

Council
5 May 2021

Title: Provision for Remote meetings

Lead Officer: Graham leach

Portfolio Holder: Andrew Day

Public report

Wards of the District directly affected: None

Contrary to the policy framework: No

Contrary to the budgetary framework: No

Key Decision: No

Included within the Forward Plan: No

Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: No

Consultation & Community Engagement: none

Final Decision: Yes

Accessibility checked: Yes

Officer/Councillor Approval

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	21/4/2021	Andrew Jones
Head of Service		
CMT		
Section 151 Officer	23/4/2021	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	21/4/2021	Andrew Jones
Finance	23/4/2021	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	23/4/2021	Andrew Day

1. Summary

- 1.1. The report seeks approval for changes to the Constitution in anticipation that remote meetings can continue after 7 May 2021.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That, subject to the Council lawfully being able to continue with remote meetings, Council approves the following changes to the Constitution:
- (a) Meetings of Council, the Executive (or its Committee), Committees or Sub-Committees may be held in a remote / online setting
 - (b) Councillors do not need to physically sign the attendance sheet when the Committee is in a remote setting;

3. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 3.1. In May 2020 the Council approved temporary amendments to the Constitution to allow for remote / online meetings until the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 expired on 7 May 2021.
- 3.2. On 21 April there was a hearing in the High Court that sought a declaration that it was possible to continue to hold remote meetings under older legislation. The outcome was unlikely to be known on the day but the Court is aware the Coronavirus Act powers lapse on 7 May 2021. Therefore, in anticipation that the case, brought by the Association of Democratic Services Officers and Hertfordshire County Council, is successful officers felt it prudent to have Council consider permanent changes to the Constitution. This way remote meetings can continue, subject to the High Court Hearing, rather than wait for approval at Council in July 2021.

4. Policy Framework

4.1. Fit for the Future (FFF)

- 4.1.1. The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.

- 4.1.2. The FFF Strategy has 3 strands, People, Services and Money, and each has an external and internal element to it, the details of which can be found [on the Council's website](#).

4.2.1 External impacts of proposal(s)

People - Health, Homes, Communities – If approved the report enables the democratic process to work more effectively at this time.

Services - Green, Clean, Safe – There would be minimal/no impact from this proposal.

Money- Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment - There would be minimal/no impact from this proposal.

4.1.2. Internal impacts of the proposal(s)

People - Effective Staff – The proposal will enable officers to continue to support the democratic process of decision making in an effective and timely manner and making sure that due process is followed.

Services - Maintain or Improve Services - There would be minimal/no impact from this proposal.

Money - Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term - There would be minimal/no impact from this proposal.

4.2. Supporting Strategies

4.3.1. Each strand of the FFF Strategy has several supporting strategies however there are none relevant to this report.

4.3. Changes to Existing Policies

4.4.1. The report brings forward changes to the Constitution with a view to ensuring Council decisions are open and transparent.

4.4. Impact Assessments

4.5.1. No impact assessment has been carried out for this report as it is a continuation of the current proposals, subject to legislative confirmation.

5. Budgetary Framework

5.1. The report does not impact on the budgetary framework of the Council or its budget.

6. Risks

6.1. The main risk associated with the report is the timing of the decision from the High Court. The Council is not due to meet again until July 2021 therefore the recommendation is proposed as an enabler if a positive decision is received after the current regulations end and before Council next meets.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

7.1. No alternatives have been considered because officers are working on plans for delivering physical Committee meetings after 7 May 2021 and prior to relaxation of restrictions on social distancing indoors.

7.2. At this time officers have not considered the potential for hybrid meetings. This would be where some Councillors attend a venue for the meeting and other dial in remotely. This is because if the ability to hold remote meetings is extended it is the intention that all Council meetings up to and including 14

Agenda Item 11(a)

July would continue to be held remotely. This is in order to allow for installation and detailed testing of the new PA system in the Council Chamber which has the technology to provide hybrid meetings.