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NOTICE OF MEETING - POLICY COMMITTEE 27 APRIL 2020

A online meeting of the Policy Committee will be held on Monday, 27 April 2020 at 6.30 pm. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

1. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
3. MINUTES 3 - 10
4. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS
5. DECISION BOOKS 11 - 12

To note the Decision Books published since the previous meeting of the Committee.

6. DECISION-MAKING AND MEETING PROTOCOLS BOROUGH WIDE 13 - 30

This report sets out the arrangements to be made in accordance with Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and 'The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020' to enable Council meetings to take place online during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

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Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);

Councillors Page (Vice-Chair), Duveen, Emberson, Ennis, Hoskin, James, Jones, Pearce, Robinson, Rowland, Skeats, Stanford-Beale and White

Apologies: Councillors Stevens and Terry

RESOLVED ITEMS

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stanford-Beale declared a prejudicial interest in Item 85, on the basis that she was a Non-Executive Director of Reading Transport Limited.

76. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

77. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Lilla Price	Reducing Carbon Emissions in Schools	Cllr Pearce
2.	Ann Dally	Council Tax Protocol	Cllr Emberson
3.	Richard Tredgett	Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health	Cllr Hoskin

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr White	Rough Sleeping on the Increase	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr White	Building Sustainable Housing	Cllr Ennis

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

78. READING CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY 2020-25: ENDORSEMENT OF DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking endorsement of the Reading Climate Change Partnership's draft 'Reading Climate

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Emergency Strategy 2020-25' for the purposes of public consultation. The draft Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report noted that the current Reading Climate Change Strategy, produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) and covering the period 2013-20, had been due for review in 2020, but that the Climate Emergency Declaration had led to a commitment to accelerate the process by six months. The Council was an active partner in RCCP and officers had been supporting the Partnership in developing the draft Strategy, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The Strategy set out a vision for 2025 of a Reading which was working rapidly towards net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and being resilient to the impacts of a changing climate. It also summarised the role and resources of RCCP partners for delivering the Strategy and set out Action Plans under the themes of: Energy and Low Carbon Development, Transport, Resources, Water, Nature and Health.

To meet the accelerated timescale, and to ensure that residents and other stakeholders had the opportunity to comment on the strategy before it was finalised, it was proposed to issue the draft Strategy for consultation on 13 March for a six-week consultation period until 24 April, to be managed by the Council on behalf of RCCP. It was envisaged that the final strategy would then be formally adopted by the Council (in parallel with other partners) in June 2020 and launched at a high-profile 'Reading Climate Summit' in July 2020.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Reading Climate Change Partnership's Draft 'Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25' be endorsed for public consultation;**
- (2) That the actions within the action plans for which the Council was identified as a delivery partner be noted and endorsed;**
- (3) That the Council manage the consultation process on behalf of the Reading Climate Change Partnership and initiate a six week period of consultation from 13 March 2020 to 24 April 2020;**
- (4) That the proposal to bring a final draft of the Strategy to the Committee's meeting in June 2020 for formal adoption be noted.**

79. COUNCIL TAX PROTOCOL

The Director of Resources submitted a report proposing the adoption of a good practice protocol for the collection of Council Tax arrears produced by Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association. The Protocol was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association were encouraging Councils in England to adopt the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol to improve Council Tax collection. The Protocol had been developed through partnership work between national bodies representing advice agencies, local government and

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enforcement agencies throughout England and Wales and aimed to help Councils in England improve the experience for residents in arrears whilst collecting what was owed. Citizens Advice reported that growing numbers of people were turning to them for help with Council Tax issues, and figures from the national charity showed that Council Tax debt had risen by a third in the last three years.

The report explained that the Council's Council Tax Recovery Team had been engaging with Citizens Advice Reading to review the processes in place for collection, and benchmarking these against the standards set out in the Protocol. Regular review meetings were underway, and several actions had already been taken to improve collection processes with more early intervention to assist residents struggling with their Council Tax payments, help prevent further charges, alleviate stress and reduce collection costs.

Resolved -

That the Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol, as set out at Appendix 1, be adopted.

80. MODERN DAY SLAVERY TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT 2019-20

The Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report setting out the Modern Slavery Transparency Statement, which outlined the approach taken to make sure that modern slavery or human trafficking was not taking place within the Council's business or supply chain, as required under the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015. The Statement was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and an Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 2.

The report explained that the 2019/20 Statement had been adopted on behalf of the Council by the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE) Committee at its meeting on 8 January 2020. The Committee had also agreed a zero tolerance approach to any form of modern slavery (slavery, servitude, human trafficking and forced labour) and authorised the Executive Director for Adult Care And Health Services to adopt and update the Modern Day Slavery Transparency Statement each year.

The report explained that the statement was now being submitted to Policy committee to note the decision taken by ACE committee and note that the Statement would apply across the whole of the Council's services. The statement committed the Council to ensure that it took a "whole council" approach to this issue.

