

Executive

Proposed Protocol for London Councils Virtual Meetings

Item no: 6

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Date:	19 May 2020		
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Summary This paper outlines a proposed protocol for the conduct of London Councils' Committee meetings from July 2020. It takes into account the new Regulations as well as how public accessibility will be enabled.

Recommendations: The Executive is asked to:

- Discuss and agree a proposed Protocol for how London Councils' Committee Meetings will be managed
- Agree to the proposed schedule of dates including the deferred AGMs
- Note that both the Protocol, with any amendments from this meeting and the schedule of dates, will go to the next Leaders' Committee Meeting
- Agree that the next Leaders' Committee will take place on 7 July 2020

Proposed Protocol for London Councils Virtual Meetings

Introduction

1. The Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced regulation-making powers with regard to meetings and proceedings of local authorities.

The Regulations, made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, came into force on 4 April 2020 and remain valid until 7 May 2021¹.

These regulations apply to local authority meetings (including joint committees of two or more authorities) that are required to be held, or are held, before 7 May 2021. They make provisions for:

- Remote access to meetings of local authorities by members of a local authority and by the press and public
 - Local authorities to hold and alter the frequency and occurrence of meetings without requirement for further notice
 - Members of local authorities to attend meetings remotely.
2. The regulations also modify existing legislative requirements for local authority meetings, including provisions requiring local authorities to hold annual meetings. In addition, they modify legislation relating to public and press access to information relating to decisions made by local authorities to enable such access to be available through remote means.

Implications of the Regulations for London Councils

3. London Councils is a Joint Committee and is covered by these Regulations. It is proposed that London Councils holds its statutory and formal Committee meetings remotely until further notice, or until 7 May 2021, whichever is the sooner.

¹ The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392 ('the Regulations').

4. The effect of the Regulations is to “insert” what are, in effect, mandatory standing orders for those authorities that wish to hold meetings remotely.
5. It is proposed that London Councils adopts a protocol for how these meetings are managed, which has the same status of a standing order and where there is conflict, takes precedence.
6. It proposed that London Councils annual general meetings (AGMs) are deferred until the autumn, noting that, where an AGM is delayed, all appointments from the Joint Committee’s 2019 AGMs continue, unless London Councils is formally notified of any changes through the normal channels/processes.

Protocol

7. A Protocol on how these remote meetings will be managed has been drafted taking into account guidance which has been made available² and some learning from remote meetings which have already taken place.

Members will be notified of the remote meeting by email and all agenda papers will be emailed and available on the London Councils website.

The ‘place’ at which the meeting’s will be held will be a virtual location and the mechanism used will be Microsoft Teams and it is proposed to facilitate live streaming to enable press and public access. The Protocol also covers the handling of exempt business.

8. There are a number of options which members of the Executive are asked to discuss, including whether to:
 - Utilise the caption facility
 - Utilise the chat facility
 - Start each meeting with a roll call of committee members
 - How votes will be dealt with

² Guidance has been published by MHCLG; The House of Commons Library, The LGA; London Office of technology and Innovation (LOTI); The Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) working with the Lawyers in Local Government Group (LLG) have also been collating and sharing advice, guidance and good practice notes

The proposed Protocol is attached as Appendix One and makes assumptions on the above options.

Dates of London Councils Committee Meetings

9. It is suggested that the Leaders' Committee meeting previously scheduled for 2 June 2020, which was to have been the AGM, might be used for a Leaders' Call, using the same time slot of 11.30a.m.
10. It is proposed that the next formal Leaders' Committee meeting takes place on 7 July 2020 and that the meeting will take place virtually using Microsoft Teams. At that meeting, Leaders will be able to discuss and agree this Protocol and be asked to discuss and agree the proposed dates of London Councils AGM's and other meeting dates – see Appendix Two, attached.

Access to documents

11. Regulations make provision for local authority members and officers, and the public, to have access to documents without attending council buildings.

The Regulations provide that it will be sufficient to publish the documents on the website. This includes notices, agendas, reports, background papers and minutes.

Recommendations: The Executive is asked to:

- Discuss and agree a proposed Protocol for how London Councils' Committee Meetings will be managed
- Agree to the proposed schedule of dates including the deferred AGMs
- Note that both the Protocol, with any amendments from this meeting and the schedule of dates will go to the next Leaders' Committee Meeting
- Agree that the next Leaders' Committee will take place on 7 July 2020.

Financial Implications for London Councils:

There are no financial implications for London Councils other than some additional costs associated with publishing recordings of meetings on You Tube or a similar channel.

Additional Microsoft Teams licences were purchased at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic for a number of staff at London Councils to enable meetings to be held virtually from the outset, for both officers and members.

Legal Implications for London Councils:

Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced regulation-making powers with regard to meetings and proceedings of local authorities, including joint committees.

The Regulations, subsequently made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, enable local authorities, including joint committees to hold decision making meetings remotely, subject to a number of procedural rules.

The Regulations make provision for local authority members and officers, and the public, to have access to documents without attending council buildings.

Regulations 15-17 provide that, where the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 require that certain documents be made available for inspection by members of the public, it will be sufficient for local authorities to publish the documents on their website. This includes notices, agendas, reports, background papers and minutes – London Councils will comply with these requirements.

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or “exempt” issues (as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972) are under consideration. For exempt items, the Chair will “clear the room” of press and public and the livestreaming will then be

stopped.

The proposed protocol attached at Appendix One is in accordance with the Act and Regulations.

