

The City of Edinburgh Council

10.00am, Thursday 16 December 2021

Review of Political Management Arrangements – December 2021

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To agree to hold virtual meetings for executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee and to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to reinstate hybrid meetings when the public health situation improves.
- 1.2 To agree that once hybrid executive committee and Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee meetings resume, these hybrid arrangements will stay in place until the Scottish Government's working from home guidance is changed or lifted, or until the next significant review of the political management arrangements after the election in May 2022, whichever comes first.
- 1.3 To note that meetings of the City of Edinburgh Council will continue to be virtual until the Council removes the physical distancing requirement in its buildings, whereupon a report would be brought to Council to consider the reimplementation of physical Council meetings;
- 1.4 To agree that the current Interim Standing Orders continue until the next review of the political management arrangements.

Stephen S. Moir
Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: Hayley Barnett, Corporate Governance Manager
Legal and Assurance Division, Corporate Services Directorate
E-mail: Hayley.barnett@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3996

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2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The report sets out the proposed meeting arrangements to carry out Council and Committee business going forward.

3. Background

- 3.1 In response to the Covid-19 emergency; specifically, to establish quick and agile decision making, manage the pressure on staff, and prioritise frontline services; interim political management arrangements were implemented.
- 3.2 Arrangements have been reviewed at regular and appropriate points during this period – April 2020, August 2020, December 2020, March 2021, June 2021 and August 2021
- 3.3 At its meeting in June 2021 the Council agreed, following a move to protection level zero, a phased approach to the resumption of committee meetings starting with executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee (GRBV).
- 3.4 At its meeting in August 2021 the Council agreed that meetings of the City of Edinburgh Council would remain virtual until physical distancing restrictions changed, when a report would be brought to Council to consider the reimplementation of physical Council meetings.
- 3.5 The advice from Scottish Government to work from home, where possible, is still in place and was reinforced by the First Minister in her statement on 29 November 2021. As a result, elected members and officers are currently only able to access the office space in the City Chambers on the day of executive committee meetings (if attending the committee).
- 3.6 At its meeting on 5 October 2021, the Policy and Sustainability Committee approved the Council's Our Future Work Strategy with a number of teams trialling new ways of working in council buildings.

- 3.7 On 29 November 2021, the First Minister provided an update on the current position in Scotland. She confirmed the number of cases of Covid-19 across Scotland remains stable. However, the Omicron variant is posing a new risk. Information on the variant at this stage is limited. Early indications suggest Omicron may be more transmissible than current variants and it may carry an increased risk if reinfection. There is currently no information that the symptoms are any different or that the symptoms caused by this variant are more severe.
- 3.8 On the 7 December 2021, the First Minister provided a further update on the current position in Scotland and the Omicron variant. A total of 99 cases of Omicron have been detected in Scotland – a tenfold increase in the space of a week (figure from 7 December 2021). The First Minister said she expected the number of cases to increase. She also said employers should ensure that all staff who can work from home are able to, until at least the middle of January.

4. Main report

Executive Committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

- 4.1 The Policy and Sustainability Committee meeting on 5 October 2021 was the first hybrid committee meeting to take place. The list at appendix one details the committees that have taken place on a hybrid basis and the number of elected members in attendance.
- 4.2 There are practical issues that arise from hybrid meetings which means procedural matters can be more complicated, however officers were able to manage these challenges and all hybrid meetings have worked well.
- 4.3 As set out in appendix one, following a request from the Committee/Convener or due to limited demand from elected members to physically attend the committee meeting, the Proper Officer (Service Director: Legal and Assurance), in consultation with the relevant Convener, determined that the majority of executive committee meetings were to revert to remote only.
- 4.4 During this period, officers presenting reports at hybrid meetings attended virtually. The only officers physically attending meetings were 1-2 lead officers, committee officers and an audio-visual technician. Additionally, deputations attended remotely, and members of the public/press were encouraged to attend meetings remotely. As previously advised, this will be reviewed when the work from home guidance is changed or lifted.

- 4.5 Due to the success of the hybrid meetings, it was to be recommended that the Council continues to hold hybrid meetings for executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee until the working from home guidance is changed or lifted, or until the next significant review of the political management arrangements after the election in May 2022, whichever comes first. However, due to the increased cases of the Omicron variant and the First Minister's statements of 29 November and 7 December, it is recommended that the Council reverts back to holding virtual only meetings for executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee and delegates authority to the Chief Executive to reinstate hybrid meetings, as described earlier in the report, if the public health situation improves.

