

Report – Policy & Resources Committee

Report of Urgent Action Taken: 22 July 2021 meeting of the Court of Common Council – physical / formal meeting arrangements

To be presented on Thursday, 22nd July 2021

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

SUMMARY OF ACTION TAKEN

1. In April 2021, the Court of Common Council resolved that all of its local and police authority meetings should be conducted on an informal basis for the coming period, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 related restrictions. This decision was taken bearing in mind the prohibitions on remote / virtual participation in formal meetings under relevant legislation and the impracticalities of holding formal meetings (particularly of the Court itself, given its size), with the Court also resolving to allow for virtual participation in non-local or police authority business more generally.
2. On 5 July 2021, HM Government announced that all Covid-related work from home guidance and social distancing restrictions were expected to come to an end as of 19 July 2021, meaning that there was the possibility of holding a formal meeting of the Court of Common Council on 22 July 2021 (the next scheduled meeting of the Court), should Members be so minded. The Government subsequently confirmed this lifting of restrictions on 12 July 2021.
3. The Policy and Resources Committee, therefore, at its meeting on 8 July 2021, discussed this matter. A range of views were expressed, with some articulating concerns that a move to a physical meeting felt premature given current rates of infection and the fact that many Members had not yet been fully vaccinated; similarly, some felt that it would not be desirable to change arrangements around the virtual format at relatively short notice, given various Members' existing commitments. However, the majority of the Committee was of the view that, given the Government's position was now clear in that people should resume activity without restrictions, it was incumbent on the City Corporation to show leadership in this regard, helping to give confidence to businesses and workers returning to the City. The strongly held desire of many Members for a formal, physical meeting after such a long time, expressed for some considerable period, was also noted.
4. Ultimately, it was agreed that the Court of Common Council should therefore proceed on a physical basis for its 22 July 2021 meeting, but that committees and sub-committees should continue to operate on an informal basis, thereby

facilitating virtual / remote participation for those meetings. The Covid-related situation could then be monitored over the summer recess, with a view to taking a longer-term decision on this matter in September.

5. To facilitate this, a Court decision under urgency was required. The Chief Commoner subsequently wrote to all Members advising of the position and affording them the opportunity to express any concerns they might have, to inform any decision under urgency. A minority of Members responded expressing similar concerns to those expressed by the Policy and Resources Committee in reaching its decision, namely, the increase in Covid cases and the lack of full vaccination, or prior commitments which rendered physical attendance impractical for some. A number of Members also suggested that the meeting should proceed on a hybrid basis, to allow people to participate as they wished; however, this would have the effect of meaning that the Court would not legally be able to meet on a formal basis (as there had been no change to the rules around virtual contributions and so no remote participation in the meeting would be possible – only physical attendance would enable Members to speak and vote). There were also a number of logistical concerns to bear in mind.
6. It was therefore recommended, under urgency, that the Court meeting in July (and that meeting only, for the time being) proceed on a physical basis, as a formal meeting. It would be live streamed on YouTube for the benefit of the public, with physical public attendance limited to allow for the Court layout to be altered. The layout will be such that there would be greater space between Members' seats, as well as for things such as divisions, to help alleviate any concerns around proximity (notwithstanding the fact that no social distancing requirements will remain in force by this date).
7. A decision on this matter had to be taken by 14 July 2021 to allow for the Court Summons to be published in accordance with statutory requirements. The approval of the Court was, therefore, sought and obtained in respect of the following:
 - That the Court of Common meeting in July 2021 (and that meeting only, for the time being) proceed on a physical basis, as a formal meeting, and be live-streamed on YouTube for the benefit of the public, with consideration also given to altering the layout of the Great Hall to enable a greater degree of space between seats.
 - That, for the time being, committees and sub-committees with local or police authority functions continue to operate on an informal basis in order to facilitate virtual / remote participation for those meetings.
 - That the impact of the easing of the restrictions be monitored over the summer recess, with a view to bringing the matter back to the Policy Committee to review and make a longer-term recommendation to the Court on the matter in September 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

8. We **recommend** that the actions taken under urgency procedures be noted.

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

DATED this 14th day of July 2021.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Catherine McGuinness
Chair, Policy & Resources Committee