

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	23 March 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Directors
Subject	-	Coronavirus (Covid-19) Emergency Arrangements

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED: That:

- 1) all scheduled committee meetings be suspended until further notice;
 - 2) agree the delegations to officers in relation to Executive Functions set out in paragraph 6;
 - 3) agree the delegations to officers in relation to the functions of the Audit and Standards, Licensing and General Purposes and Planning Committees as set out in paragraph 8;
 - 4) agree that Member non-attendance related to Covid-19 be considered as an absence approved by the Council as set out in paragraph 12; and
 - 5) agree to temporarily amend the Constitution accordingly.
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Coronavirus (Covid-19) Emergency Arrangements

1. The current incidence of the Covid-19 virus both nationally and internationally is beginning to cause disruption to a range of businesses and social activity. There may be a need for additional preventative measures to be introduced nationally to help contain or delay the spread of the virus. This includes potential advice to individuals or groups to self-isolate for periods of time, and/or for more general restrictions on travel or gatherings. It is also likely that more people will become unwell as a result of the virus.
2. Further spread of Covid-19 therefore has the potential to impact upon Rother District Council's ability to hold its normal meetings. This could be as a result of Members or officers being unable to attend due to illness or self-isolation, or general advice against travel or gatherings leading to a need to suspend the holding of meetings for a period of time.
3. This report outlines a range of proposed temporary measures which enables the Council's essential business to be conducted as a result of suspension of formal meetings due to Covid-19.
4. All scheduled committee meetings will therefore be suspended until the position improves. This will be reviewed weekly with the Leader of the Council and all Members will be advised when meetings resume.

Executive decisions

5. It is therefore proposed that, due to the suspension of meetings due to Covid-19, the Forward Plan of decisions is reviewed and any decisions which can be

postponed are rescheduled for a later date. However, there may be time-critical decisions which cannot be deferred and arrangements will be required to ensure these decisions can be taken in a timely manner.

6. In the case of critical business that cannot wait, it is proposed that delegated authority be granted to the Council's Executive Directors (or in their absence one of the Statutory Post Holders (Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer) or in their absence a Head of Service) in consultation with a minimum of four Members of Cabinet, one of whom to be the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council, to make a decision remotely. The delegation is to cover all the Cabinet's powers, duties and functions not currently covered by Part 8 of the Council's constitution (Delegations to Officers). Any decisions made under this delegation will be published on the Council's website, via the Committee Management system and notified to all Members.

Non-Executive decisions

7. As with Executive decisions it is proposed that, wherever possible, items due for consideration by the Council's Non-Executive bodies be reviewed and items postponed and rescheduled wherever possible. However, there is potential for time-critical decisions to be required in relation to the remits of the Audit and Standards (A&S), Licensing and General Purposes (L&GP) and Planning Committees.
8. As above, in the case of critical business that cannot wait, it is proposed that delegated authority be granted to the Council's Executive Directors (or in their absence one of the Statutory Post Holders (Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer) or in their absence a Head of Service) that a decision on the matter should be taken remotely before the next scheduled meeting, it is proposed that the following delegations be agreed:
 - In relation to the A&S Committee – to delegate the functions of the Audit and Standards Committee in so far as the law allows to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.
 - In relation to the L&GP Committee – to delegate the functions of the L&GP Committee in so far as the law allows to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.
 - In relation to the Planning Committee – to delegate the functions of the Planning Committee in so far as the law allows to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.
9. Any decisions taken by officers under these delegations will be reported to the subsequent meeting of the relevant committee when meetings resume.
10. It is noted that there are no arrangements in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as this is a non-decision making Committee.

Member attendance

11. The temporary suspension of meetings due to Covid-19 will impact on Members' ability to attend Council meetings. This may in turn result in Members becoming

at risk of failing to meet attendance rules which require a minimum attendance at meetings of once every six months.

12. To prevent any Member being at risk due to non-attendance as a result of Covid-19 it is proposed that non-attendance due to: being diagnosed with Covid-19; self-isolating due to suspected Covid-19; self-isolating in order to reduce the risk of contracting or passing on Covid-19; or as a result of following Covid-19 related guidance from Government be considered as absence for a reason approved by the Council in relation to attendance requirements.

Conclusion

13. The recommendations to be considered by Council are:
 - all scheduled committee meetings be suspended until further notice;
 - agree the delegations to officers in relation to Executive Functions set out in paragraph 6 above;
 - agree the delegations to officers in relation to the functions of the Audit and Standards, Licensing and General Purposes and Planning Committees as set out in paragraph 8 above;
 - agree that Member non-attendance related to Covid-19 be considered as an absence approved by the Council as set out in paragraph 12 above; and
 - agree to temporarily amend the Constitution accordingly.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director