

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 97

Subject: Arrangements for Council and Committee Meetings

Date of meeting: 7 April 2022

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report proposes arrangements for holding Council and Committee meetings during the pandemic to minimise the risk to the public, Members and Officers.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 3rd February 2022, full Council agreed arrangements for holding Council and Committee meetings during the pandemic. The arrangements were intended to remain in force until after annual Council subject to any review at the Council meeting on 7th April.
- 1.3 Given the uncertainty, this report proposes that the current arrangements are extended until the meeting of full Council on 21st July 2022 with some modifications

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the arrangements set out in the draft protocol attached in the Appendix be agreed and come into effect immediately after annual Council on 26th May 2022.
- 2.2 That the said arrangements come cease to have effect immediately after the full Council meeting on 21st July unless full Council agrees different arrangements before that day.
- 2.3 That the Chief Executive be granted delegated powers to modify the requirement regarding the wearing of masks and need for a lateral flow test ahead of Council or committee meetings if, following consultation with Group Leaders, he considers it appropriate.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Council, at its meeting on 3rd February, adopted arrangements for Council and Committee meetings to reflect the risk from the Covid 19 pandemic. This was intended to last until annual Council subject to a review at full Council on 7th April.
- 3.2 The Officer working group with representatives from Public Health, Health and Safety, Premises, Legal Services and Democratic Services reviewed the situation in the light of the legal requirements, guidance from government and local circumstances. Given the uncertainty regarding the pandemic, it would be premature to lift all the precautions currently in place. There have also been signs of fluctuation in the level of infections which add to uncertainty.
- 3.3 Despite the relaxation of the rules under Coronavirus legislation, the Council still has a duty under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 as well as the common law of negligence to ensure the health and safety of the public, including Members and Officers.
- 3.4 Taking the above into account, the Council is recommended to adopt the protocol set out in the Appendix to this report. The protocol operates by way of a variation to the Council Procedure Rules to the extent that it is necessary to enable Council and Committee meetings to be conducted in line with the protocol.
- 3.5 The proposed arrangements are essentially the same as existing ones, including:
- the proposed advisory restriction in numbers for full Council to 14 (the minimum for a quorum);
 - the requirement to wear masks for all Council and Committee meetings;
 - the need to undertake lateral flow test before meetings. Members can use their own LFT devices or collect them from Democratic Services. Officers have a supply that is sufficient to cover the period up to annual Council in July;
 - Keeping the current virtual Public and Member engagement sessions with a one-hour gap before the main in person meeting of the Council;
 - Advisory guidance regarding oral questions, petitions for debate, notices of motion and reports for information.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council has the option of continuing without the special arrangements proposed in this report. But given the level of risk and uncertainty this is not recommended.

5. Public and Community Engagement

- 5.1 The proposals in this report relate mainly to internal council processes. The virtual public engagement sessions and the facility for up to 6 members of the public to attend the in-person meetings means that there will be no adverse impact so far as the public are concerned.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. For the reasons set out in the report, the proposed measures would be a proportionate way of reducing the risk of infection and protecting the health and safety of Members, staff and the public.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no material financial implication arising from this report. It is expected that costs arising from the arrangements for the meetings, given that council buildings will be used, will be covered by existing resources.

Finance officer consulted: Peter Francis Date consulted 14/01/22 9.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The proposals in the report comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's obligation under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974.

Lawyer consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis Date consulted (28.03.2022

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 There are no adverse equalities implications arising from this report. The ability of the public to present questions, petitions or deputations are preserved. Where any reasonable adjustments are necessary to enable an individual to take part or follow the proceedings, that will be accommodated.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 Enabling matters to be dealt with in the virtual engagement sessions will have a beneficial impact by reducing the need to travel.

11. Public health implications

- 11.1 The proposals will have a positive impact by reducing the likelihood of the spread of infection.

Supporting and Background documents

Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft protocol

