

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 27 APRIL 2020

Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);
Councillors Duveen, Hoskin, Jones, Page, Skeats, Stevens, Terry and White;

Apologies: Councillor James.

RESOLVED ITEMS

86. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Brock, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Policy Committee, welcomed everyone to the first online meeting of the Policy Committee, which was being held 'in public'. He expressed his gratitude and appreciation to all those involved in the Coronavirus response, including every worker at the Council, every worker in our NHS, every care worker, every public servant, police officer, firefighter, every retail worker, and every single key worker who had played their role.

87. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

88. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr White	Personal Protective Equipment	Cllr Hoskin
2.	Cllr White	Coronavirus related deaths in care homes	Cllr Jones
3.	Cllr White	Looking after our vulnerable children	Cllr Terry

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

89. DECISION BOOK REPORTS

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report listing the Decision Books that had been published since the previous meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2020.

In relation to Decision Book 589 it was noted that:

- (a) the consultation on the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 would be extended to at least the end of August 2020;
- (b) the Green Group had requested a review of the decision in relation to the Palmer Park Development Framework and would meet the Lead Councillor for Strategic

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Environment, Planning & Transport and officers to discuss the concerns they had raised.

Resolved -

That Decision Book Nos 586-591 be noted.

90. DECISION-MAKING & MEETING PROTOCOLS

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report setting out the arrangements 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. The Coronavirus Act and subsequent Regulations allowed local authority meetings to occur without the participants being in the same place. Local authority meetings could now 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. The Protocols for holding meetings of the Policy Committee, Planning Applications Committee and Licensing Applications Sub-Committees 1 & 2 were set out in Appendix A for approval. The Committee requested that the provision set out in the recommendations that where a Group had only one member of the Policy Committee or Planning Applications Committee, the Group Leader would be entitled to nominate a substitute member, should be added to those protocols in the interests of completeness.

In addition, the report sought approval to suspend some standing orders and rules of procedure to enable the Council, as an interim measure, to gain experience of the new technology and holding online meetings within a slightly simplified meeting procedure. The report also sought delegated authority in consultation with the Leader of the Council to reinstate the standing orders once more familiarity with the capabilities of the technology had been gained. The interim arrangements also included reduced membership on the Policy and Planning Applications Committees to make the online meetings more manageable. These meetings would consist of ten members and would include members from all political groups represented on the Council. The Licensing Applications Committee had to consist of between 10 and 15 members with three Councillors from its membership being appointed to Sub-Committees 1 & 2 to determine applications and reviews under the Licensing Act 2003. There would be no change proposed to this arrangement.

Additionally, the report recommended, in view of the disruption to the normal Committee cycle, to grant a general dispensation to all Councillors in relation to the requirement for them to attend at least one meeting of the authority in each six-month period. The report stated that the current Covid-19 pandemic should be agreed as an appropriate reason for the authority to grant an exemption to this rule.

Finally, in order to reduce the amount of business required to be decided by the Planning Applications Committee at this time, the report was further seeking to increase officer

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delegations to determine some minor planning applications and Tree Preservation Orders. The details of the extension to officer delegations were set out in Appendix B to the report.

During the debate, Councillor Page referred to an enquiry he had received from Councillor Skeats in relation to Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3, which dealt with non-Licensing Act 2003 business. He said that the membership agreed by the Licensing Applications Committee on 22 May 2019 was still in force and if the Sub-Committee needed to meet online it would do so using this previously agreed membership.

Resolved -

- (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) 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;
- (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);

- (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)

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Councillors Brock (Chair); Page (Vice-Chair); Duveen; Hoskin; James; Jones; Skeats; Stevens; Terry; and White;

(b) Planning Applications Committee (10)

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

Councillors McKenna (Chair); Sokale (Vice-Chair); Duveen; Ennis; Lovelock; Page; Robinson; Rowland; Stanford-Beale; and J Williams;

(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.

- (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 (and this substitute provision be included in the meeting protocols for Policy Committee and Planning Applications Committee);
- (6) That the quorum for the various meetings be as follows:
 - (a) Policy Committee - Three members, including the Leader or Deputy Leader (and relevant Lead Councillor);
 - (b) Planning Applications Committee - Five members, including the Chair or Vice-Chair;
 - (c) Licensing Applications Committee - Two members (to allow for exceptional circumstances when a member may not be “present online” and it was therefore necessary to adjourn a hearing. The expectation would be that hearings should take place with three members);
- (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 fails 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;

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- (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;
- (9) That, in the event an online meeting of the Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3 was called, the membership be consistent with the appointments agreed by the Licensing Applications Committee on 22 May 2019 (Minute 1(3) & (4) refer) and a separate protocol would be produced to govern how these meetings would operate.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 7.23pm).