

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 28 May 2020

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Arrangements and Remote Council Meetings

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To agree the interim remit and arrangements for the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee as outlined in appendix one.
- 1.2 To agree to hold a Council meeting in late June with a date to be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Lord Provost.
- 1.3 To note the testing being carried out to identify a suitable platform for a remote Council meeting.
- 1.4 To note that further detail on the Council meeting would be reported to the Committee on 11 June 2020.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

Contact: Gavin King, Democracy, Governance and Resilience Senior Manager

E-mail: gavin.king@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 4239

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Arrangements and Remote Council Meetings

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 A proposed interim remit for the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee for the period June to August 2020 is outlined. In addition, progress with establishing a remote Council meeting is detailed.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Leadership Advisory Panel on 23 April 2020 agreed that the Chief Executive should report back to the Policy and Sustainability Committee on the operational arrangements for the reinstated Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee and the potential options for holding meetings of full Council.

4. Main report

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

- 4.1 The Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee acts as the Council's audit committee but it also has a remit that spans across all activities of the Council and enables it to scrutinise almost any issue it chooses.
- 4.2 In April 2020 the Leadership Advisory Panel agreed to re-introduce the committee to improve the Council's decision making and provide a greater level of assurance. However, this was in the context of the Covid-19 emergency having a considerable impact on Council resources and that significant committee business would have a detrimental effect on front line service delivery.
- 4.3 It was agreed that committee reinstatement would take place on a phased basis with the Policy and Sustainability Committee reinstated in May, Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee in June and a review of the political management arrangements in August. As a result, the second phase includes three Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee meetings. The objectives for these three meetings are proposed as follows:

- 4.3.1 To increase scrutiny and gain assurance in relation to the Covid-19 emergency response;
 - 4.3.2 To consider external and internal audit assurance outcomes; and
 - 4.3.3 To scrutinise the governance arrangements of the Council.
- 4.4 An interim remit for the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee is proposed at appendix one to this report. This will be in place for June-August 2020 and will be reviewed by the Policy and Sustainability Committee in August 2020.
- 4.5 It is anticipated that the committee will consider the processes and the governance arrangements followed by the Council in relation to Covid-19. This will include seeking assurance on risk management and the structures and processes created and implemented for decision making.
- 4.6 The committee should also consider the relevant internal and external audit reports that require to be considered by the Council and scrutinise matters such as the Council's Annual Governance Statement and whistleblowing reports.

Council Meetings

- 4.7 The Council has three potential options for hosting a remote Council meeting:
- 4.7.1 Skype for Business
 - 4.7.2 Microsoft Teams
 - 4.7.3 Connect Remote
- 4.8 The Council currently utilises Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams for remote meetings. Both of these options could be used as the platform to host remote Council meetings. Committees so far have used Skype for Business which was used by the Council before the Covid-19 emergency. Microsoft Teams was rolled out during the emergency but will become the Council's primary tool for remote meetings and will ultimately replace Skype for Business within the Council. Public I the Council's webcast provider has developed a remote meeting platform called Connect Remote which is specifically designed for formal Council meetings. Connect Remote is at an early stage of its development and functionality is still being added but will only be a viable option once it has undergone full testing. City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council have used Connect Remote for their cabinet meetings but as yet no Council has used it for a large-scale meeting.
- 4.9 Microsoft Teams has also been used successfully for a Council Wider Leadership Meeting of around 60-70 participants with no sound issues. A successful capacity test with around fifty participants was carried out using Connect Remote on 13 May 2020, but further testing is required and will be carried out in May and June 2020.
- 4.10 However, there is no certainty that a Council meeting with around 70 participants could be carried out successfully and it is recommended that a full test be carried out with elected member participation before a Council meeting is broadcast live. It is expected that all microphones and videos would need to be turned off unless the participant was speaking to manage system capacity within data parameters.

- 4.11 If testing demonstrates that a Council meeting could be facilitated by the technology, the logistical difficulties of managing a remote large meeting for the Lord Provost and the clerk would also have to be overcome. Managing 63 elected members who wish to speak remotely is not straightforward and, although there are different options for dealing with this, none of these guarantees a 100% no mistakes and fair system. A combination of restrictions on the number of elected members who can speak on any given item, clear procedures and advance notice of speakers would have to be in operation for at least the first few remote Council meetings. Connect Remote are working on developments to assist chairs and clerks and these improvements are scheduled for roll-out in summer 2020.
- 4.12 It will be necessary to explore how we can ensure that any solution meets our own accessibility standards for elected members, officers and external participants. External participants, such as deputations, are not able to join a Skype for Business meeting, however, they could potentially join meetings on Microsoft Teams and Connect Remote platforms. It will need to be considered carefully what impact the addition of external participants would have on capacity of the system, meeting logistics, security arrangements and whether we could maintain accessibility standards.
- 4.13 The Information Governance and Digital Services teams have been consulted throughout this process to ensure the viability of any solution from an information security perspective. No material concerns have been raised to date, however, it will be necessary to continue to work with colleagues once there is more clarity on the chosen platform and key logistical arrangements to ensure that sufficient data security and encryption arrangements are in place.
- 4.14 In conclusion, to facilitate the Council holding a meeting in late June 2020, the following is recommended:
- 4.14.1 Further testing being carried out to identify whether Microsoft Teams or Connect Remote is the most suitable platform;
 - 4.14.2 A full test run of the chosen technology with as many elected members as possible participating;
 - 4.14.3 Discussions with those elected members with additional support needs to ensure they can participate fully; and
 - 4.14.4 Procedures on the running of the meeting agreed by elected members prior to the meeting.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Further testing will be carried out, in particular with Microsoft Teams and Connect Remote

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report and the Council is pursuing options that it has got in place.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Council is permitted to hold remote meetings and is committed to doing so whilst maintaining as much access as possible for the wider public.
- 7.2 Allowing participation from external bodies and community groups in a secure and accessible manner is a key aim of the development of remote meetings.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Leadership Advisory Panel 23 April 2020 – [Interim Political Management Arrangements 2020](#)

9. Appendices

Appendix One – Remit of Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

Appendix 1

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

7.1. **Constitution:** 11 members of the Council as follows:

7.1.1. 3 SNP

7.1.2. 3 Conservative

7.1.3. 2 Labour

7.1.4. 2 Green

7.1.5. 1 SLD

Convener

7.2. The Convener of the committee will be a member of the opposition.

Quorum

7.3. Four members of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee will constitute a quorum.

Substitution

7.4. Substitutes are permitted from members of the Council who have undertaken and completed appropriate training specified by the Chief Executive.

Delegated functions

7.5. Power is delegated to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee to exercise the following functions:

7.5.1. To monitor the effectiveness of the Council's audit and inspection, risk management and governance arrangements and of the control environment of the Council and associated anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, including:

7.5.2. To monitor delivery of the annual audit plan and reviewing all Council audit and inspection work against the plan.

7.5.3. To receive and consider summaries of internal and external audit reports which relate to any issue falling within the remit of this committee.

7.5.4. To monitor internal controls, corporate risk management, whistleblowing and key operational governance areas.

7.5.5 To scrutinise the procedures and processes implemented in response to the Covid-19 emergency.

7.6. To report, as required, on any matter within the committee's remit to Council.

7.7 Scrutiny on a specific issue should follow a committee or officer decision.