

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	8 APRIL 2021	REPORT NO:	CFO/015/21
PRESENTING OFFICER	ACTING MONITORING OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	RIA GROVES	REPORT AUTHOR:	RIA GROVES
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	REMOTE AUTHORITY MEETINGS		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: MHCLG LETTER APPENDIX B: AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS APPENDIX C: PROCEDURE FOR ATTENDANCE AND RECORDING OF MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members as to the future of remote Authority meetings and request that the amendments made to standing orders and procedural rules for remote meetings are withdrawn Members on the condition the regulations do expire on 7th May 2021.

Recommendation

2. That Members;
 - a. Note the legislation to hold Authority meetings remotely has not been extended,
 - b. Instruct the Acting Monitor to review the options available to the Authority for face to face meetings to recommence that will be compliant with government guidance, and
 - c. Approve the removal of the amendments to the standing orders and procedural rules contained within Appendix B from the constitution subject to the Remote Meetings Regulations expiring on the 7th May 2021
 - d. Approve the changes to the constitution as detailed in paragraph 8

Introduction and Background

3. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ('Remote Meetings Regulations') were introduced by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the appropriate levels of governance could continue by enabling all local authority meetings before 7 May 2021 to be held remotely.

4. The Remote Meetings Regulations stipulated that remote access for members of the public and press was also required in order to meet the condition for local authority meetings to be accessible to the public.
5. It has now been confirmed that the Remote Meetings Regulations will not be extended beyond the 7th May 2021 with the government also publishing updated guidance on the safe use of local authority buildings following confirmation that emergency legislation regarding virtual meetings will not be extended. A letter was published on the future of remote local authority meetings by MHCLG on the 25th March 2021 as contained within Appendix A.
6. The Acting Monitoring Officer is reviewing the implications of this decision in anticipation that future Authority meetings will need to be held face to face alongside the guidance to ensure the location is safe and covid compliant for those attending. The Acting Monitoring Officer will continue to liaise and discuss this issue with Members prior to the next meeting.
7. The impact of the Remote Meetings Regulations automatically overrode any existing Procedure Rules or Standing Orders within the Authority's constitution or any other governing rules in place and as a result and as considered good practice an amendment to standing orders and procedure rules was adopted within the constitution to reflect this as contained within Appendix B. It is proposed to Members that this amendment is therefore removed from the constitution on the condition that the Authority committee meetings can no longer be conducted remotely and the Remote Meeting Regulations cease on the 7th May 2021
8. It is also proposed to Members that the constitution is amended to include the possibility of attendance by the public and press at meetings of the Authority may continue remotely as detailed in Appendix C. It is important that access to meetings by the press and public continues however allowing for the possibility of access to be remote ensures the Authority can remain compliant with the Covid19 guidelines.
9. Members are asked to note that the decision not to extend the legislation for the use of virtual meetings by Local Authorities has been challenged through the legal process which is ongoing. The Acting Monitoring Officers will update Members on the outcome of such a challenge and report back to Members on any significant impact for the Authority and how meetings can be conducted.

Equality and Diversity Implications

10. As meetings may no longer be remote every effort will be made to ensure that meetings of the Authority and its Committees continue to remain accessible as possible to both the public and Members.

Staff Implications

11. The reintroduction of face to face meetings in line with published guidelines will impact on staff resources whilst staff liaise with one another and possibly seek other resources in preparing for the meetings, however it is anticipated that the demands on staff will return to normal once the appropriate arrangements have been put in place.

Legal Implications

12. The legal implications are contained within this report.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

13. Any costs associated with the reintroduction of face to face Authority meetings, can be contained within existing budgets.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

14. The physical location to hold an Authority meeting after the expiry of the Remote Meetings Regulations will be done in a manner that adheres to the government guidance and COVID-19 compliant.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

15. The reintroduction of face to face meetings ensures that the decisions and actions of the Authority continue to remain accountable, transparent and that the democratic governance is not been impacted in order to ensure the delivery of the Authority's Mission of "Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters".

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/022/20 Amendments to Standing Orders- Remote Meetings

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

MHCLG Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government