Resolved -

- (1) That the decision taken by the Council's Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee on 8 January 2020 to approve the Modern Day Slavery Transparency statement be noted;**
- (2) That it be noted that the Statement applied across the whole council.**

81. ICT FUTURE OPERATING MODEL - PROGRESS UPDATE AND APPROVAL TO APPOINT DESIGN & TRANSITION PARTNER

The Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the proposed approach to the design and implementation of the ICT Future Operating Model which would follow the end of the current ICT outsourcing contract with Northgate Public Services. The report also sought authority to enter into a contract with a Design and Transition Partner to provide the specialist expertise and capability required to achieve the rapid transition required.

The report noted that the Council currently had a full outsourcing arrangement, under which overall responsibility for the delivery of ICT services has been transferred to Northgate Public Services, with minimal core ICT capability retained in the Council. The contract would expire in March 2021 and contained no further provision for extension. A scoping and a high-level options analysis carried out in 2019 had concluded that a like-for-like reprocurement of an outsourcing arrangement of the current broad scope was unlikely to offer value for money. It was therefore proposed to adopt a "smart-sourced" approach, in which services were grouped, and each group sourced in the way which represented best value for money, with options including commodity procurements via Government frameworks, shared resources or services with other public sector organisations, managed service procurements and insourcing where appropriate. The various services would be managed, and brought together to deliver a coherent and effective experience for users, by an in-house service integration and management team.

The report explained that the next stage of work would be a Design Stage to develop a business case making recommendations for the design of the FOM, which would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. The design stage would also plan the procurement, implementation and transition work needed to achieve transition by 31 March 2021 and identify and initiate any work that needed to be started immediately to inform the business case and transition planning, such as pre-contract procurement activity. The Design Stage and subsequent procurement implementation and transition would require external expert support, and a mini-competition for a Design and Transition Partner (DTP), under a Government framework had therefore been launched. The report sought authority for the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Procurement and Chief Digital and Information Officer, to appoint a DTP through the ongoing competition and to place work with the DTP as necessary up to a value of £750k.

Resolved -

- (1) That the proposed approach to the design of, and implementation planning for, the ICT Future Operating Model be endorsed;**
- (2) That the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Procurement and Chief Digital and Information Officer, be authorised to enter into a contract with a Design and Transition Partner to enable the design stage of the project;**

- (3) That a detailed business case setting out the Future Operating Model be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

82. 2019-20 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the projected revenue and capital outturn positions for 2019/20 for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as at the end of December 2019 (Quarter 3), and performance for the third quarter against the measures of success published in the Council's Corporate Plan. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Financial Monitoring for Quarter 3
- Appendix 2 - Performance Monitoring for Quarter 3

The report noted that the forecast outturn as at the end of Period 9 for operational service budgets (excluding the services delivered by Brighter Futures for Children) was an overspend of £0.507m. The forecast outturn for Children's Services delivered by Brighter Futures for Children was a projected overspend of £1.608m, which related predominantly to the continued increase in the number of children in care and the cost of agency workers covering vacant posts. Corporate Budgets were forecast to underspend by £5.230m and incorporating this forecast with that of the service areas resulted in a net projected underspend of £3.115m. The forecast revenue outturn position on the HRA was an underspend of £8.614m, as a result of slippage on Major Works due to two work programmes that had to be retendered, increased projected rental income, and a change in the Council's minimum revenue provision policy.

The report set out the thirty-nine measures of success in the Council's Corporate Plan, and summarised progress against targets as at the end of December 2019. Overall 23 measures were currently rated Green, six measures were Amber, and eight measures were Red.

Resolved -

That Policy Committee note:

- a) That the forecast General Fund revenue outturn position as at the end of December 2019 was a net underspend of £3.115m with weighted opportunities of £0.075m;
- b) That the forecast outturn position on the Housing Revenue Account as at the end of December 2019 was a projected underspend of £8.614m against budget;
- c) That the forecast outturn on the Capital Programme as at the 31st December 2019 was a projected underspend of £133.9m on the General Fund and a projected underspend of £4.9m on the Housing Revenue Account;

- d) The performance achieved against the Corporate Plan success measures as set out the report and Appendix 2 attached to the report.

83. BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN 2020/21 BUSINESS PLAN

The Director of Resources submitted a report to the Committee, acting as Sole Member of Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), setting out at Appendix 1 the 2020/21 Business Plan, at Appendix 2 the company's Transformation Programme, and at Appendix 3 a proposal to amend BFfC staff terms and conditions to support its strategic approach to improving staff recruitment and retention. Approval of the BFfC Business Plan and changes to BFfC staff terms and conditions were reserved matters, requiring the approval of Policy Committee in its capacity as sole member.

Resolved -

That Policy Committee, in its capacity as sole member for BFfC:

- a) Approve the Company's Business Plan and contract sum for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1 and 4.8 of the report, noting the recommendations regarding transformation funding;
- b) Agree the recommended changes to BFfC staff terms and conditions as set out in Appendix 3.

84. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of Item 85 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

85. SHAREHOLDER REPORT

The Director of Resources submitted a report to the Committee, acting as the shareholder of Reading Transport Limited (RTL), setting out at Appendix 1 an Interim Review Shareholder Update report from RTL. The report summarised the key points of the Shareholder Update and the requests for shareholder approval made by RTL, including the provision of lease finance and the appointment of the Company's Service Delivery Director to the Board. The report also gave an update on discussions with the Company regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme liability.

Resolved -

That the Policy Committee, acting as Shareholder of Reading Transport Ltd:

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- a) Note the report and the Shareholder Update Report attached at Appendix 1;
- b) Agreed the approval requests set out in the Shareholder Update Report to:
 - i) Note the content of the Company's Report;
 - ii) Approve the provision of lease finance to Reading Buses by means of an extension of the existing Master Lease Agreement, should it be required to facilitate the purchase of vehicles as set out in the report, and that the Executive Director of Resources be authorised to agree terms with the Company;
 - iii) Approve the appointment of Dan Bassett into the position of Service Delivery Director;
- c) Request that the Company report back to the June 2020 Policy Committee with proposals and an action plan to reduce operating costs, realise efficiency savings and return the company to profit over the next 12 to 24 months in line with the Shareholder's dividend position;
- d) In light of the significant financial challenge, request a skills audit of the RTL Board to ensure it had the capacity to drive the requisite improvement in the trading position of the Group overall; and
- e) Note the approach being taken to addressing the Local Government Pension Fund Issue as set out in the report.

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3).

(Councillor Stanford-Beale declared a prejudicial interest in this item, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion or decision. Nature of interest: Councillor Stanford-Beale was a Non-Executive Director of Reading Transport Limited).

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm)

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REPORT BY ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 APRIL 2020		
TITLE:	DECISION BOOKS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BROCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
SERVICE:	LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	MICHAEL GRAHAM	TEL:	0118 937 3470
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	E-MAIL:	michael.graham@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Decision Book process was amended on 25 March 2020 to disapply the previous councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability to seek a review of the decision retrospectively, and to keep the changes in force temporarily during the ongoing Covid-19 situation.
- 1.2 To complement the amended process the list of Decision Books published will be reported to Policy Committee as a standing item on the agenda.
- 1.3 The following Decision Books have been published since the Policy Committee meeting held on 9 March 2020:

Title	Date
591 Decisions in Response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic	09/04/2020
589 Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee 16 March 2020 - Decisions	08/04/2020
589 Personnel Committee 18 March 2020 - Decisions	08/04/2020
589 Council 24 March 2020 - Decisions	08/04/2020
590 Relocation of Hamilton School (formerly Phoenix College) to the Hamilton Centre	08/04/2020
588 Land Rear of The Lawns, Windermere Road	03/04/2020
587 Council Response to Coronavirus Pandemic	25/03/2020
587 Decision Book Procedure	25/03/2020
586 Heritage Champion	13/03/2020

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Agenda Item 6

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	27 APRIL 2020		
TITLE:	DECISION-MAKING AND MEETING PROTOCOLS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BROCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
SERVICE:	LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	MICHAEL GRAHAM	TEL:	0118 937 3470
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES	E-MAIL:	michael.graham@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the arrangements to be made in accordance with Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 [The Act] and 'The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020' [The Regulations] to enable Council meetings to take place online during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 The Act and Regulations have made provision for local authorities to allow meetings to occur without the participants being in the same place. Local authority meetings can take place under the Regulations with members in more than one place, including at electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.
- 1.3 The protocols to allow the Policy Committee, Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1 and 2 to continue to meet under the new arrangements are attached at **Appendix A**. The Council and its other Committees, Sub-Committees and consultative bodies will cease to meet for the time being.
- 1.4 Section 78(3) of the Act states that the Regulations may make provision only in relation to local authority meetings required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021. The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services or Policy Committee will also be able to end or make amendments to the arrangements prior to 7 May 2021. The Regulations can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/regulation/5/made>

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the protocols for meetings of the Policy Committee, Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1 and 2, drafted in accordance with the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020' [The Regulations], and attached at Appendix A to the report be approved.

2.2 That the provisions agreed in 2.1 above be applied only to those Committee and Sub-Committee meetings required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021 and the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to end or make amendments to the arrangements prior to 7 May 2021, as set out in Appendix A, as and when necessary.

