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Remote Meeting Protocol and Procedures

Document History

Adopted by Council – 27 May 2020 (Updated September 2020)

To be reviewed – May 2021

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Town Clerk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came in to force on 4 April 2020.
- 1.2 On 1 August, an amendment came into force: The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Amendment Regulations 2020.
- 1.3 The Regulations allow local councils such as the Town Council to hold remote meetings until May 2021. These could be entirely virtual or allow for hybrid meetings.
- 1.4 Furthermore, the Regulations remove the requirement to hold an annual meeting. Appointments (Chairman, Vice-Chairman, committee membership, etc) which are usually be made at an Annual Meeting could continue until the next Annual Meeting (expected to be May 2021).

2. Remote meeting method

- 2.1 NALC guidance states that local councils can decide the method they will use to facilitate the holding of remote meetings.
- 2.2 Zoom will be used as the method to deliver remote meetings and the public will be able to view the meeting via a livestream on YouTube. This method has been selected because it is cost effective and reliable.
- 2.3 The method above does not preclude the use of other apps, software and technology by the Town Council to provide remote or hybrid meetings.

3. Meeting agenda and summons

- 3.1 Remote meetings will be set up by the Town Clerk who will act as the meeting facilitator and whose role will be to: manage the technology employed for remote access and to administer the public and Member interaction with it.
- 3.2 The Deputy Clerk is delegated the power to perform all the functions set out in this document of the Town Clerk if he/she is not present or able to do so.
- 3.3 It will also be possible for the Town Clerk to delegate some or all of the functions described in this document to another officer of the Town Council.
- 3.4 The 'place' at which the meeting is held may be at a Town Council building or may be where the organiser of the meeting is located or may be an electronic or a digital or virtual location, a web address or a conference call telephone number; or could be a number of these combined.
- 3.5 The Town Clerk will give notice to the public of the time of the meeting, and the agenda, together with details of how to join the meeting.
- 3.6 Members will be issued a remote meeting summons, along with all meeting papers, via their Town Council (.gov.uk) email. This will be in the form of a 'meeting request' sent in advance which should appear as both as an email and 'calendar event'.

- 3.7 If there is no physical location for the meeting an agenda will feature only a link. Alternatively, if a meeting is taking place in a physical location and remote access is possible both the physical location (the address) and the remote link will be included on the agenda.

4. Before the meeting starts

- 4.1 Members are asked to join the remote meeting at least five minutes before the scheduled start time to ensure the technology is working.
- 4.2 Members camera (video-feed) should show where possible a non-descript background and members should be careful not to allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
- 4.3 Any other attendees will be invited to use a link or will be added by the Town Clerk to the meeting.

5. The meeting

- 5.1 Chairman opens the meeting in the usual manner and welcomes all to the meeting.
- 5.2 Chairman reminds Members and officers that they must keep their mics muted unless they are speaking.
- 5.3 Chairman will be the only Member to have their mic un-muted throughout the whole meeting.
- 5.4 Chairman introduces the first agenda item which is the former 'apologies for absence' item renamed 'Register of Attendance for Remote Meetings' and will instruct the Town Clerk to undertake a name-roll call of Members and Officers in the order they appear on the agenda.
- 5.5 Each Member of the Committee will be required to un-mute their mic and respond, "Present Chairman" and then re-mute their mic.
- 5.6 This should mean each Members face will in turn come to the front of the screen confirming that it is the Members in question, and they can see and be seen, hear and be heard. Clarity around the officers in attendance will be done for transparency reasons.
- 5.7 The Town Clerk will read the name of each officer expected to be on-line in support, and each in turn will be required to un-mute their mic and respond "Present Chairman" re-muting their mic afterwards.
- 5.8 Once the Chairman has confirmed all are present and correct the meeting will proceed.

Public participation

- 5.9 Where there is a 'public participation item' on an agenda a member of the public will have two options for participation:
 - i. To submit written questions before 5pm on the day before the meeting takes place, or;
 - ii. to inform the Town Clerk before 5pm on the day before the meeting that they wish to participate remotely.

- 5.10 Outside of a 'public participation item' it will be at the Chairman's discretion whether or not to allow members of the public to participate directly during a remote meeting.
- 5.11 During the 'public participation item' the Chairman will ask the Town Clerk to confirm to the meeting if any members of the public have submitted any representations or wish to participate directly during a remote meeting.
- 5.12 If members of the public have submitted any representations in accordance with Standing Orders the Town Clerk will read them out.
- 5.13 It will be possible at the Chairman's discretion to 'group' similar submissions and consider them together rather than each being considered in turn.
- 5.14 If a member of the public wishes to participate remotely the Town Clerk will 'invite' them into the meeting and 'remove' them after they have finished or as the Chairman indicates.
- 5.15 After the public representation has been made members should consider what action to take.
- 5.16 The process will be repeated as many times as is necessary or until the Chairman deems that time available for public participation has elapsed.

