

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

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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.

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