2.3 That, in accordance with Regulation 5(5), the following Council Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure be suspended for meetings to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021, subject to the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, being authorised to reinstate them prior to that date, if appropriate:

Standing Order (SO) 8 (Petitions); SO9 (Questions from Members of the Public); SO10 (Questions from Councillors); SO36 (Participation by members of the public), SO36A (Public speaking at Planning Committee) & SO36B (Public participation in Standing Committees) and the Petitions Scheme (Part 4 of the Constitution).

2.4 That, during these arrangements, the attendance of members at the Policy Committee, Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Committee be as follows:

(a) Policy Committee (10)

Councillors (Labour 6; Conservative 2; Greens 1; and Lib Dems 1)

(b) Planning Applications Committee (10)

Councillors (Labour 6; Conservative 2; Greens 1; and Lib Dems 1)

(c) Licensing Applications Committee

That the membership be unchanged and the members of Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1 and 2 continue to be drawn from the membership of the main Committee in accordance with the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003.

2.5 That current members of the Policy Committee and Planning Applications Committee not included in the reduced memberships be entitled to act as substitutes on the Committee in place of a member of their Group; and where a Group had only one member of the Policy Committee or Planning Application Committee appointed in the current year (2019/20), the Group Leader be entitled to nominate a substitute member, in the event that their Group member was unable to attend the Committee and the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services be authorised to appoint that Councillor as a substitute member of the relevant Committee.

2.6 That the quorum for the various meetings be as follows:

Policy Committee - Three members, including the Leader or Deputy Leader (and relevant Lead Councillor)

Planning Applications Committee - Five members, including the Chair or Vice-Chair

Licensing Applications Committee - Two members (to allow for exceptional circumstances when a member may not be “present remotely” and it is therefore necessary to adjourn a hearing. The expectation is that hearings should take place with three members).

2.7 That, in view of the disruption to the normal Committee cycle, a general dispensation be granted to all Councillors in relation to the requirement set out in Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, which states if a member throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of his last attendance to attend any meeting of the authority, he shall, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a member of the authority.

2.8 That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services delegated authority to determine planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders be extended to include the proposed changes, as described in Appendix B to the report, and a schedule of those applications where delegations had been changed be presented to each Planning Applications Committee for information.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 To enable the Council to fulfil its leadership role at this incredibly challenging time, and to guide its work with partners in providing the support that residents and businesses need, the Council’s current Corporate Plan priorities have been reframed to provide clarity of purpose and the three point strategic framework that has been adopted is based around the following three broad priorities:

- To support and protect vulnerable children and adults by ensuring the social care system continues to function effectively;
- To support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities;
- To support businesses and the local economy, and secure Reading’s economic recovery.

3.2 The Government has passed legislation to enable local authorities to hold meetings on-line and the proposals set out in the report describe the Council’s practical steps to enable this to happen and thereby continue to take decisions in an open and transparent manner during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The Council is making arrangements to hold online meetings of the Policy Committee, Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1 and 2 as permitted by the new Regulations that came into force on 6 April 2020. The protocol for these meetings are set out in Appendix A.

4.2 As part of the adoption of new arrangements, the Committee is also asked to reduce the membership of the Committees, agree new quorum thresholds and suspend various standing orders temporarily to assist the functioning of the online committees. It is also

recommended that provision should be made to include substitutes in the event that a member of the Committee cannot attend the online meeting.

- 4.3 The report also seeks to increase the delegated authority to the Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services to determine planning applications to manage the business before the Planning Applications Committee during the current pandemic emergency as effectively as possible. Appendix B sets out the current officer delegations and proposes a number of changes to increase those delegations.
- 4.4 In view of the limited opportunity of some councillors to attend a meeting during the period of the pandemic, as precautionary measure, Policy Committee is asked to use its urgency powers to grant a dispensation to all members from Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, which states that a councillor may be disqualified from office by failure to attend meetings unless the failure was due to a reason approved by the authority before the expiry of that period.
- 4.5 In order to provide consistency to the meeting arrangements all the online meetings will manage voting; declarations of interest and exempt and confidential business in the following way:

(a) Voting

Votes at online meetings will be taken by the Chair asking each individual Councillor to declare whether they are for, against or abstaining orally in order to achieve clarity to the decision-making process.

(b) Declaring Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members with a disclosable pecuniary interest must declare the existence of the interest and leave the meeting. This will be achieved by the member pausing or exiting the online meeting temporarily for the duration of the item of business in which they have the interest. Once the item of business has been dealt with, the Chair or clerk will invite the member to return to the meeting.

(c) Exempt and Confidential Business

Where a Committee passes a resolution to exclude the press and public from an item or items of business to consider exempt or confidential information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), this (Part 2) business will be conducted in a separate private online meeting. Before any councillor can take part in discussing exempt and/or confidential business they must confirm to the Chair that they are in a location where no person not entitled to be party to that information can hear or participate in the discussion/ decision in respect of the restricted business.

