

Council to operate with committee of 17 councillors for time being

The Leadership Panel met on Thursday to decide a way forward for the council to operate, and to be seen to operate.

Until now the council has been in recess which was extended to 27 April. Decisions have been made by senior councillors and the Chief Executive under delegated powers. So it was agreed that it is necessary to agree a new way of working to last through to the autumn.

The various members met over Skype, and, as you could not see everyone at the same time, it was difficult to know exactly who was on the call. But the Chief Executive, Director of Place, the Director of Communities and Families and Director of Resources were in attendance with the Council Leader, Deputy Leader and other political group leaders.

It was agreed that the council will reinstate its Policy and Sustainability Committee (P & S) from 1 May with 17 members who will run all council business.

The members of the Panel were conscious that other councils across Scotland were looking to them to set their way of working, saying it could form a model for some other local authorities.

From June, the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee will also be reinstated with an oversight function. The planning committee (Development Management sub committee) will meet

only to consider major applications. At present, until the council can work out which virtual meeting system to use, there will be no meetings of all 62 councillors. (There is a vacancy in Craighentinny/Duddingston and the by-election has been postponed meantime.

All council directors will retain their delegated powers.

Ahead of the decision to adopt the council's recommendation, the Chief Executive, Andrew Kerr, explained that the council was having difficulty in providing front-line services due to the pandemic and staff absences. Most council buildings have been closed. The need for quick decision making in certain areas means that a return to the usual committee based system is 'not realistic'.

The opposition parties, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, as well as the Edinburgh Party of Independent Councillors (EPIC) all wanted a committee of 18 councillors to include the Lord Provost and a representative of the EPIC group.

Cllr Iain Whyte said: "To take the place of the council the P & S committee must reflect the membership of the whole council, and the Lord Provost must be the convener. It is necessary to bring communities together and build community spirit. It would make it more broadly democratic."

But the agreement was that the P & S committee will be set up with 17 members and there will be wider thought to who will form the GRBV committee, perhaps by using conveners of other committees which are not meeting at present. This will require an amendment of standing orders which could be discussed in May.