Equalities Implications for London Councils:

All meetings will be formally minuted and published on the London Councils website in the usual way. Microsoft Teams is a business platform which all members should be able to access and use. Livestreaming the meetings enables will enable public access.

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Protocol for London Councils Joint Committee Meetings¹:

- All meetings will be conducted virtually using *Microsoft Teams*
- The relevant committee agendas will indicate that the “meeting place” is “virtual”
- The notice of meeting and publication of relevant agendas and papers will continue to comply with the five working day *Access to Information* Regulations and will be available on London Councils website
- All meetings will be formally minuted and attendance recorded
- The normal quorum requirements will apply
- All votes will be dealt with by a roll call by the Chair or by the affirmation of the meeting if there is no dissent [by assent]
- Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or other declarable interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. Their departure will be confirmed by the Democratic Services Officer or meeting facilitator, who will invite the relevant Member by link, email or telephone, to re-join the meeting at the appropriate time
- For exempt items, the Chair will “clear the room” of press and public and the livestreaming will then be stopped. Each Member in remote attendance must ensure that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings
- In the event of any apparent failure of the conferencing connection, the Chair should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate:
 - if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or
 - if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chair, expected to be no more than ten or fifteen

¹ This protocol applies to: London Councils Leaders’ Committee and its sub-committees; London Councils Transport and Environment Committee (TEC) and its sub-committees; Grants Committee and its sub-committees; Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC); Greater London Employers Forum (GLEF); Young Persons Education & Skills Board (YPES) and should be read in conjunction with London Councils Standing Orders 2019

minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established.

- Should any aspect of an individual's remote participation fail, the Chair may call a short adjournment of up to five minutes or so to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established, either by video technology or telephone in the alternative. If the connection is not restored within that time, the meeting should continue to deal with the business whilst this happens, providing the meeting remains quorate and the public are able to hear
- In the event of connection failure, the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Member(s) before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with the item/s
- If the connection is successfully re-established, then the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment
- If a connection to a Member is lost during the meeting, and the connection cannot be restored within a reasonable time, the meeting will proceed, but the Member who was disconnected will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the facts.

The following Meeting etiquette will be observed:

1. All members of the Committee should join the meeting promptly to avoid unnecessary delays to the start of the meeting
2. There will be a roll call of participants at the beginning of each meeting
3. All members will then be asked to have muted microphones as the default position to improve the sound quality of the meeting
4. It will be a decision of each respective Committee Chair, but the default position for the Joint Committee Meetings will be that, other than the Chair, all cameras will be switched off when a member is not speaking to save bandwidth and improve the sound quality of the meeting
5. Members will only speak when invited to by the Chair

6. Members can indicate that they would like to speak by using the chat facility and turning on their camera
7. All members should state their name and authority before speaking for the benefit of the press and public (officers/invited guests should state their name/job title/organisation)
8. It will be a decision of each respective Committee Chair, but the default position for all Committee Meetings will be that the chat facility is not used other than as an indication of a wish to speak
9. Only one person may speak at any one time
10. The chat facility must not be used for private conversations between participants
11. In respect of key committees, it will assist the meeting if those Members who wish to speak on a particular item could indicate their wish to speak to the Chair and to the Democratic Services Officer in advance of the start of the meeting where possible. Political groups are also encouraged to co-ordinate this activity wherever possible in respect of meetings likely to result in a high number of requests to speak
12. Members (and officers) should be careful not to allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen.

Each agenda, when published, will have the meeting “etiquette/house rules” and any relevant useful information included. London Councils website will also have this protocol, plus house rules and any helpful information permanently displayed on its committee page.

LONDON COUNCILS MEETING DATES – 2020/21- Virtual

Confirmed; Proposed

<p>Leaders Committee (11:30 with Labour, Conservative Group and Liberal Democrat Group pre-meetings at 10.00- TBC)</p> <p>2020 7 July 2020 13 October 2020 (AGM) 8 December 2020</p> <p>2021 9 February 2021 23 March 2021 8 June 2021 (AGM) 13 July 2021</p> <p>Executive (9.30) 2020 19 May 2020 16 June 2020 8 September 2020 10 November 2020</p> <p>2021 18 January 2021 2 March 2021 11 May 2021 22 June 2021</p> <p>Grants Committee (11:00– pre-meets at 10:00) 2020 8 July 2020 11 November 2020 (AGM)</p> <p>2021 17 March 2021 14 July 2021 (AGM) 10 November 2021</p> <p>Grants Executive (2:00 – 4:00pm) 2020 16 September 2020</p> <p>2021 5 February 2021 15 September 2021</p>	<p>Audit Committee 2020 18 June 2020 17 September 2020</p> <p>2021 18 March 2021</p> <p>TEC (2:30 –pre-meets at 1:30) 2020 11 June 2020 15 October 2020 (AGM) 10 December 2020</p> <p>2021 18 March 2021</p> <p>TEC Exec (10:00) 2020 16 July 2020 17 September 2020 12 November 2020</p> <p>2021 11 February 2021</p> <p>Greater London Employment Forum (GLEF) 2020 25 June 2020</p> <p>2021 20 February 2021 (AGM) 25 June 2021</p> <p>Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC) 2020 29 October 2020 (AGM) 2021 15 April 2021 14 October 2021</p> <p>Young People’s Education and Skills Board (YPES) 2020 15 October 2020</p> <p>2021 28 January 2021</p>
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