

# Report of the City Solicitor to the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee to be held on 17 September 2020

# H

---

## Subject:

Council Meetings Coronavirus Governance Review Update

## Summary statement:

A report was presented to the meeting of this Committee on 20 August 2020 presenting an overview of delivering meetings in the democratic decision making structure since the beginning of the Coronavirus period when 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. Since then this authority has held its first meeting of full Council on 8 September 2020 and this report considers the delivery of that meeting.

---

Parveen Akhtar  
City Solicitor

**Portfolio:**

Corporate

Report Contact: Adrian Tumber  
Phone: 07970 412150  
E-mail: [adrian.tumber@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:adrian.tumber@bradford.gov.uk)

**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

Corporate

## 1. SUMMARY

A report was presented to the meeting of this Committee on 20 August 2020 presenting an overview of delivering meetings in the democratic decision making structure since the beginning of the Coronavirus period when 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. Since then this authority has held its first meeting of full Council on 8 September 2020 and this report considers the delivery of that meeting. Figures have also been received from Public-i the company that this Council works with to provide meetings remotely on the number of occasions the remote meetings are being viewed.

This report is being considered by the Governance and Audit Committee due to its role in overseeing the governance framework of the Council.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

On 16 March 2020 the Government announced that it was bringing in measures in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic stating that everyone should avoid gatherings. This meant that it was no longer possible to hold the Council's democratic decision making committees/panels physically in meeting rooms. The Government announcement was followed by the publication 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 enabling meetings to be held remotely. The Council's IT Services worked with Public-i so that a means of delivering meetings remotely was procured and the Council's Legal and Democratic Services drafted protocols ensuring that the remote meetings would be held lawfully.

## **3. EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL**

- 3.1 Since the Coronavirus period began this Council has held its first full Council meeting. It was an Extraordinary meeting of Council to consider the resolution of the Executive on the consultation undertaken on West Yorkshire Devolution. The Executive resolved that the report of the Chief Executive should be referred to full Council for comment and endorsement.
- 3.2 All 90 councillors are members of Council so along with the officers supporting the meeting from the Council's Democratic Services and IT Services and from Public-i meant that in total there were 98 either participating or those supporting on the remote meeting platform. This number is far in excess of any other remote meeting the Council has delivered to date.
- 3.3 The delivery of the remote Extraordinary meeting of Council necessitated considerable preparation. This included a preparatory session for the Lord Mayor; two preparatory sessions for all Members of Council and individual support provided for Members by the Council's IT Service.

- 3.4 A feature of the Extraordinary meeting of Council was the first use by this Council of electronic voting. In a meeting of Council held physically in the Council Chamber at City Hall voting is undertaken by a show of hands (unless a recorded vote is undertaken). Undertaking a vote in a remote meeting cannot be undertaken by a show of hands as only the Lord Mayor and whoever is speaking at the time are visible to those viewing the meeting online to protect bandwidth. There is also only a maximum of 25 people that can be seen on the screen at the same time so not all Members could be observed in a vote undertaken by a show of hands. Officers supporting the meeting are able to monitor the electronic voting to ensure that it is working correctly.
- 3.5 The Council's IT Service provided exemplary support to Members in the preparation for the Extraordinary meeting of Council supporting councillors with any connectivity issues both before and during the meeting.

### **ACCESS DATA FOR HOLDING MEETINGS REMOTELY**

- 4.1 As requested at the last meeting of this Committee Public-i does hold data on both those who are viewing live streams as committee/panel meetings are taking place and those who view the archive recordings of those meetings.

A representative snapshot is the data for the four week period ending 24 August 2020 as follows:

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Committee/Panel</b>	<b>Live Viewing</b>	<b>Archive Viewing</b>	<b>Total</b>
30 July	West Yorkshire Pension Fund Joint Advisory Group	12	41	53
30 July	Bradford South Area Committee	5	28	33
4 August	Bradford District Licensing Panel	4	14	18
5 August	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	19	16	35
11 August	Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6	18	24
18 August	Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee	19	8	27
20 August	Governance and Audit Committee	15	12	27
20 August	Regulatory and Appeals Committee	76	20	96

- 4.2 Although comparative data on attendance by the public at meetings held physically at City Hall has not been routinely compiled what is clear is that the public are accessing meetings in the Council's decision making structure in larger numbers through the meetings being held remotely. Please note that the figures do not include any member of the public who was attending a meeting as a participant.

## **5. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

There are no financial issues arising from this report.

## **6. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

The risk of physically holding meetings in a meeting room is being continuously assessed during this period in accordance with Government regulations and guidance. Government guidance is in place for the safe use of Council buildings. When meetings are delivered remotely the governance is undertaken in accordance with the statutory arrangements in place. Governance, for example, must ensure that the meeting is quorate, and that there is decision making clarity with councillors having heard the full debate on a matter before voting, so that all councillors have made their decision on the basis of the same facts and representations.

## **7. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 permits the Council to hold meetings remotely so long as Members can be heard, and where practicable seen, by other Members and the public attending the meeting. Government guidance is that meetings should be held remotely at the present time. Any move to holding physical meetings would have to be carefully assessed taking into account regulations, guidance, and the public sector equality duty.

## **8. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

Holding meetings remotely does have the advantage of making the Council's democratic decision making more accessible and transparent for many residents, including those with a disability who would find it challenging attending a meeting in a physical location. There are currently equalities issues in holding meetings physically as Coronavirus is known to disproportionately affect the elderly, some ethnic groups, some disabled groups and men.

### **8.2 TRADE UNION**

None.

### **8.3 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

All Wards.

### **8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel are being delivered remotely.

### **8.5 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

None.

**9. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None.

**10. OPTIONS**

10.1 The report can be noted and further reports requested.

**11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**11.1 That the report be noted and further updates be scheduled in the Committee's work programme.**

**12. APPENDICES**

None

**13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.