

## Minutes of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Thursday, 22 October 2020 in Remote

Commenced 10.00 am  
Concluded 11.30 am

### Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT GROUP
Johnson Thornton Watson	Pollard	Stubbs

### Councillor Johnson in the Chair

#### 7. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

#### 8. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no declarations of interest in matters under consideration.

#### 9. COUNCIL MEETINGS CORONAVIRUS GOVERNANCE REVIEW - ORDINARY MEETINGS OF FULL COUNCIL

Reports had been presented to this Committee on 20 August and 17 September 2020 presenting an overview of delivering meetings in the democratic decision making structure since the beginning of the Coronavirus period. Government regulations and guidance meant that meetings could not be held physically in a meeting room and the introduction 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 permitted meetings to take place remotely. The first meeting of full Council, an Extraordinary meeting, was held on 8 September 2020.

The report of the City Solicitor (**Document “L”**) considers whether it is now feasible to deliver an Ordinary meeting of Council.

The Governance, Scrutiny and Members Support Manager reported that arrangements for holding Ordinary meetings of Council as set out in Standing Orders raised the following issues:

- a) Holding meetings remotely it was not possible to circulate paper documents at the start of the meeting.
- b) The deadlines set out for the submission of amendments to motions and the receipt of documents that were circulated at the start of the meeting were on the day of the Council meeting and it would not be possible to ensure that all Members were able to receive and read all the documents given the short timescale.
- c) Public participants in addition to the Members, officers supporting the meeting from the Council and Public-i would mean that more people in excess of 100) would need to access the remote meeting platform placing additional pressure upon delivering the meeting remotely.
- d) Delivering meetings remotely was demanding on resources. The delivery of the remote Extraordinary meeting of Council necessitated considerable preparation. This included preparatory sessions for all Members of Council and individual support provided for Members by the Council's IT Service and its partner in delivering meetings remotely, Public-i. From the governance staff's perspective implementing the current arrangements for ordinary meetings of Council would involve a level of complexity far greater than the Extraordinary meeting of Council involved.
- e) Consideration had to be given to the length of meetings held remotely. Experience had shown that long meetings held remotely placed heavy demands on the participants and keeping the current ordinary meeting of Council arrangements in place could potentially lead to long meetings.

He reported that delivering ordinary meetings of Council in a simplified way were detailed in paragraph 4 of the report.

Members made the following comments:

- Why wasn't there an ability to amend motions?
- Ordinary meetings of Council were a useful platform for residents and it was a way of holding Executive to account through Member questions – supplementary questions should be permitted.
- Don't recall having all six groups putting amendments to motions before.
- What was the maximum number of people that could participate in a remote meeting?
- Needed to look at how technology could be used to maximise public engagement.
- How petitions were received at Council could be streamlined – such as no need to vote when receiving petitions.
- Could petitioners pre recorded messages be played at the meeting?
- A Working Group could be set up to look at what lessons had been learnt from how meetings had been conducted during the period of Coronavirus and consider whether some of these different ways of conducting meetings should be taken forward to be included in the Council's Constitution and Standing Orders; and to also consider any other ideas for Council meetings.

- Needed to consult all political groups on the interim Standing Orders.
- Leader's report could be published immediately after the 1000 deadline.
- Ordinary meetings of Council should resume.

In response to the questions raised the Governance, Scrutiny and Members Support Manager reported that not having amendments to motions did not hinder debate taking place and consideration of a matter – Members would have to have a clear view if they supported or disagreed to a particular motion; it would be easier for meetings to be understood if there were no amendments to motions – amendments could be received from each political group which could be 5 or 6 amendments and a substantive vote would need to take place as well.

It was reported that the public-I platform could support 100 plus participants and was able to handle a large number of people at full Council; clarification would be sought from Public-I on whether pre-recorded messages could be played at the meeting.

Members were informed that an ordinary meeting of Council could be held on Tuesday 8 December 2020 and that a report reviewing the meeting could be considered by this Committee at its meeting on 21 January 2021.

#### **Resolved-**

- (1) That the Committee recommends that the City Solicitor introduces further interim amendments to the Council Constitution and Standing Orders for meetings as set out in Section 4 of the report (Document "L") and subject to the amendments made at this meeting which included;**
  - Leader's report published immediately after 10 am deadline on Friday preceding
  - No vote on receiving petitions
  - Member supplementary questions allowed but notified in writing by 10 am the day before Council.
  - City Solicitor requested to consult minority councillors as well on the interim amendments to Standing Orders for the December Council.
- (2) That an ordinary meeting of Council (in accordance with the amended interim standing orders) be arranged for Tuesday 8 December 2020.**
- (3) That a further report on Council meetings during the Coronavirus period be presented to the January meeting of this Committee.**
- (4) That a Working Group of members of this Committee (supported and advised by the City Solicitor) be set up to consider what lessons have**

**been learnt from how meetings have been conducted during the period of Coronavirus; to also consider whether some of these different ways of conducting meetings should be taken forward to be included in the Council's Constitution and Standing Orders; and to also consider any other ideas for Council meetings.**

**Action: City Solicitor**

Chair

**Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.**

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER