

## Report – Policy and Resources Committee

### Report of Urgent Actions Taken: COVID-19 Response

*To be presented on Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020*

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons  
of the City of London in Common Council.*

#### SUMMARY

As a consequence of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak in the United Kingdom and related directives from HM Government, the City of London Corporation suspended the vast majority of formal decision-making meetings towards the end of March 2020. Whilst formal meetings have now been reinstated following the introduction of new Regulations permitting virtual meetings, a number of decisions concerning the immediate response to the outbreak were required to be taken in the interim, in accordance with the City Corporation's urgency procedures. The various actions taken are set out below.

#### RECOMMENDATION

That the actions taken under urgency procedures be noted.

#### SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN

The following actions were taken in accordance with Standing Order No. 19:

**(A) Postponement of the election of Sheriffs and other Officers usually elected in Common Hall on Midsummer Day**

1. Arising from the rapidly developing COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak in the United Kingdom and related legislation from HM Government, the London Mayoral, Police and Crime Commissioner and local government elections were suspended until May 2021. These provisions did not apply to municipal elections in the City, which remained under the control of the City Corporation, but reflected a clear statement of national policy. It was, accordingly, necessary to give consideration to the election of Sheriffs and other Officers by an assembly of the Livery in Common Hall on Midsummer Day (24 June). The timeline was also relevant to the Mayoral election in Common Hall due in September 2020.
2. Given the national position and uncertainty about the length of time during which restrictions and effects on normal activities may be in place, it was recommended that the elections on Midsummer Day should be delayed for a year, until Midsummer Day in 2021, which would have the effect that the terms of office of the incumbent Sheriffs and other Officers would also be extended accordingly. This could be implemented through a formal resolution of the Court of Common Council. The Court of Aldermen resolved similarly the intention for the currently serving Lord Mayor to be selected to serve a second term.

3. To allow for the required adjustments to be actioned appropriately, the views of the Policy & Resources Committee were sought at an informal meeting on 16 April 2020, after which the proposals were ratified under urgency procedures in accordance with Standing Order No. 41(a) and, thereafter, submitted and approved by the Court in accordance with Standing Order No.19.

**(B) Postponement of the Annual Appointment of Committees and Consequential Matters**

4. In response to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak in the United Kingdom and related directives from HM Government, the City of London Corporation suspended the vast majority of formal decision-making meetings towards the end of March 2020, with decisions being taken in the meantime in accordance with the City Corporation's urgency procedures.
5. This suspension included the April meeting of the Court of Common Council, which was when the constitution of committees and election or appointment to those committees would be made for the ensuing municipal year. Therefore, the Court of Common Council would be unable to appoint its Committees, nor elect and appoint to those Committees for 2020/21. There was also a consequential impact in respect of other Standing Orders, including the ability of the Chief Commoner-Elect to take office, which needed to be addressed.
6. Given the position and uncertainty about the length of time during which restrictions and effects on normal activities may be in place, together with limited resource with which to work through immediate implications, it was felt that the pragmatic response in the circumstances would be to roll forward the existing arrangements in respect of committee membership and associated matters - i.e., to preserve the status quo subject to any further decision of the Court.
7. This accorded with the wider national approach in respect of the deferral of local government and Mayoral elections for the forthcoming year. It also aligned with *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 governing meetings* ("the Regulations") which came into force on 4 April 2020, which set out such an approach. (It should be noted that these Regulations apply to local authority functions and, consequently, a separate technical approval was also required to replicate the same position for non-local authority functions. This was captured within the appended resolution for the Court).

8. A report detailing the proposed action was circulated to all Members of the Court for comment, with responses received relayed to an informal meeting of Members of the Policy & Resources Committee on 16 April 2020. Following discussion at that meeting and a minor amendment emerging from that discussion, the proposals were ratified under urgency procedures in accordance with Standing Order No. 41(a) and, thereafter, submitted and approved by the Court in accordance with Standing Order No.19.

**(C) Temporary Amendments to Code of Corporate Governance in response to COVID-19/Coronavirus**

9. The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic had led to the suspension of ordinary City of London Corporation activity, including aspects of the City Corporation's Committee process. Whilst emergency legislation was enacted to facilitate the holding of formal virtual decision-making meetings, which progressed as of 24 April, there was still a requirement to streamline decision-making in a small number of relevant areas, allowing both resources and decision-making meetings to focus as far as possible on critical and / or frontline services, where these decisions would have greatest impact and importance.
10. To this end, 14 requests were made by service departments in respect of potential changes to the Scheme of Delegations to Officers and the Project Procedure, requesting temporary delegations to Chief Officers to make decisions on certain matters without recourse to Committees. Of the 14, following review by the Town Clerk and Director of Human Resources, 3 were recommended for rejection, while a further 7 were recommended for approval subject to Member involvement (e.g. delegated authority arrangements, rather than solely to officers). 4 were recommended for approval without amendment.
11. These recommendations are set out in full in the attached appendix (Appendix 2), together with the rationale for their initial proposal and the subsequent rationale for their recommended acceptance, amendment, or rejection.
12. The views of the Policy & Resources Committee were sought at an informal meeting on 16 April 2020, after which the proposals were ratified under urgency procedures in accordance with Standing Order No. 41(a) and, thereafter, submitted and approved by the Court in accordance with Standing Order No.19. The amendments were made on a time-limited basis, expiring 31 October 2020.

**(D) COVID-19 Contingency Fund**

13. In order to manage through the challenging period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the various unanticipated issues arising therefrom, it was recommended that a COVID-19 Contingency Fund be established to support those business continuity arrangements required to enable the City Corporation to continue its activities as best as it could during this period.
14. In December 2018, the Court had agreed the establishment of a £2m Brexit Contingency Fund, to support the City Corporation's strategic aims during the Brexit period, as well as to manage the risks to service delivery. Given the

ongoing delays to the delivery of Brexit, the majority of funds remained unspent to-date, with no foreseeable major draw-down required in this area in the coming period. It was, therefore, proposed that a portion of the funds be reallocated to meet the COVID requirements, and that £1.5m be transferred from the Brexit Contingency Fund to the COVID-19 Contingency Fund, to support contingency arrangements required during this time.

15. In view of the ongoing crisis and the need for access to contingency funds as soon as possible, so as to facilitate an expeditious response to emerging issues and to take mitigating actions proactively, the approval of the Court was sought and obtained in accordance with Standing Order No.19 to reallocate £1.5m from the Brexit Contingency Fund to the COVID-19 Contingency Fund.

### **Appendices**

- **Appendix 1:** Resolution of the Court concerning the April postponement
- **Appendix 2:** Proposed Amendments to the Scheme of Delegations and Project Procedure

All of which we submit to the judgment of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 17<sup>th</sup> day of April 2020.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

**Deputy Catherine McGuinness**  
Chair, Policy and Resources Committee