

URGENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9.00 am on 19 March 2020

Present:

Councillor Colin Smith (Chairman)
Councillors Nicholas Bennett MA J.P., Peter Fortune,
Melanie Stevens, Pauline Tunnicliffe and Angela Wilkins

Also Present:

Councillor Graham Arthur, Councillor William Huntington-
Thresher, Councillor Peter Morgan, Councillor Diane Smith and
Councillor Gary Stevens

6 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Colin Smith was appointed Chairman.

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simon Fawthrop and also from the Chief Executive.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH OCTOBER 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2019 be confirmed.

10 DECISION MAKING ARRANGEMENTS DURING CORONAVIRUS DELAY PHASE

Report CSD20059

This report was considered as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that effective decision making could continue whilst democratic accountability was preserved during the coronavirus pandemic.

During the coronavirus pandemic local authorities had to consider how they held their meetings and took decisions. There was not yet a prohibition on local authority meetings being held, but it was possible that this could change. At present, local authorities were expected to use the provisions already available in their constitutions to continue with necessary decision-making, but it was possible that new provisions might become available through the emergency legislation

being promoted by the Government. This might include provision for virtual meetings and options for the annual meeting, which currently had to take place before the end of May.

The report presented a series of changes to allow most decision making to take place whilst preserving democratic accountability during the pandemic. The same report would be considered by the Executive immediately after this meeting.

Councillor Morgan proposed that it was not necessary to include the words "cannot be deferred" in the decision about planning applications, which other members accepted.

Councillor Bennett commented on the appeal for volunteers and the need to prevent frauds, and added that, at present, it was intended that the next citizenship ceremony would take place, but with restricted attendance.

The Leader stated that there was a strong senior officer group which was reporting back to Councillors on a daily basis, and he would ensure that there was a flow of information to members and to residents. Over 1,300 volunteers had come forward in the last 24 hours.

Councillor Gary Stevens reported that he was working with the Head of Information Technology to develop the Council's capacity for holding virtual meetings should the law be changed to allow this as anticipated. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that a range of solutions was being considered with BT.

The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that it was intended that reports would be published in accordance with current agenda and meeting timelines with at least five clear working days to allow time for comments from Members and from the public.

Councillor Wilkins commented that it was essential to ensure that opposition members were included in the membership of any meetings that did need to take place - some additional wording around political balance could be included which the Leader supported. She was also concerned that the planning application for Crystal Palace Park should not be deferred, and the Leader asked for any concerns from members or the public to be fed back to the Planning department to reduce any possibility of that occurring.

RESOLVED that

(1) All Committee Chairmen review whether meetings are needed and whether items under consideration can be deferred; where meetings are not required that the relevant Chairman requests cancellation of the meeting.

(2) Where meetings are required that wherever possible then the minimum quorum of members should attend, subject to endeavouring to achieve political balance, and subject to any quorum including a majority of Members from the Majority Group.

(3) All Policy Development and Scrutiny meetings are suspended until the new municipal year but that written or virtual scrutiny of Executive and Portfolio holder decisions continue to be co-ordinated by the relevant PDS Chairman.

(4) Rules on public questions are varied for the duration of the municipal year to only allow for written questions.

(5) All planning decisions are delegated to the Assistant Director Development Control and Planning but only where a majority of members of the committee or sub-committee who would have made the decision support the proposed recommendation.

(6) The limit on supplementary estimates of £1m by the Executive is removed for the remainder of the municipal year, where it is not possible to hold a meeting of the Council, the Mayor agreeing the matter cannot be deferred and the Leader taking the decision on the expenditure.

(7) The Contract Procedure Rules be varied for the remainder of the municipal year to allow the Leader to award contracts of over £1m without calling a meeting of the Executive and subject to written pre-decision scrutiny as set out in recommendation 2.9 of the report.

The Meeting ended at 9.29 am

Chairman