The City of Edinburgh Council

- 4.6 A one metre physical distancing rule is still being applied by the Council in its buildings. Therefore, Council is still unable to meet in the City Chambers with all 63 members whilst maintaining a physical distance of 1m.

Other Committees and Sub-Committees (as set out in the Committee Terms of Reference and Delegated Functions) and Working Groups

- 4.7 As noted above, we have safely carried out hybrid executive and GRBV committee meetings, however the demand from elected members to attend physically has been limited.
- 4.8 At its meeting in August 2021, the Council agreed to delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with conveners and vice-conveners, to agree an appropriate time for further physical committee meetings to recommence, following the successful implementation of physical meetings of executive committees. Due to the work from home guidance still being in place, operational service demands, the limited uptake from members to attend physical meetings, and, more recently the emergency of the Omicron variant, a further expansion of hybrid meetings to other committees and sub-committees has not yet been taken. This will continue to be kept under review.
- 4.9 The resumption of physical meetings of working groups will be considered at the same time as consideration is given to the other committee and sub-committees.

Attending a hybrid meeting

- 4.10 At the point when hybrid meetings resume, those attending in person should take a lateral flow test prior to the meeting and should only attend if the test is negative. Further information regarding lateral flow tests is available [here](#).

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The impact of the new Omicron variant will be monitored, and the Council will continue to adhere to all Scottish Government guidelines.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Political management arrangements during this period will be contained within existing revenue budgets.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Political Management arrangements will be communicated to all stakeholders.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Interim Political Management Arrangements 2020 – Leadership Advisory Panel of 23 April 2020](#)
- 8.2 [Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Arrangements and Remote Council Meetings – Policy and Sustainability Committee of 28 May 2020](#)
- 8.3 [Review of Political Management Arrangements 2020 – Policy and Sustainability Committee of 6 August 2020](#)
- 8.4 [Review of Political Management Arrangements December 2020 – City of Edinburgh Council of 10 December 2020](#)
- 8.5 [Review of Political Management Arrangements March 2021 – City of Edinburgh Council 11 March 2021](#)
- 8.6 [Review of Political Management Arrangements June 2021 – City of Edinburgh Council 24 June 2021](#)
- 8.7 [Review of Political Management Arrangements August 2021 – City of Edinburgh Council 26 August 2021](#)
- 8.8 [Our Future Work Strategy - Policy and Sustainability Committee 5 October 2021](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - List of Physical Executive Committee and Governance Risk and Best Value Committee Meetings
- 9.2 Appendix 2 - List of Other Committees

Appendix 1 - List of Physical Executive Committee and Governance Risk and Best Value Committee Meetings

Date (2021)	Committee	Remote/Hybrid	Physical Attendance	Remote Attendance
5 October	Policy and Sustainability	Hybrid	9	8
7 October	Finance and Resources	Hybrid	6	5
12 October	Education, Children and Families	Remote	N/A	11
14 October	Transport and Environment	Remote	N/A	11
4 November	Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work	Remote	N/A	11
9 November	Governance, Risk and Best Value	Hybrid	5	6
11 November	Transport and Environment	Remote	N/A	11
16 November	Culture and Communities	Hybrid	5	6
18 November	Finance and Resources Committee (Special Meeting)	Hybrid	6	5
30 November	Policy and Sustainability	Remote	N/A	17
7 December	Education, Children and Families	Remote	N/A	11
9 December	Finance and Resources	Remote	N/A	11
14 December	Governance, Risk and Best Value			

Appendix 2 – List of Other Committees and Sub-Committees (as set out in the Committee Terms of Reference and Delegated Functions)

Other Committees

Committee on Discretionary Rating Relief Appeals

Leadership Advisory Panel

Planning Committee

Pensions Committee

Personnel Appeals Committee

Placing in Schools Appeals Committee

Committee on Pupil Student Support

Recruitment Committee

Regulatory Committee

The City of Edinburgh Planning Local Review Body

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

Community Council Independent Complaints Panel

Sub-Committees

Development Management Sub-Committee (Parent: Planning Committee)

Licensing Sub-Committee (Parent: Regulatory Committee)

Pensions Audit Sub-Committee (Parent: Pensions Committee)

Property Sub-Committee (Parent: Finance and Resources Committee)

Special Sub-Committee on Adult Social Care (Parent: Culture and Communities Committee)

Sub-Committee on Standards for Children and Families (Parent: Education, Children and Families Committee)