- 4.6 In order to retain flexibility in the online meeting arrangements, it is recommended that the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services should be given delegated authority to amend the arrangements to enable a prompt response to any changes in circumstances and implement improvements as a result of learning from holding online meetings.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Council's reframed three broad priorities, as set out above, are consistent with the Council's strategic aims.

5.2 The strategic aims are:

- To Develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley;
- To establish Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit;
- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

5.3 None of these can be achieved unless the entire Borough comes together to address this emergency and emerges strongly on the other side. Although we have taken the step of closing some of our buildings to protect staff and service users, in line with government guidance on social-distancing, we are still meeting the needs of our customers. Holding meetings online supports the democratic oversight and scrutiny of the Council's work.

5.4 We are working in partnership with key partners, the business community and our vibrant voluntary and community sector to mobilise to address both the immediate and longer-term needs of the Borough.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). We will not lose sight of this imperative and if progress reports are not immediately evident during the heightened activity to respond to the virus, members should be assured that work will continue nonetheless.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way". We have consulted with the voluntary sector and businesses community on how we should respond to the emergency. We will be working over the coming weeks to make sure that residents' voices help shape our work going forward in relation to the Recovery.

7.2 We have sought to maintain community involvement in the Policy Committee and Planning Applications Committee and will work to bring greater public involvement into the new online meetings.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 It is imperative, that in responding to this emergency we look to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. Our revised priorities facilitate this. We

will continually review our progress to ensure that we do not leave behind any section of our community.

- 8.3 These revised arrangements are considered to be of neutral effect to the public sector equality duty.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent on 25 March 2020 and contained provision for the Secretary of State to make Regulations in relation to the arrangements for holding local authority meetings (Section 78), during the current pandemic.
- 9.2 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020' [The Regulations] came into effect on 6 April 2020 and enable local authorities to hold online meetings.
- 9.3 Regulation 5(1) states that a meeting of a local authority is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a "place" where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.
- 9.4 Regulation 5(5) states that the provision applies notwithstanding any prohibition or other restriction contained in the standing orders of the local authority and Regulation 5(6) allows a local authority to make other standing orders and other rules relating to the arrangements for and attendance at online meetings of the authority.
- 9.5 The online Committees will continue to be convened in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) where those arrangements remain unaffected by the new Regulations.
- 9.6 Sections 15-17 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 deal with the duty to allocate seats to political groups in accordance with the proportionality of the groups' representation on the Council. Section 17 allows an exemption to the proportionality requirement where no member of the committee dissents to disapplying the rule.
- 9.7 One important role of councillors is to ensure that there is adequate scrutiny of the Council's decisions. Whilst the reduction of the number of Committees arguably reduces the opportunity for the scrutiny of Council functions, it is intended to be introduce greater transparency around the Decision Book process to allow councillors to request items be reviewed for scrutiny.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications as a result of adopting these arrangements for holding online meetings. However, if there are costs that are incurred from the practical application of the arrangements, these costs will be reported as necessary.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None

Protocol for Online meetings of Policy Committee

Introduction

During the period when meetings cannot be held in person, Policy Committee will hold online meetings and take decisions on behalf of the following bodies: Council, Audit & Governance Committee, ACE, SEPT, HNL, Personnel Committee, Traffic Management Sub-Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3. None of these other bodies will be convened until ordinary meetings are resumed.

(NB online meetings of the Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1&2 will be held and separate Protocols have been developed for these meetings.)

This Protocol outlines some changes proposed to facilitate successful online meetings of the Policy Committee, by reducing the number of participants and the complexity of the meetings.

Membership

Currently, the Policy Committee has 16 members (10 Labour; 4 Conservative; 1 Green; and 1 Liberal Democrat), which is considered too large to meet in an online setting.

It is proposed to reduce attendance at the Committee to 10 councillors based on 6 Labour; 2 Conservative; 1 Green; and 1 Liberal Democrat. This allocation will require the Labour Group to give up one seat to enable the Liberal Democrat Group to be represented (and, because of this variance from the proportionality of seats on the Council as a whole, it will need to be agreed without dissent).

All attending members will be drawn from the membership of the Policy Committee as it was agreed at the Annual Council Meeting in 2019 (or any subsequent review of its full membership in 2020).

The nominated members of each Group are:

Labour (6)	Cllr Brock and Cllr Page and four other lead councillors most relevant to the business of the meeting.
Conservative (2)	Cllr Skeats and Cllr Stevens
Green (1)	Cllr White
Liberal Democrats (1)	Cllr Duveen

Officer attendance will be kept to a minimum.

Quorum

No change is proposed - the current quorum is 3 under the Emergency provisions of the Constitution - Standing Order 7.7

Attendance

As the online meeting is a reduced version of the full meeting to deal with the Council's response to the Emergency, it is evident that the meeting should have the full complement of councillors available to attend:

- The Leader and Deputy Leader should attend all meetings wherever possible.
- Depending on the business which is before the Committee, the relevant Lead Councillors should also attend.
- The Leader of each political group is responsible for ensuring that the most relevant members of Policy Committee attend the meeting.
- Substitution is allowed so that where a nominated member cannot attend then another member of the full committee should attend.

