

PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

17 November 2020

Present:-

Councillors S Barker (Chair), J Hart, S Hughes, S Aves, F Biederman,
A Connett, R Hannaford, N Way and C Wright

* **94** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020 be signed as a correct record.

* **95** **Items requiring urgent attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* **96** **Council Meetings (1 January 2021 to 7 May 2021)**

The Committee noted the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, which were in place until 7 May 2021.

The Committee also noted that the Council had previously agreed to utilise the regulations to run remote meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic until the end of the year (December).

In view of the latest Government guidance and the advice received from the Director of Public Health, Group Leaders supported the proposal to continue to operate Committee meetings via remote means.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the Council continue to conduct remote meetings until the expiry of the regulations, on the 7 May 2021.

97 **Notice Of Motion - Remote Meetings and the Future**

The Committee noted that at the Council meeting on 23 July, Councillor Biederman had submitted a Notice of Motion relating to the Council's future working practices relating to Member meetings.

'That Devon County Council make a commitment to holding more virtual meetings, briefings and task groups post Covid-19. They have clearly been very successful, have made a huge saving to the Council in budgetary terms and they also help in the Council's climate emergency aims, by reducing our carbon footprint. Council therefore asks the

Procedures Committee to consider a Report on meetings in the future and what Committees, briefings and task groups could meet virtually.

The Committee then considered the Report of the County Solicitor (CSO/20/18), responding to the Motion outlining the current process, legislation, the national debates, remote meetings and financial impacts.

The Report highlighted that the issue of remote meetings had been discussed in the past, however, prior to the 4th April 2020, there had been no legal provision to allow Councillors to attend meetings remotely. The Legislation outlined that in order to vote on decisions or recommendations a Member must physically be present at the meeting. Of course, the temporary Regulations in the form of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 permitted remote attendance for the first time, as long as certain conditions were satisfied, for example, being able to hear and be heard.

The Report also highlighted the Council's Current ICT Strategy and that work was underway to finalise the new Digital & Technology Strategy which took the Council into 2024. Whilst it covered a number of themes reflecting the changing working patterns of many staff, it also looked to understand and support the new meeting experience and refresh "technology enabled meeting rooms".

The Report outlined the representations that had been made at a national level, with the Association of Democratic Services Officers having written to the Local Government Association with regard to the extension for remote meetings more generally beyond May 2021. A response to the letter was awaited.

Whilst the outcome of the legislative changes was awaited, this would only apply to the Council's Committees formally constituted under the Local Government Act, but the Report outlined a number of other meetings that could be conducted remotely in the future and the current work on induction sessions to consider other formats such as webinars, so people could view content in their own time, notwithstanding this would not be appropriate for all induction sessions.

Whilst the most important aspect of this remote meeting conversation was open and transparent democratic processes, there could be considerable budgetary saving and the Report gave detail of the Members expenditure from April – October 2020 and the saving of £39,384 when compared to 2019/20.

It was also noted that a number of equality and environmental impacts could also be identified, for example, to allow more flexibility in Local Government may increase the attractiveness of the role to a wider group of people.

With the Council's sign up to the climate emergency to become carbon neutral by 2030, to permit remote attendances contributed significantly to reductions in both journeys and carbon emissions.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Biederman, **SECONDED** by Councillor Barker and **RESOLVED**

That Council be asked to;

- (a) note the update Report around the current legislation, the Council's Virtual Meetings and Audio-Visual capabilities and Member meetings which permit remote attendance;
- (b) welcome more flexibility in Local Government in the future which could pave the way for more people standing for Election and a more diverse Council of the future;
- (c) in light of (b) and the benefits achieved over the last few months, write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government requesting a permanent change to the Legislation to support more flexible working practices in the future for Local Democracy.
- (d) ask officers to consider the most effective medium for holding a meeting in the future, supporting and encouraging remote meetings when it is appropriate to do so;
- (e) support those Members who wish to attend future meetings remotely, with relevant training and provision of necessary equipment; and
- (f) ask Procedures, at the appropriate time, to undertake a further review of any legislative changes surrounding remote meetings and make any necessary changes to the Constitution and working practices.

