

LEICESTER, LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 24 June 2021

VENUE ARRANGEMENTS FOR PANEL MEETINGS

Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to enable Panel members to consider the venue arrangements for Panel meetings with the resumption of physical meetings and since the Secretariat of the Panel transferred from Leicestershire County Council to Leicester City Council with effect from 11 May 2020.

Background and current arrangements

2. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland is an elected official under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. The role of the Police and Crime Panel is to review and scrutinise the decisions and actions of the PCC providing support and challenge. Transparency plays a key role in the Panel's approach to scrutiny of the PCC.
3. The Police and Crime Panel is a public meeting and it plays a key role in assisting the public in evaluating the performance of the PCC. The Panel also provides evidence of ongoing support and challenge to local policing and community safety. For these reasons it is imperative that meetings of the Panel are accessible to as many members of the public as possible either by attending in person or viewing a webcast, whilst maintaining value for money.
4. When the Panel was formed the Secretariat for the Police and Crime Panel was based at County Hall and comprised officers from Leicestershire County Council. This arrangement was agreed prior to the Panel's inception in 2012. With effect from May 2020 the administration and hosting arrangements of the Police and Crime Panel transferred to Leicester City Council and the panel is supported by officers from Leicester City Council
5. Since the beginning of the 2020-21 municipal year meetings have been held by virtual means as permitted by section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The legislation that permitted such virtual meetings has now ceased (7th May 2021) and following the Government's announcement that virtual meetings would not be allowed to continue we need to hold meetings where Members are present in a physical place for the meeting to be legal.
6. The role of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel will be up for election at the June 2021 meeting.
7. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) is based at Force Headquarters in Enderby on the outskirts of the city. In addition to officers from the OPCC, officers from Leicestershire Police also regularly attend meetings of the Panel. In terms of mileage from Force Headquarters, City Hall and County Hall are equidistant.

8. At a meeting of the Panel on 23 September 2016 a decision was made by the Panel to hold two of its six standard meetings per year at City Hall on a trial basis, commencing with the March 2017 meeting of the Panel. Panel meetings thereafter took place at City Hall twice per year.
9. At a meeting of the Panel on 3 October 2017 the Panel was of the view that the Panel should continue to rotate the venue of its meetings in order to make them accessible to the public and therefore resolved that the Panel continue to hold 2 of its 6 standard meetings per year at City Hall, Leicester.

Analysis

10. Whilst the situation with the pandemic has improved, we still need to ensure that meetings are held in a safe way that minimises the risk of transmission of the virus and keeps all those in attendance as safe as possible. Currently there are limits on the number of people who are allowed in a meeting room at any one time and suitable measures such as seat spacing, and screens will be in place.
11. The Committee rooms previously used for Panel meetings at City Hall and County Hall have been spacious and could accommodate public attendance.
12. At present the largest room in operation at County Hall is the Council Chamber, the Chamber is capable of live streaming meetings to the County Council's You Tube channel and can also be used in hybrid mode using MS Teams. However, with social distancing measures in place the capacity for physical participants in the meeting is reduced, with only 14 seats able to access a microphone so at the current time it would not be feasible for a meeting to be held there.
13. The main Committee meeting room at City Hall is spacious and with social distancing measures there is capacity for up to 28 active participants with some additional seating for public. The main Committee room is capable of live streaming meetings through its webcast system onto the Council's website and a hybrid system has been installed to enable virtual participation by those who aren't legally required to be present, whilst enabling them to still be able to engage with those present in the meeting room.
14. Meetings at City Hall have not attracted better attendance than meetings at County Hall and meetings do not attract members of the public generally although meetings held by virtual means appear to have attracted more public viewings. Journalists from the Leicester Mercury and BBC Radio Leicester do attend Panel meetings both at City Hall and County Hall.
15. Melton Borough Council has offered to host a panel meeting and now has the ability to stream meetings through its webcast system although room capacity limits are not known at this time, it may be that other Districts would wish to host a Panel meeting on occasion.
16. Participation via a hybrid system (where in place) will be encouraged for those that are not legally required to be in person at the meeting e.g. if an officer is presenting a single report at a meeting.

17. The public have a legal right to attend and view meeting proceedings, as well as provision to ask questions therefore provision will be made in meeting rooms for public to attend however due to capacity limits remote viewing of meetings (for non-participants) will be encouraged via the live streams.
18. The webcasting for meetings at both City Hall and County Hall generally works well with very occasional technical difficulties.
19. City Hall does not have its own car park and Panel attendees are recommended to park at the NCP Rutland Centre carpark on Halford Street, Leicester. Whilst this is relatively close to City Hall this car park has on occasion been quite full at the time of day the Police and Crime Panel has taken place. In addition, parking at this car park for the duration of Police and Crime Panel meetings has cost attendees approx. £12 which has had to be claimed back from the Home Office grant funding. Other car parks are available in the City Centre within a reasonable walking distance, with both the Haymarket and Dover Street carparks just 5 minutes from City Hall. There is also a cheaper on street parking provision around the Cultural Quarter.
19. Holding Police and Crime Panel meetings at County Hall or elsewhere would be less pragmatic for City Council officers who administer the panel and whilst they have no specific preference on whether meetings take place at City Hall or County Hall or occasionally within a District, administratively and in terms of cost efficiency and resources it would be easier to attend meetings at City Hall.
20. In the past the attendance of Panel members has on occasion been slightly lower at City Hall meetings than would normally be for meetings at County Hall although meetings have remained quorate. However, this may be due to other unconnected reasons and little significance can be placed upon it.
21. Though traffic/travel is a consideration for the location of meetings, it could be suggested that traffic in and approaching the city is equally as busy as around the main arterial routes of the County.

Recommendation

The Panel is asked to consider the following options:

- to hold all meetings at City Hall;
- to have a split, holding most meetings at City Hall with some at County Hall, or;
- to have a split of meetings at City Hall and County Hall with an occasional meeting being hosted by one of the District/Borough councils e.g. Melton Borough Council.
- Any other suggestions.

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