Quorum and technological failure

- 5.17 The normal quorum requirements for a meeting will apply to a remote meeting.
- 5.18 In the event of any apparent failure of the video, telephone or conferencing connection, the Chairman should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate:
 - i. if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or
 - ii. if it is not, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chairman, expected to be no more than ten minutes, to allow a connection to be re-established. After ten minutes if the meeting is not quorate the Chairman will convene an extraordinary meeting if the business being discussed is urgent.
- 5.19 In the event of a connection failure, any Member attending remotely will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure. If connection is re-established, then they will be deemed to have returned at that point.

Exclusion of the press and public

- 5.20 There are, following a resolution to do so, times when members of the public and press are excluded (usually because contractual, legal, or staffing matters are being considered) from meetings of the Town Council.
- 5.21 It is important to ensure that there are no members of the public and press 'present'. This might require that the Chairman call a short adjournment and/or that another remote meeting be set up.
- 5.22 During discussion of items where the press and public are excluded it would be advisable for Members to turn off devices that automatically record speech, such as, smart speakers (Amazon Echo, Google Home, etc) or other smart music devices.

6. Debate and voting during the meeting

Debate during the meeting

- 6.1 During discussion of any item each Member must only speak when invited to by the Chairman and only ever one at a time.
- 6.2 The meeting “chat” facility must not be used for private conversations between Members during a remote meeting.
- 6.3 To indicate they wish to speak Members will use the “raise hand” or “chat” facility. In chat it could be a simple “me” typed. The Town Clerk will respond to the Member that they are “on the list” to provide assurance.
- 6.4 The Chairman will allow a few minutes and request the Town Clerk to list the members who have indicated they wish to speak.
- 6.5 The Chairman will call their names in turn. Members can make their comments by un-muting their mics when directed to do so by the Chairman.
- 6.6 Members should keep their comments brief, they can also move and second items verbally during their speech.
- 6.7 The process will at the Chairman’s discretion be repeated as many times as is necessary.
- 6.8 Disruptive behaviour by Members will, as far as it is practical to do so remotely, be managed in the way set out in Standing Orders.

Voting during the meeting

- 6.9 When the Chairman is satisfied that there has been sufficient debate and there is a proposer and seconder for the item being discussed the meeting will progress to the vote.
- 6.10 Before moving to the vote, the Chairman will ask the Town Clerk to confirm that the matter has been proposed and seconded, and if so by which two Members.
- 6.11 If there is no proposer or seconder the Chairman will request that they are made. Members will propose and second at this stage through the “chat” facility, a simple ‘p’ or ‘s’ would suffice, or by using the “raise hand” facility
- 6.12 The Chairman will once again ask the Town Clerk to confirm to the meeting that the matter has been proposed and seconded, including the names of members that have done so.
- 6.13 The method of voting will be conducted through the casting of votes by way of alphabetical roll call, to ensure that each Member can be clearly seen and heard on the screen. A show of hands is not possible through MS Teams as all participants can not be seen at once.
- 6.14 The Town Clerk will call out the name of each Member present with the Members then stating ‘for’, ‘against’, or ‘abstain’.
- 6.15 The Town Clerk will clearly state the result before the Chairman moves to the next agenda item.

7. End of the meeting

- 7.1 Participants are able to leave the meeting by clicking on the red “hang up” button.
- 7.2 The Town Clerk as the meeting facilitator can on the instruction of the Chairman end the meeting for all participants and members of the public.

8. Interpretation of these protocols and procedures

- 8.1 The Chairman will be required to interpret the Town Council’s existing Standing Orders when considering the requirements of remote meetings, with advice taken from the Town Clerk before a ruling is made.
- 8.2 The Chairman’s decision shall be final in interpreting the protocol and procedures.

Appendix 1: Additional guidance

- a) The following additional guidance has been produced to provide further information for those taking part in remote meetings.
- b) Members and officers should remember that everything they do and say could be recorded during remote meetings. This is in theory no different than 'normal' meetings, but during a remote meeting it is much easier.
- c) Members should treat all conversations in the "chat" facility both before during and after a meeting as if they are happening in public. This is much in the same way as they would if 'chatting' in a real committee room.
- d) During the coronavirus pandemic it is likely that:

The Town Council will:

- Accept change at short notice will probably be required.
- Recognise flexibility will be required for when things don't go as planned.
- Take more time to prepare for meetings.
- Need clear objectives for meetings.
- Accept that more time will be required in meetings.

The Chairman will:

- Most likely need to take the time to pause discussion, remind people of the process and of the meeting's aims to ensure that everyone is able to contribute.
- Before the meeting will need to be in close communication with officers to ensure they have all the information they require.

All Members and officers will:

- Need to make sure that they are ready to take part in advance of a meeting.
- Ensure they are dialling in from an area in your home where you are less likely to be disturbed.
- Ensure the broadband connection is sufficiently stable.
- Try to make the background on the video-feed as neutral as possible (a blank wall is best).
- Ensure that the camera is positioned to provide a clear, front-on view of the face. This may involve thinking in advance about lighting and involve putting the webcam, laptop, or tablet on top of a couple of books.
- Attempt to familiarise themselves with the functions of the software being used.