

Full Council

Date:	27 April 2021
Title:	Return to Physical Meetings
Contact Officer:	Cassie Pinnells, Acting Town Clerk

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider options and agree arrangements for the return to physical meetings and beyond 7 May 2021.

Background

2. The Government announced on 25 March 2021 that legislation which permits virtual council meetings will not be extended beyond 7 May 2021. A legal challenge to the wording of the Local Government Act 1972 was heard by the High Court on 21 April 2021. At the time of writing this report, that decision has not been announced. Officers are currently investigating venues that can accommodate all Council members if virtual meetings cannot continue.
3. NALC's position remains that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force.

Options

4. Continue to meet virtually; technically not permitted but this route is being suggested by some other Councils. Although the risk of legal challenge is low, decisions could be challenged in a court as ultra-vires.
 - a) Working Groups with terms of reference and report back to a committee permitting them to use the virtual facility if deemed appropriate.
5. Use of Scheme of Delegations to the Clerk. Operationally, matters would be dealt with at a "virtual" Full Council and Committee which would recommend decisions to the Clerk who would enact those recommendations under the scheme of delegations until the Councillors decided that a return to face to face meetings is safe.
 - a) It should be noted that a face-to-face Annual Council meeting held on 18 May would still need to take place as the following items cannot be delegated: Following the decision of Mayor Elect and Deputy Mayor Elect in April, the formal acknowledgement of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, appointment to committees, membership to working groups and outside organisations, adoption of the power of General Competence.
6. Face to Face meetings resume after 7 May 2021 [NALC's](#) advice is there will still be a risk to attendees of COVID-19 exposure. Councils should undertake a risk assessment considering what the Council can do to reduce the risk to councillors, officers and public.
 - a) The Town Hall Upper Chamber cannot safely accommodate all 16 members, Officers, and members of the public whilst maintaining social distancing. The next scheduled meeting is the Annual Meeting of the Council on Tuesday 18 May 2021. The Acting Town Clerk has investigated other venues of St Mary's Church and the Spread Eagle to accommodate this meeting. The preference

would be for the Spread Eagle as the room will be set up by their staff. However, there are no PA systems to aid the meeting which may cause an issue and financial implication.

- b) Calculations have taken place that committee meetings could take place in the Upper Chamber subject to mitigations identified within the risk assessment being followed and reviewed.

Risk Assessment

- 7. An appendix face to face risk assessment is attached to this report.

Resource Appraisal

- 8. There are no financial implications for a virtual meeting.
- 9. There will be a financial implication for an 'in-person' Full Council meeting as the Town Hall cannot accommodate all Officers, Councillors and Public whilst adhering to Covid-19 guidelines. Room hire costs are estimated for a 2.5-hour meeting at £200 this would include setup or a donation to St Mary's Church staff would be required to setup and take down.

Legal Powers

- Local Government Act 1972 sch 12 para 7 (1), 14(1) and (3)
- Localism Act 2011 s1
- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Recommendation:

- i) ***That the Council discusses the options and agree a way forward***