Public Participation

Standing Orders 8, 9, 36, 36A and 36B and the Petition Scheme are amended or suspended as necessary in order that:

- public petitions and questions can continue to be submitted but will not be presented at meetings and will be responded to in writing only
- no facility for public speaking on other agenda items

(NB different arrangements will apply for Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees).

Members of the public will be able to follow the meeting 'live' in order to meet the legal requirement for meetings to be held 'in public'. Information will be published with the agenda on how to do this.

Where there are items that require the exclusion of press and public it will be practical to close the public meeting and discuss these within a second closed meeting.

Councillor participation

The usual councillor questions and ward councillor speaking on agenda items procedure is to be suspended. All councillors who wish to make representations on an item must work with their political group to ensure that those points can be addressed by the nominated members of the Committee.

Management of meeting

The success of the online meetings will depend on the ability of the participants to interact with each other via the system and the ability of the Chair to manage the meeting despite the unfamiliar setting.

The Chair will decide a practical protocol for management of the debate and decision-making - e.g. calling of speakers, self-introduction before speaking, vote taken by asking members in turn rather than show of hands. Such a protocol can be amended from time to time and does not require Committee approval for any change.

Given the potential difficulty of tabling and circulating documents at an online meeting Standing Order 39 is amended to specify that any proposed amendments must be submitted to the Chair and all nominated members of the Committee by email at least 24 hours before the commencement of the meeting.

Protocol for Online Planning Applications Committee

Introduction

The Coronavirus Act 2020 has paved the way for temporary changes to Regulations governing public meetings held by local authorities, including those held by local planning authorities, to allow the meetings to be conducted using media systems to be attended remotely by officers, members and the public and press.

This Protocol outlines some changes proposed to facilitate successful online meetings of the Planning Applications Committee, by reducing the number of participants and the complexity of the meetings.

Membership

While a video-link meeting is itself relatively easy to organise, the current Planning Applications Committee meetings are attended by 14 members and 5-10 officers, with public objectors and supporters, applicants/agents and ward councillors also participating in the meetings and other interested members of the public and the press in attendance.

In order to make the online meetings more manageable it is proposed to reduce the number of participants, by keeping officer attendance to a minimum and reducing the number of Committee members attending while retaining representation from all political groups.

The online meetings will therefore be attended by 10 members supported by the committee clerk, legal advisor, and the relevant planning officers.

All members attending the online meetings will be drawn from the membership of the Planning Applications Committee as it was agreed at the Annual Council Meeting in 2019 (or any subsequent review of its full membership in 2020).

The nominated members of each Group to attend the online meetings are:

Labour (6)	Cllrs McKenna, Sokale, Page, Ennis, Lovelock & Rowland
Conservative (2)	Cllrs Robinson & Stanford-Beale
Green (1)	Cllr J Williams
Liberal Democrats (1)	Cllr Duveen

Quorum

No change is proposed to the current quorum of five.

Attendance

As the online meeting is a reduced version of the full meeting to deal with the Council's response to the Emergency, it is evident that the meeting should have the full complement of councillors available to attend:

- The Chairman and Vice-Chairman should attend all meetings wherever possible.

- The Leader of each political group is responsible for ensuring that the most relevant members of Planning Applications Committee attend the meeting.
- Substitution is allowed so that where a nominated member cannot attend then another member of the full committee should attend.

Managing the meeting

The success of the online meetings will depend on the ability of the participants to interact with each other via the system and the ability of the Chair to manage the meeting despite the unfamiliar setting.

The Chair will decide a practical protocol for management of the debate and decision-making - e.g. calling of speakers, self-introduction before speaking, vote taken by asking members in turn rather than show of hands. Such a protocol can be amended from time to time and does not require Committee approval for any change.

Given the potential difficulty of tabling and circulating documents at an online meeting Standing Order 39 is amended to specify that, where councillors are pre-disposed to make any proposed amendments, these should be submitted to the Chair, all nominated members of the Committee and the Planning Manager by email at least 24 hours before the commencement of the meeting. This does not preclude any amendments to officer recommendations, which may still be tabled during the meeting as a result of the discussions during the debate.

Officers will circulate updates by email as they become available in the days leading up to the online Committee. This will avoid the need for a consolidated document to be tabled on the day of the hearing. Councillors should therefore review their emails regularly to ensure that they can track these additional documents in good time as intended.

