

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**MEETINGS AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the special Council meeting held on 30 June 2020 a report was tabled which reviewed the continued role of the Business Continuity Committee (BCC), taking account of the most recent guidance/routemap from the Scottish Government.
- 1.2 The Council:-
- i. Agreed that all Area Committees and Strategic Committees (with the exception of the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee scheduled for August / September will resume on a virtual basis, with a restricted number of agenda items.
 - ii. Agreed that the BCC will, in the meantime, continue its role, exercising all delegated functions from the Council and the Policy and Resources Committee.
 - iii. Agreed that a further review of the operation of the BCC and committees will be undertaken and reported to the Council meeting scheduled for 24 September 2020.
 - iv. Noted the log of decisions that have been taken in consultation with the Leadership Group as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
 - v. Agreed to approve the non-attendance of any member at any meeting of the authority for the period up to and including the Council meeting scheduled for 24 September 2020.
- 1.3 As per the decision at the Council on 30th June 2020 a further review of the continuing role of the BCC has now been undertaken and it is recommended that Members:-
- i. Agree that meetings of the BCC are suspended meantime;
 - ii. Agree that the Policy and Resources Committee resumes from the scheduled meeting on 15th October 2020;
 - iii. Agree that all committee meetings will continue on a virtual basis; and
 - iv. Agree that a further review of the operation of committees will be undertaken and reported to Council in April 2021.

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2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Covid-19 has required an urgent, multi-agency response at national and local government level. Argyll and Bute Council has been working in partnership with community planning partners and other agencies to respond to the pandemic. In order to provide capacity and focus in dealing with this response, and to adhere to advice and guidance from the UK and Scottish Governments, it has delegated emergency powers to ensure appropriate focus and oversight of decisions.
- 2.2 The initial urgency, degree of change, and intensity demanded by Covid-19 has now eased to an extent, however work is still ongoing to respond to the numerous challenges it brings.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to:-

- 3.1 Agree that meetings of the BCC are suspended meantime;
- 3.2 Agree that the Policy and Resources Committee resumes from the scheduled meeting on 15th October 2020;
- 3.3 Agree that all committee meetings will continue on a virtual basis; and
- 3.4 Agree that a further review of the operation of committees will be undertaken and reported to Council in April 2021.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 At the special Council meeting on 31 March 2020 a decision was taken to put a hold on scheduled meetings and constitute a temporary committee, known as BCC, to exercise all of the powers of the council for a finite period of time.
- 4.2 Subsequently, a review of the arrangements agreed in March 2020 were undertaken and a report tabled at Council in June 2020, where it was agreed that all Area Committees and Strategic Committees (with the exception of the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee scheduled for August / September would resume on a virtual basis. It was also agreed that the BCC would, in the meantime, continue its role, exercising all delegated functions from the Council and the Policy and Resources Committee.
- 4.3 The purpose of this report is to undertake a further review in respect of the continued role of the BCC, and associated committee matters.

- 4.4 The circumstances surrounding coronavirus are ever changing, with advice and guidance from the Scottish and UK Governments and Public Health Scotland being updated daily. The situation is being continually reviewed by Officers in order to inform the options available in terms of returning to a normal committee schedule.
- 4.5 This report has been prepared having regard to the Scottish Government Covid-19 Routemap that was published on 21 May 2020. Scotland are currently in Phase 3 of the routemap, which advises:-
- Working from home and working flexibly remains the default position for those who can
 - Physical distancing requirements in place
 - Frequent handwashing and hygiene measures for all
 - Cough etiquette is maintained
 - Indicative dates – based on the First Minister’s update on 10th September 2020
 - Further review on 1st October prior to taking a decision on whether non-essential offices can re-open following implementation of relevant guidance, including on physical distancing.
 - 5th October (depending on outcome of review on 1st October) – live events (indoors) with physical distancing and restricted numbers, following guidance
- 4.6 Taking account of the latest guidance it is recommended that, due to there still being a number of restrictions in place, all committee meetings continue on a virtual basis. It is anticipated that a further relaxation of public/mass gatherings won’t occur until Phase 4 of the routemap, and at this time there is no clear indication of a timescale for moving into the next phase. The First Minister at her briefing on 10th September 2020 advised that the risk levels are too high at present to consider re-opening non-essential offices and that working from home should remain the default position.
- 4.7 On the basis that there has been a shift in focus across the Council towards recovery and “business as usual”, it is also proposed that meetings of the BCC are suspended meantime, with the ability for BCC meetings to be called in future should the need arise, with the Council and the Policy and Resources Committee resuming their normal committee schedule in September and October respectively. In the event of a second wave of the virus or a lockdown situation, consideration can be given to re-convening the role of the BCC. Meantime, officers are looking at potential arrangements to embed virtual meetings in the Council Constitution, ensuring secure public access, and will report back to Members on this. Factors being considered include the use of video during meetings for participants and wider public access to observe Council meetings in real time, which may include options for broadcasting.
- 4.8 The Council’s constitution gives specific delegations to the Chief Executive. Section 3 Part C paragraph 3(A)(5) gives the Chief Executive ‘power in an emergency situation to instruct executive action on any matter after consultation with the Leader or, in his/her absence, Depute Leader of the Council. This

provides a basis for any urgent decisions which require to be made in response to Covid-19.

- 4.9 On 31 March 2020 the Council agreed that for the life of the Covid-19 crisis the consultation by the Chief Executive will be with the Leader, Depute Leader, and Leader of the SNP Group where available and this arrangement will continue meantime.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 A further review of the temporary arrangements for conducting Council business during the Covid-19 pandemic has been undertaken by Officers. Members are asked to agree that the BCC is suspended meantime, and that the Policy and Resources Committee resumes from 15th October 2020, with all committee meetings continuing on a virtual basis until a further review is carried out and reported to the next Council meeting on 26th November 2020.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – Emergency/urgency provisions put in place, to exist for duration of COVID-19 crisis only.
- 6.2 Financial – Any costs arising are being recorded in accordance with Scottish Government and/or COSLA guidance in the expectation that net additional costs will be reimbursed.
- 6.3 Legal – Amendment of the powers delegated to Officers and Standing Orders agreed at Council meeting on 30th March 2020 in accordance with Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.
- 6.4 HR – none
- 6.5 Equalities/Fairer Scotland Duty – It is not anticipated that any of the recommendations in this report will have a potential negative impact on any particular group or discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or religion and belief.
- 6.6 Socio-economic Duty – none
- 6.7 Risk – Addresses risk associated with ensuring business continuity and resilience, in a manner that creates least risk to public health.
- 6.8 Islands – none
- 6.9 Customer Services – supports arrangements for amending decision making framework to support critical customer services.

Douglas Hendry

Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support

10th September 2020

Policy Lead – Councillor Rory Colville

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