

PROTOCOL FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Following briefings to Members regarding arrangements for Council meetings, the matter was discussed at Group Leaders and this proposed draft protocol proposes measures to assist in ensuring safer arrangements for Council meeting. The arrangements for Committees have worked reasonably well and the focus is therefore mainly on full Council meetings given the numbers involved and the higher risk posed by the new variant of the Covid 19 virus.

2. Venue for Meetings

2.1 Given the cost of hiring external venues and the limitations of Brighton Town Hall in terms of IT, power supply, acoustics inclusion and other issues, it is proposed that meetings take place at Hove Town Hall for the time being, but Officers continue to work to address issues about Brighton Town Hall so that we could move to alternating meeting venues.

Recommendation: use Hove Town Hall for the time being and continue to explore options for Brighton Town Hall

3. Attendance Numbers

3.1 There is still a significant risk associated with gatherings, especially given the spread of the Omicron strand of the virus. Given the absence of an eternal venue large enough to host full Council meetings at a reasonable cost, it is recommended that members adopt a voluntary reduction in numbers. Currently we are aware that a number of members will not be attending although we have not had confirmation from all groups. Officers' recommendation would be to reduce the overall attendance numbers to 40. The proportionate reduction in numbers would mean: Greens 15, Labour 11, Conservatives 10 and Independents 4.

3.2 Another option would be to use the public gallery to ether seat some Members there or to move the desk used for the press into the public gallery and use the space freed up for seating additional Members. If attendance is reduced to 46, 40 members could be seated in the main chamber and 6 in the public gallery. However, we have had advice from security that, if Members are to be seated in the public gallery alongside members of the public, they would have concern. If, using a combination of options, the overall number of members attending is reduced to 46, this would mean a total reduction of 8. The Group split would be: Greens 17, Labour 13, Conservatives 11and Independents 5.

3.3 There is no mechanism for enforcing reduced attendance at full Council meetings. Any measures are therefore dependent on a voluntary co-operation of Members.

Recommendation:

- That all Groups and Independent Members notify Democratic Services of the names of Members not attending, so that we can reflect that in the arrangements
- That members agree in principle to use best endeavours to achieve voluntary reduction to 40 Members on the floor of the chamber.
- That special arrangements be made for the budget Council in February

4. Limit the number of Notices of Motion coming to Council

4.1. There are at least 9 notices of motion coming to the December Council. This is more than we would usually have as many were carried forward from the October Full Council. There is also the ongoing issue of Notices of Motion being debated at Full Council when any decision would end up being referred to the relevant committee. the following principles for future.

Recommendation:

(1) For the December Council meeting only, there be an agreement in principle to reduce the overall number of notices of Motion coming to that meeting 2 per Group plus one additional joint Notice of Motion.

(2) That there be agreement in principle, for future meetings, to reduce the number of Notices of Motion that are debated, and the time taken for the debate, by using one or more of the of the following options:

(a) withdrawal of the notice of motion

(b) Agree for the NOM to be “passported” to the relevant Committee so that it is left to be dealt with by the Committee

(c) Agree to limit the number of speakers to 1 per Group

(3) that the above agreement in principle be implemented by agreement through Group Whips and Independent Member briefings

5. Separate Hybrid Public Engagement Sessions

5.1 As the law stands at the moment, it is not possible to hold Council or Committee meetings (with the exception of licensing panels) other than in person. A large part of the public engagement (questions, petitions and deputations) involves exchanges between a member of the public and the Lead Member and other members do not have any active role to play. It is therefore proposed to introduce a separate public engagement session outside full Council meetings where the Chairs of Committees attend at the Council Chamber in person to respond to questions and deputations and to receive petition which are just presented (not debated.) Members of the public who present public engagement items will be able to attend in person or via Teams> All Members will be provided with a Teams link and would be able to follow the proceedings if they so wish. Petitions for debate will be taken at full Council as normal as it is for all members not just lead councillors. This will be an engagement session and will not be part of the formal Council meeting. It will operate for an initial

Recommendation:

- That full Council on 14 December agrees to suspend standing orders to enable public engagement to take place remotely or by way of a hybrid meeting
- The Chief Executive be authorised to decide on the timing of the public engagement session
- That the Mayor, Leader and Chairs of Committees attend in person to take questions, respond to deputations and receive petitions for noting and forwarding to relevant committee
- That Petitions for debate are dealt with as normal
- That Members consider at a later stage extending the hybrid meetings to Member oral questions

pilot period from January until annual Council, but may be reviewed earlier.

6. Lateral Flow Test

6.1 Under existing arrangements, Members are required to undertake a lateral flow test (LFT) before coming to meetings of Council and Committees. Given the heightened level of risk, it is proposed that Members notify the Head of Democratic Services that they have done an LFT test. This can be done by e-mailing the Head of Democratic Services. For data protection reasons members will not be asked to disclose the result, but any Member with a positive LFT result would be expected not to attend a Council meeting until they have a negative PCR test result or the period

Recommendation: Members are recommended to take an LFT before coming to a Council or committee meeting and notify the Head of Democratic Services that they have done the test.

of isolation lapses

7. Vaccination

7.1 It is recommended that Members take vaccinations as soon as possible and those not double vaccinated with no exemption or good reason consider seriously whether they should attend Council meetings.

Recommendation:

That Members take vaccinations (1st, 2nd and buster vaccinations) as soon as possible.

8. Wearing of Masks

8.1 To reduce the risk of infection and give the guidance relating to some public spaces, it is proposed that the Council continues with the mandatory requirement to continue to wear masks.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the requirement to wear masks at all Council meetings continues. Appropriate masks and shielding masks will be provided by the Council to those who need it along with sanitation fluid.

9. Committees and Working Groups

9.1 There is no legal requirement for Working Groups to meet in person. It is therefore proposed that Working Groups, Committee pre-meets and other meetings without a committee or sub-committee status will continue to meet virtually

Recommendation

That Working Groups, Committee pre-meets and other meetings without a committee or sub-committee status continue to meet virtually.

10. Next Steps

10.1 Subject to the decision of Council and any comments received, the implementation of the above proposals will be progressed in consultation with the Whips and/or Group Leaders as necessary.

6 December 2021