



**NOTES of  
COVID-19 INTERIM MEASURES GROUP  
29 APRIL 2020**

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**PRESENT**

Councillors: R G Boyce MBE, Chairman of the Council  
A S Fluker, Leader of the Council  
M S Heard, Leader of the Opposition

Directors: Mr Paul Dodson, Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance  
Mr Richard Holmes, Director of Service Delivery  
Mrs Tina Stankley, Interim Director of Resources

**1. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HEYBRIDGE BASIN PARISH COUNCIL**

The Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance presented the report which recommended action to address governance matters for Heybridge Parish Council, in light of new virtual meeting legislation.

Councillors A S Fluker, Leader of the Council, R G Boyce, Chairman of the Council and M S Heard, Leader of the Opposition supported the recommendations as set out in the report.

It was noted that Maldon District Council would be supporting the new Parish Clerk as much as possible.

The Director of Service Delivery **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the following three members be appointed in the absence of an election in Heybridge Basin Parish to be Parish Councillors;
  - District Councillor Michael Edwards
  - District Councillor Bryan Harker
  - Former Parish Councillor Jenny Sjollema
- (ii) support be provided for the convening of a virtual meeting as soon as possible with the purpose of choosing a Chairman, appointing a temporary Parish Clerk and delegating decision-making to that Clerk.

**2. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

The Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance presented the report seeking an agreed approach for governance arrangements for the Council. Within the report were

three options for consideration along with the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The Director referred to discussions that had taken place with Members regarding these options.

Councillor M S Heard, Leader of the Opposition, highlighted how the Independent Group had been holding regular meetings via Microsoft Teams. They had discussed the options set out in the report in depth and at this point Councillor Heard thanked the Directors for the good work that they had done. It was noted that option three was the option supported by the Independent Group.

Councillor A S Fluker, Leader of the Council advised that the general feeling amongst Members was to move to virtual meetings as soon as possible and he referred to discussions he had with the Monitoring Officer who reported that there was still a lot of work to be done around procedure rules. The Leader highlighted the importance of retaining the COVID-19 Interim Measures Group (COVID-19 Group) until virtual meetings were operational to enable the Council to respond quickly to any urgent matters that may arise. These views were echoed by Councillor R G Boyce, Chairman of the Council.

Councillor Fluker suggested that the Council could at its first virtual meeting consider the future of the COVID-19 Group.

Councillor Heard proposed that a one-hour meeting be arranged with all Members as a training, non-public meeting and providing opportunity for each Member to have two minutes to raise any questions relating to virtual meetings that they may have. He felt this would assist in getting Members up to speed with the virtual meeting requirements. In response, Councillor Fluker advised that prior to this it was necessary for the Council to agree the software it was going to run to facilitate the meetings. He highlighted how the Council had to be mindful when moving to facilitate virtual meetings that connectivity, hardware and training were considered.

The Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance reported that a project group (of Officers) had been set up and was working to an agreed project plan in respect of virtual meetings. This work included identifying software solutions, hardware requirements etc.

In response to a question, Members were advised that the Monitoring Officer would present new procedure rules relating to the delivery of virtual meetings to the COVID-19 Group for consideration.

The Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance advised that having listened to the comments of Members, he had identified a further option (option four) for consideration. He outlined option four as follows:

- To reinstate full Council and District Planning Committee as soon as possible, ideally by end of May to ensure Members can undertake the urgent business of Council (including urgent issues that would have gone to Committee);
- Monthly Council meetings;
- A further paper will be brought forward to introduce the protocols for the meetings and where there will be exceptions to the normal constitution;
- The current interim measures will continue to run subject to review;

- An all member virtual briefing will be arranged for mid-May to update Members.

There was a brief discussion at this point regarding the different software options which could be used for virtual meetings and Councillor Fluker advised that IT along with the Monitoring Officer were looking at the best option for the Council and once this had been confirmed an all Members test meeting could be arranged. Protocols were currently being worked on by Officers and would be brought back to the COVID-19 Group for consideration.

It was confirmed that if option four was agreed the COVID-19 Group would continue subject to a review by the Council. Councillor Fluker highlighted how once virtual meetings were operational the Council could then undertake and review and decide if other Committees would be reinstated as virtual meetings.

The Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance advised that because of the resources required for virtual meetings these would be held during the day. There was a brief discussion regarding this and Councillor Heard proposed that virtual meetings be held during the day and within normal office hours. Councillor Fluker supported this based on staff welfare at this time, operational issues etc. The Director confirmed that the proposed timing of virtual meetings would be set out in the protocols.

Councillor Fluker raised concern regarding Area Planning Committees as he had received some communications from Members regarding reinstatement of these meetings. Various options for consideration of Area Planning Committee business was discussed. It was agreed that the District Planning Committee virtual meetings would also consider any Area Planning Committee business and that protocols would be established to confirm this.

Councillor Fluker referred to option four as suggested by the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance. He supported this option but suggested an amendment i.e. to include Area Planning Committees business being dealt with by virtual meetings of the District Planning Committee. Following a further discussion it was agreed that option four be further amended referring to the Member meeting being virtual, virtual monthly meetings of both the Council and District Planning Committee and as an interim measure District Planning Committee considering Area Planning Committee business. All three Members supported option four with the proposed amendments.

Having taken all discussions into account the Director of Service Delivery and Interim Director of Resources **RESOLVED** that

- (i) the following be agreed as the best option suited to the Governance of the Maldon District Council during the COVID-19 Health Emergency:
  - that virtual daytime (during office hours) meetings of the Council and the District Planning Committee be reinstated as soon as possible, ideally by the end of May2020, to ensure that Members can undertake the urgent business of the Council (including any urgent issues that would have been considered by Committees);
  - that the Council meets virtually on a monthly basis;

- that the District Planning Committee meets virtually on a monthly basis and as an interim measure will include consideration of any planning applications due for consideration by Area Planning Committees;
  - that the COVID-19 Interim Measures Group will continue to operate and be reviewed at the first virtual meeting of the Council;
  - that an all Member virtual briefing will be arranged for mid-May 2020 to update Members.
- (ii) a further report be brought to the COVID-19 Interim Measures Group to introduce the protocols for the above meetings and where there would be exceptions to the Council's Constitution;

The meeting closed at 12.11 pm.

PAUL DODSON  
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE  
AND GOVERNANCE