Planning Applications to be considered

To make the online meetings focussed on the important business of the Pandemic Response and the Recovery, officers are also seeking a change to the list of applications that are delegated to officers to deal with so that fewer applications need to be considered and decided by the online Committee. This will mean that reports will still be presented for Major category applications but only where the officer recommendation is to approve, and for those other applications where officers, in consultation with the Chair, feel a committee decision is appropriate.

The Chair and the Planning Manager will agree a forward plan of applications based upon these categories:

A	Important for the Pandemic Response or the Recovery from the Pandemic
B	Matters which are otherwise important for the economic development of the town
C	Minor and Household applications which are not related to the Recovery

Classification: OFFICIAL

Category A & B applications are the matters which should be referred to the Committee.

Public participation and attendance

The normal public speaking arrangements are suspended. All people who have commented on a planning application will be invited to make written representations (word limit of 500) and submit these to the Planning Admin team by 2pm on the day before the meeting. These statements will be circulated to members of the Committee. Public participants usually prepare written notes for the meeting and the objective of public participation is still fulfilled by receiving these representations.

In addition, any formal questions submitted to the Committee will be responded to in writing only.

The facility for Ward Councillors to speak on applications will continue.

Members of the public will be able to follow the meeting 'live' in order to meet the legal requirement for meetings to be held 'in public'. Information will be published with the agenda on how to do this.

Meeting Agendas

- Introduction - Chair to explain meeting format and who is attending
- Minutes of previous meeting
- Declarations of Interest
- Information items
- Planning applications to be considered

For practicality any exempt items will be considered at a separate closed online meeting to be held on the rising of the main Committee.

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PROTOCOL FOR LICENCING HEARINGS UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003

This protocol allows the Council to deal with Licensing Act 2003 matters during the pandemic emergency.

During this period, the Council will convene remote hearings using video and audio technology. Licensing hearings are governed by specific provisions in the Licensing Act 2003 and the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearings) Regulations 2005. They provide a wide degree of flexibility to Licensing Authorities in determining their own hearing procedures. This Protocol is part of the Council's Hearing Procedures.

Consultation periods and representations

1. The Council website will indicate that all representations in relation to a new application should be submitted on line or by e-mail to reduce the risk that they may not be received or considered by the authority.
2. Officers will ensure that they are in receipt of any representations received within the consultation period, before agreeing to the grant of any application by delegated authority.

Time for submission of documentation supporting application/representation

3. Documentation in support of applications and representations to be provided at least 10 working days prior to the hearing date. Any documentation received after that date will only be considered in exceptional circumstances at the Chair's discretion. Where information about the exceptional nature of the delay is not provided it will not be forwarded to the Chairman for consideration.
4. Information and documentation will only be considered if the contents are in support of a ground for objection or representations already made during the consultation period and must be relevant to the licensing objectives. Only written documentation should be provided.
5. CCTV and audio evidence will only be admitted in exceptional circumstances where it is necessary in the interests of justice. No CCTV or audio evidence will be sent to the Chairman for consideration without an explanation of why it is exceptional and why it is necessary to admit it in the interests of justice.

Notice of hearing

6. A Notice of Hearing will be sent to all parties five clear working days before the meeting. In some cases, a shorter period of notice will be necessary due to statutory timescales involved in notifying the Council of the application or determining the application. The Notice will provide details of the date and time of the online hearing, and a link for joining the meeting, the hearings procedure note and the report from the Council's Licensing Officer with relevant objections attached.

7. The Chair will decide a practical protocol for management of the debate and decision-making in an online environment - e.g. calling of speakers, self-introduction before speaking, etc. Such a protocol can be amended from time to time and does not require Committee approval for any change.
8. Parties must submit their written submission on the written evidence by email at least 72 hours before the hearing is due to start, summarising the points they wish to make at the hearing and the outstanding issues. The written submission should be no longer than one side of A4 sized paper. These written submissions will assist in the conduct of the remote hearing and the decision-making process.
9. Applicants are encouraged to attend the hearing online but are also advised that they may elect not to attend the hearing and instead allow the decision to be considered on the basis of written representations, and that the hearing will be decided on the information available at the hearing
10. A party may be assisted or represented by a person who does not have to be legally qualified.

Agenda documents

11. Agenda Documents will be accessible online or sent via email in a format and pagination common to all participants this will usually be a single PDF document bundle.