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Devon Day and Patron Saints

The Committee note that at the Procedures Committee on the 15th September 2020, the Leader had asked that the Committee undertake a piece of research to review how the current date of the 4th June was chosen for Devon Day, the link to St Petroc's Day and also St Boniface. The Committee had **RESOLVED** that the issue be investigated and a Report brought back to the Committee in due course.

The Report of the County Solicitor highlighted that whilst the Roman Catholic Church had an elaborate and formal, canonization process, the process in the Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Catholic Churches was much less formal. However, the Church of England had no mechanism for canonising saints. Patron saints of churches had generally been chosen due to some connection of that saint to that place.

In relation to Saint Petroc and the link to Devon Day (4 June) it was noted that county days were relatively recent observances, formed to celebrate the cultural heritage of a particular county. Devon Day was linked with St Petroc; one of the three Patron Saints of Cornwall; along with St Piran (5th March) and St Michael

(8th May). The report outlined the history of St Petroc including his links with Dumnonia, which included Kernow (Cornwall), and parts of Dewnans (Devon), Somerset and Dorset and his work in founding a number of churches and monasteries across the south-west, with several important clusters around Barnstaple and the Devon villages of Petrockstowe and Newton St Petroc. Petroc was also strongly associated with Exeter.

The idea for Devon Day began in 2014 to have an official date to celebrate Devon and promote the best of Devon. The previously constituted Devon Flag Group had suggested several significant county dates when the flag might be raised, agreed the Feast Day of Saint Petroc's and this was the date that had been commemorated since. Since becoming an official day in 2016, Devon Day attracts a massive online following. In 2017, more than 2.4million Twitter followers saw #DevonDay and in 2018, the subject was trending on Twitter nationally for more than eight hours.

The Report then went on to highlight the work and status of St Boniface, born in Crediton around 675AD and was a leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire. Boniface believed that church and state should work together and was dedicated to a peaceful co-existence. Saint Boniface's feast day was celebrated on 5 June and a statue stood in the grounds of Mainz Cathedral. The UK National Shrine to St Boniface was at the Catholic church in Crediton as well as an aisle dedicated to him at Crediton Parish Church.

The idea of St. Boniface as a Patron Saint of Devon originated with The Boniface Link Association. The Council had previously considered a Notice of Motion and it had been agreed that the Council supported the work of the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon. In 2019, the Bishop of Exeter introduced a new initiative in the name of St Boniface in the form of 'the Company of St Boniface' which honoured people who had made a substantial contribution to the life of the church in Devon.

The Report then outlined the position in terms of the designation of a Patron Saint concluding that there was no formal system. The Diocese of Exeter advised they were proud to have many outstanding Christians representing Devon and notwithstanding enthusiasm for wanting St Boniface to be more widely recognised, there was no desire to side-line St Petroc or any of the other saints associated with Devon.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had published guidance in July 2019 on celebrating the historic counties of England which included a list of all the county days. The guidance highlighted that local approaches must be locally led.

The Council recognised the importance of celebrating the history and traditions of the County through Devon Day and the mechanism by which St Boniface was honoured in the church calendar on 5th June. The Council also supported

the work of the Boniface Link Association but recognised the popularity and strong branding of the 4 June as Devon Day, as evidenced on social media.

Members discussed the benefits of Devon Day in celebrating the County of Devon and any opportunities for promotion and helping economic recovery in the County that could be afforded by supporting the 'Made in Devon' campaign alongside Devon Day.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Way and **SECONDED** by Councillor Connett that the recommendation in the Report (shown in black) be moved and amended by the addition of the words shown in in red.

‘that the Committee notes the **importance and** mechanism by which St Boniface is honoured in the national church calendar on 5th June and the Council's ongoing support for the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon,

The amendment was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

It was then **MOVED** by Councillor Connett and **SECONDED** by Councillor Hannaford that the Motion be amended by the addition of (a) in red below;

(a) that the County Council consider celebrating and utilising Devon Day as a 'Made in Devon Day for the 2021 year.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that;

(a) the County Council consider celebrating and utilising Devon Day as a 'Made in Devon Day for the 2021 year; and

(b) the Committee note the importance and mechanism by which St Boniface is honoured in the national church calendar on 5th June and the Council's ongoing support for the Boniface Link Association in working towards the adoption of St Boniface as the patron saint of Devon.

NOTES:

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 11.19 am