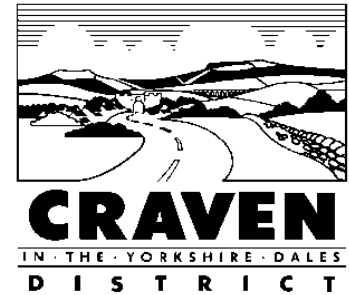


Council – 27 April 2021

Local Authority Meetings

Report of the Chief Executive

**Lead Member – Leader of the Council,
Councillor Foster**



Ward(s) affected: N/a

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To consider and review options for Council and Committee meetings beyond 7 May 2021 when the regulations that enable virtual meetings to take place are due to expire.

2. Recommendations – Members are recommended to:

2.1 Note the latest position following the decision by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 25 March 2021 not to extend the current regulations that enable virtual meetings to take place.

2.2 That dependent on the outcome of proceedings by Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers, the Council takes the following course of action:

- i) If the proceedings are successful, then virtual meetings will continue and a further report will be submitted to consider and agree future meeting arrangements.
- ii) If the proceedings are unsuccessful then face to face meetings will resume. Further information will be made available to consider and agree future meeting arrangements.

3. Report

3.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 enables Councils to meet virtually. The regulations do not apply to meetings on or after 7 May 2021.

3.2 Extending the regulations beyond 7 May 2021 requires primary legislation. The Government considered the case for legislation and concluded that it was not possible to bring forward emergency legislation on this issue.

3.3 Following this two professional organisations (Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers) jointly commenced legal proceedings seeking a declaration that remote meetings are permitted under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972 itself, with or without the temporary COVID Regulations.

3.4 The outcome of legal proceedings by Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers is not yet known and therefore the Council has been making contingency plans to enable face to face meetings to take place. The arrangements for the first meetings would be as follows:

- Planning Committee on Monday, 17 May 2021 at 1.30pm – Meeting would take place at the Council's Belle Vue Suite.
- Selection Committee on Wednesday, 19 May 2021 at 6.30pm – Meeting would take place at the Council's Belle Vue Suite.
- Annual Council on Tuesday, 25 May 2021 at 6.30pm – Meeting would take place at an external venue.

3.5 In the event that the legal proceedings by Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers are successful; the recommendation is to continue with virtual meetings in the short term. This is to enable sufficient time to consider the most appropriate course of action for each Council and Committee.

3.6 If the legal proceedings are unsuccessful then Council and Committee meetings will be required to take place face to face. For most committee meetings it has been assessed that there is sufficient capacity to meet at the Council's Belle Vue Suite meeting room. For Council and potentially some Planning Committee meetings it will be necessary to meet at larger external venues.

4. Financial and Value for Money Implications

4.1 No direct financial implications, although there are costs associated with servicing meetings, member and officer attendance.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 These are considered within the body of the report.

6. Contribution to Council Priorities

6.1 Not applicable.

6.2 Impact on the declared Climate Emergency

A return to face to face meetings would increase the requirement for officers and members to travel to meeting venues which would impact on carbon emissions.

7. Risk Management

7.1 A risk assessment would be required for all meeting venues.

7.2 Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) Statement

No additional comments.

7.3 Monitoring Officer Statement

The recommendation set out in the report is lawful and within the powers of the Council.

8. Equality Impact Analysis

- 8.1 Procedure has not been followed. Therefore, neither an Initial Screening nor an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the proposed policy, strategy, procedure or function to identify whether it has/does not have the potential to cause negative impact or discriminate against different groups in the community based on •age • disability •gender • race/ethnicity • religion or religious belief (faith) •sexual orientation, or • rural isolation.

9. Consultations with Others

- 9.1 Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer and Legal Services Manager.

10. Background Documents

- 10.1 None

11. Appendices

None

12. Author of the Report

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.