the Chief Executive shall be final.

3.16.2 The Council Procedure Rules shall be applied subject to the modification to reflect the above arrangements.

3.16.3 These arrangements shall remain in force until annual Council but may be modified at any time before then, especially if there is change in the levels of risk posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.