

RECOMMENDATION FROM CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP – THE USE OF AUDIO, VIDEO OR WEB CONFERENCING FOR NON-STATUTORY MEETINGS

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group agreed to support the use of audio, video or web conferencing as a preferred and standard meeting method in order to avoid unnecessary travel to meetings where possible and reduce associated carbon emissions.

It is noted that emergency government legislation concerning remote meetings will not be extended for statutory meetings. However, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability and the Chairman of the Climate Change Working Group propose that future meetings of the Working Group, and other non-statutory meetings, should continue where practical, on a remote basis. This would have clear benefits for the Council's pledge to reduce carbon emissions as stated in its climate and ecological emergency declaration and associated action plan. This is proposed whilst acknowledging that face-to-face and/or hybrid meetings are sometimes necessary and that technology requirements to enable the latter will be reviewed to maximise their effectiveness.

This proposal is recommended for consideration by the Executive under the delegated authority given to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability and the Chairman of the Climate Change Working Group by that Working Group. The proposal will be covered by the Climate Change Working Group at its meeting on 10 June 2021.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

non--statutory meetings, should continue where practical, on a remote basis via audio, video or web-conferencing in line with the Council's pledge to reduce carbon emissions as stated in its climate and ecological emergency declaration and associated action plan.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: The Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan includes an action that seeks to avoid unnecessary travel to meetings where possible. The pandemic saw audio, video and web conferencing as a practical and successful way to conduct remote meetings. The Climate Change Working Group proposes that this should continue for non-statutory meetings.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Recommendation from Climate Change Working Group – The Use of Audio, Video or Web Conferencing for Non-Statutory Meetings

Background Papers: None.

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Recommendation from Climate Change Working Group – The Use of Audio, Video or Web Conferencing for Non-Statutory Meetings

1.0 Introduction and background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group agreed to support the use of audio, video or web conferencing as a preferred and standard meeting method in order to reduce and avoid unnecessary travel to meetings where possible and reduce associated carbon emissions.
- 1.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic the government introduced the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 to enable all local authority meetings before 7 May 2021 to be held remotely. The regulations were brought in specifically to help local authorities deal with the challenges of holding in-person meetings during the coronavirus pandemic. On 25 March 2021, the government confirmed that the emergency legislation will not be extended and that statutory meetings should proceed face-to-face.
- 1.3 Remote meetings bring benefits of flexibility and importantly in terms of reduced travel and associated carbon savings. In this way, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability and the Chairman of the Climate Change Working Group propose that future meetings of the Working Group, and other non-statutory meetings, should continue where practical, on a remote basis.
- 1.4 The Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan includes an action that seeks to avoid unnecessary travel to meetings where possible. Remote meetings by means of audio, video or web conferencing fit with the need to reduce carbon emissions associated with the corporate estate, including business related travel.
- 1.5 This is however proposed whilst acknowledging that face-to-face and/or hybrid meetings are sometimes necessary and that technology requirements to enable the latter are currently being developed at the Civic Offices to support a future flexible and hybrid working model for the Council.
- 1.6 This proposal is recommended for consideration by the Executive under the delegated authority given to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability and the Chairman of the Climate Change Working Group by that Working Group. The proposal will be covered by the Climate Change Working Group at its meeting on 10 June 2021. If any further comments arise from that discussion, a verbal update will be provided to the Executive.

2.0 Conclusions

- 2.1 The pandemic saw audio, video and web conferencing as a practical and successful way to conduct remote meetings. The use of technology in this way brings with it the opportunity to avoid unnecessary travel to meetings which is a stated action within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. Where practical, the Climate Change Working Group proposes that this should continue for non-statutory meetings.
- 2.2 The Council is positively embracing and planning for greater flexible and remote working in order to gain both operational efficiencies and to reduce travel demands in support of the climate emergency action plan. This includes the provision of online meeting and collaboration platforms and the roll out of Office 365.

3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 The use of technology, where practical, to avoid unnecessary travel to meetings by councillors, staff and representatives of the Council's partner organisations, will support delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives of effective use of resources and improving the Borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure whilst upholding the digital first principle.

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4.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 4.1 The financial implications for Office 365 are within the current ICT investment programme.
- 4.2 There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.3 There are no equalities implications associated with this report.
- 4.4 There are no additional human resource or training and development implications.

Legal

- 4.5 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Sustainability

- 4.6 The use of audio, video and web conferencing avoids unnecessary travel to meetings and associated carbon emissions which is a stated action within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

5.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 The Climate Change Working Group was consulted on this proposal at its meetings on 18 March 2021 and will be consulted again on 10 June 2021.

REPORT ENDS