The Online hearing

12. The normal committee hearing procedure will be followed (included in the pack sent to the party) with the following changes during the pandemic period:
13. Members, officers, and all relevant parties, including applicants, interested parties, responsible authorities will be invited to join (attend) the meeting remotely via Microsoft Teams. This application enables individuals to view and participate in a video-conference using a desktop computer, lap-top, tablet device or even smart-phone. The press and members of the public are also invited to observe the meeting, but not participate.
14. When making a representation all relevant evidence up to the point of making the representation must be included and submitted. Matters arising after the date of submission may be submitted but must only be submitted if relevant to the initial submission and could not have been submitted at the date of the original submission. Justification for later submission of evidence should be submitted with clear justification as to why there is need for a further submission. This could be due to further breaches of conditions after the initial submission or the service of a notice for example.
15. Matters included in any submission must:
 - Detail how the applicant has complied with Section 182 of the Guidance and what attempts have been made to resolve the matter informally

- focus on the four licensing objectives and the potential impact of any application on those
 - Adhere to local policies
 - Be relevant
 - Be evidence led not based on speculation
16. Video evidence must be in MP4 format. The recording must be edited down to the highlights, containing only relevant matters which relates to the written representation submitted. In addition, a description of how, when and where the video was recorded and what it contains must be submitted in evidence. The Chair will decide if it is necessary in the interests of justice for the video evidence to be reviewed.
 17. If any video evidence is to form part of the relevant parties 5 minute opening submission it must be supplied at least 10 working days before the hearing in the correct format and in accordance with the requirements in paragraph 16 above.
 18. Parties are reminded that, even where an application has attracted representations, applications can be determined without the need for a hearing where all parties consent to dispense with a hearing by virtue of regulation 9 of the Hearing Regulations. In these cases, written representations may be submitted and considered before a determination is made.
 19. The Chair will invite the participants to join the meeting, introduce themselves and the panel members and outline the procedure to be followed.
 20. Each party will be allowed 5 minutes to speak (their written representations having been considered).
 21. When not speaking their microphone will be muted by the meeting producer.
 22. Members' deliberations will take place without other participants, the press, and members of the public, being able to hear or see those deliberations by way of a separate conference with Members, Legal Officer, and an officer from Democratic Services.
 23. The summary decision and reasons will be advised by email to all those who notify the Committee Administrator of a valid email address in advance.
 24. Notification in writing of the full decision with reasons will follow in five working days.
 25. To meet the legal requirement for hearings to be held in public members of the press and public will be able to observe the meetings online. A recording may also be subsequently available on the Reading Borough Council website.

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APPENDIX B

The table below sets out those applications that the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services is currently not authorised to exercise delegated powers and how officers consider these could be changed to reduce the number of cases coming to Planning Applications Committee. Instead it would be possible to present a schedule of those applications where delegations are changed to each PAC so the decisions can be discussed if needed or simply noted.

	Pre April 2020	Proposed
Applications “called -in” by a member	Determination of applications where a member has requested that an application be referred to Planning Applications Committee for a decision within 3 weeks of the application appearing on the weekly list of planning applications.	Members to use their discretion in call-ins to support the strategic objectives of the Council in the pandemic and recovery. Members are requested to seek advice from the Planning Manager and Chair of Planning before notifying a call in to the Planning Manager instead of the case officer.
Planning Applications Committee re-referral	Where Planning Applications Committee has resolved that a matter be referred to Planning Applications Committee for a decision	No change
Serving or former councillors and employees of the Council and their close friends and relatives	Power to determine an application for planning permission, approval of reserved matters, variations of conditions, variations of legal agreements or planning obligations, advertisement consent, listed building or conservation area consent, works affecting trees covered by tree preservation order and certificates of existing or proposed lawful use or development made by serving councillors and any member of the Corporate Management Team and any person employed or engaged by Planning and Legal Services.	No change but amend the description to: <i>Applications submitted by serving councillors and some employees of the Council (those on Corporate Management Team and any person employed or engaged by Planning and Legal Services).</i>
Council developments	Power to determine an application for planning permission made by the Council alone or jointly with another person under Section 316 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992 (S.I. 1992/1492) (Para 6) and the determination of applications made by the Council for listed building or conservation area consent.	No change
Applications to develop land without compliance with	Determine applications to develop land without	Delegated and no need to agree method with Cllrs.

conditions attached by Committee	compliance with conditions under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 where those conditions were previously attached by Committee, without first agreeing the method of determination with the Chair of Planning Applications Committee and Ward members.	
Departures from the Development Plan.	Any development which is considered by the Head of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services to be a departure from the provisions of the adopted development plan and where the application is recommended for approval.	No change - rarely happens
'Major' Applications.	<p>Major development, i.e.:</p> <p>building or engineering work; or</p> <p>Building or engineering work involving change of use comprising:</p> <p>(i) residential development of 10 or more dwellings or residential development on an application site of 0.5 ha or more or</p> <p>(ii) in the case of other uses (not comprising minor or other development as described above), 1,000 sq m or more of gross floorspace, or an application site of 1 ha or more.</p>	<p>No change when the recommendation is to approve.</p> <p>Delegated when the recommendation is to refuse</p>
Conservation area consent / listed building consent	Only where the proposals also require planning permission for development which is classed as "Major"	No change
Tree Preservation Orders / Trees in conservation areas	Where an objection to a Tree Preservation Order has been received or where the proposal has been submitted by or on behalf of the Council	Delegated.