

Report of	Meeting	Date
Monitoring Officer	Governance Committee	Wednesday, 22 May 2024

Suspension of Standing Orders - Public Questions

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the temporary suspension of standing orders approved by council on 16 April.

Recommendations

2. That members consider the decision and make recommendations to full council on criteria to apply to the continuation of the suspension or otherwise.

Reasons for recommendations

3. It is appropriate for any future decisions on this issue to be reasonable to have criteria to apply when the continuation of the suspension is considered further.

Background to the report

4. On 16 April, following a public disturbance arising from a protest at the previous council meeting, members voted to suspend standing orders to remove the right for public to address the meeting. A copy of the report presented to Council is referenced as a background paper to this report.
5. The decision was intended to be a temporary measure but was made subject to regular review. Members, whilst approving the suspension, directed that Governance Committee review the continuation of the suspension.
6. The decision was not taken by council lightly but reflected the concerns to safety of not only councillors at the meeting but also members of the public and council staff. Decisions on the operation of the constitution sit with Council, or the chair of any meeting where it relates to a particular meeting. However, Council have requested that Governance Committee firstly sense check the decision for reasonableness and secondly express a view on how the continuation of the suspension should be considered moving forward.

7. The reasons for the decision were presented in the report attached. Other considerations could include the likelihood of the behaviours arising again and any agenda items to which the issue could be linked.
8. It is recognised that the cause of the protest, the conflict between Israel and Gaza, is still current. It is also recognised that previous protests (including at a council meeting) have been peaceful and did not cause a disturbance.
9. Other considerations should include the political sensitivity of this matter given the likely imminent calling of a General Election.
10. Given the incident at the council meeting, the decision was reasonable. In relation to its continuation it is suggested that the following considerations be put to Council when the suspension is considered again:-
 - a. Current position in relation to Israel/ Gaza and whether there has been a change in hostilities between the parties;
 - b. The proximity to a general election;
 - c. Local intelligence; and
 - d. Meeting Agenda.
11. If members were minded to lift the suspension of Standing Orders they may recommend to Council to do so but with the following delegation:-

“The Chief Executive, in consultation with the Mayor, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition, has the delegated authority to suspend standing order 6 for the following meeting of Full Council should in their opinion it is right and proper to do so.”

Climate change and air quality

12. No impact

Equality and diversity

13. It is recognised that this decision may disproportionately affect a group of people who by way of ethnicity or religion have an interest in protesting the conflict in Gaza and Israel. However, this limitation applies only to meeting of the council in the chamber, lawful protest is not restricted from the environs of the council building. The action is to avoid unreasonable confrontation and disruption of council meetings and to address concerns over councillor for their own safety and that of other members of the public and council officers.

Risk

14. Risk assessments for council meetings will be adjusted to reflect the outcomes of this decision.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

15. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

16. Decisions in relation to the suspension of standing orders sit with the Council. It is proper for Governance Committee to express a view on what would be reasonable factors to take into account when the decision is revisited or reviewed.

Background documents

Suspension of Standing Orders – Report to Council; Meeting 16 April 2024

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