

FULL COUNCIL - 29th MARCH 2021

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

END OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020.

The regulations that allowed this Council's formal meetings to be conducted via an online platform only apply to meetings taking place before the 7th May 2021.

At the time of writing, from the 7th May all meetings must be held in a physical 'meeting place', just as before Coronavirus restrictions came into force. Virtual meetings or hybrid meetings (some Members attending via an online platform, some in person) will again be illegal.

In order to maximise the amount of business this Council can execute before a face to face meeting is required, Members are asked to consider moving the date of the May meeting from the 17th to Wednesday 5th May. This will give the Council the opportunity to carry out the essential May meeting business without risk of restrictions or other concerns making attendance difficult and risking the meeting not being quorate.

National Association of Local Council (NALC), Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and others are working on the basis that there are "forceful arguments" that the Local Government 1972 Act as it currently exists allows meetings to be held remotely or in hybrid form when current provisions expire. This rests on the premise that in the modern day, remote attendance could satisfy the act's requirement for somebody to be present at a meeting while the place of a meeting could be a digital place. They are putting this to the High Court for a decision which is expected soon.

Should this not be successful and no further temporary legislation is forthcoming, then we will have no choice but to return to face to face meetings. We are lucky to have the main hall at The Watermark which will enable effective social distancing between Councillors and staff. However, there may still be anxiety of Councillors and staff with underlying health conditions, or who have not been vaccinated, being forced into face to face gatherings, which have been demonstrated can happen remotely.

However, we will as officers have time to plan using the latest guidance and best practice to make face to face meetings as safe as possible for the second meeting of the new Council year.

If regulations are extended temporarily or permanently, then work can commence developing proposals to decide whether this Council wants to continue meeting remotely, or if face to face is the preferred method.

It is **recommended** that this Council changes the meeting calendar and moves the May meeting date to Wednesday 5th May 2021.

Jonathan Parsons
Town Clerk