

VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND HOMEWORKING

Item OS 21/10 referred from Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 11 March 2021

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the review of virtual meetings and homeworking and set out initial proposals for amendments to the existing Protocol for the Use of Video-conferencing Facilities.

It was explained that uncertainty around the ability to hold meetings virtually after 7 May 2021 remained as there was no indication from Government that the temporary arrangements would be extended. This position represented a significant challenge for local authorities as the Government did not intend to review social distancing restrictions until 21 June at the earliest.

As part of the overall review of virtual meetings, Officers had considered whether the effectiveness of the Protocol, attached at Annex 1 to the report, could be improved. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Area Planning Committees had been consulted on the rules for public speaking at virtual planning committees.

A number of amendments were proposed and included reference to the Borough Council's Privacy Notice, the retention of live streams for a period of 6 months and clearer processes related to rules for voting, revised motions and the use of a 'roll call'.

In addition, amendments to the rules for public speaking at planning committees related to the submission of written statements and the removal of points of clarification. However, Members asked that flexibility around the management of meetings, especially those with public participation, be retained and that the use of Chairman's 'discretion' be allowed.

Members welcomed the ongoing review of virtual meetings and homeworking and reiterated support for the continuation of livestreaming of meetings so that residents were able to observe proceedings in whatever format they were held.

Finally, the Director of Central Services was not in a position to provide a verbal update on the outcome of the Phase 8 bid process, as referenced in paragraph 1.3.4 of the report, as the Secretary of State had not made any formal announcements.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the amended Protocol, at Annex 2, be approved;
- (2) subject to noting the comments related to the use of Chairman's 'discretion', the amended temporary arrangements for Public Speaking, at Annex 2.1, be approved;
- (3) the Protocol for Use of Video-conferencing Facilities would continue to apply in the event that the Borough Council was lawfully able to hold remote meetings, whether under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel

Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 or other enabling legislation;
and

- (4) support for the continuation of livestreaming of meetings, in whatever format, be noted.

***Referred to Cabinet**