

PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS

NOTE: This Protocol may need to be adapted according to the type of meeting held. It should be read in conjunction with the User Guide for members of the public

Introduction – legislative background

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to, council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021.

These enable the council to hold meetings without all, or any, of the councillors being physically present in a room and allow for remote meetings through electronic and digital means at virtual locations using video and telephone conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming.

Councillors need not be physically present, as long as they are able to hear and be heard (and where practicable, see and be seen by) other councillors and members of the public attending remotely or in person.

The provisions in this Protocol for remote meetings supplement the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution (the Council's Standing Orders) in relation to the governance of remote meetings.

This Protocol is a guide to remote formal committee meetings involving councillors, officers and the public during the Covid-19 Pandemic. It has been agreed by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) and will be kept under regular review.

General:

- All formal remote meetings must be streamed so they are available to the public. The meetings will be recorded and a copy of the recording placed on the council's website.
- If the technology fails for a wholly remote meeting and the meeting is no longer open to the public, any decisions made could be challenged. It is therefore particularly important that councillors attending a meeting join sufficiently early to test their connectivity to the live event and for an officer to verify that the meeting is, indeed, being live streamed to the public.

Prior to the meeting

Access to papers

- Democratic Services will publish the agenda and papers in the usual way on the council's website. Printed copies will, in addition, be sent to the councillors involved in the meeting. This is because we recognise that it may be difficult to operate the remote meeting technology and also navigate through complex documents on the screen. A printed copy will be available for inspection at the council's offices. There will be an agreed form of wording on the agenda that this will be a remote meeting and specifying how public questions will be dealt with.

Public Questions and Statements

- Members of the public must still submit any questions/statements in writing three working days prior to the meeting. They will be offered the opportunity to read out their question/statement at the remote meeting (e.g. via phone or video conferencing), or have it read out by the Chair or Democratic Services Officer. They can also ask a supplementary question.

At the meeting: 1. Process

Joining/leaving

- All participants to "join" at least ten minutes prior to the meeting (to give time to resolve any technical issues that may arise).
- Any councillor who joins the meeting late should highlight this to the Chair at the first possible opportunity and the Chair will advise that "Councillor x has joined the meeting."
- Any councillor who needs to *leave* the meeting early should advise the Chair who will confirm that "Councillor x has left the meeting."

Quorum

- Normal quorum rules will apply.

Consideration of business

- *Minutes:* The Chair to seek approval of the minutes and take matters arising in the usual way. NOTE: The Chair to physically sign the minutes at the next available opportunity, acknowledging this could be a few months away.
- *Declarations of interest:* Councillors must comply with the Members' Code of Conduct, including making declarations of interest at a meeting. Any declarations made will be recorded in the minutes. A councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest in an Item who has to leave the meeting should declare their interest verbally to the Chair and leave the meeting. Once the item has been dealt with, the Democratic Services Officer will tell the councillor when they may re-join the meeting.

- *Public Questions or Statements:* Members of the public must still submit any questions/statements in writing three working days prior to the meeting. They will be offered the opportunity to read out their question/statement at the remote meeting (e.g. via phone or video conferencing), or have it read out by the Chair or Democratic Services Officer. They can also ask a supplementary question.
- *Reports:* The committee will consider the order of business on the published agenda.
- If there are no exempt or confidential items, the Chair to conclude the meeting and confirm it has ended.

Exempt or Confidential Items

- During consideration of any exempt or confidential item of business the live stream of the meeting will be suspended.
- At the conclusion of the exempt or confidential item, the Chair will declare the meeting closed, unless the committee needs to confirm its decision in public.

Voting

- If an item requires a formal vote, the Democratic Services Officer will ask councillors to confirm their vote. NOTE: Any councillor who loses connection during any part of an item that has a vote should consider whether this makes it appropriate for them to take part in the vote.

At the meeting: 2. Technological issues that may arise

Loss of connection

- In the event of the technology failing, proceedings, either visually, orally, or in terms of connection, the Chair will determine if the meeting is still quorate. If it is then the business of the meeting will continue. The quorum for each committee can be found in the council’s Constitution. The quorum for those committees which it is anticipated will meet remotely during this period are as follows:-

Committee	Quorum
Audit	3
Executive	3
Planning and Regulatory Functions	3

- If there is no quorum following failure of the connection then the meeting shall be adjourned by the Chair for a period of no more than 10 to 15 minutes, while attempts are made to re-establish the connection.
- If the connection for the councillor cannot be restored, the Chair will decide whether or not the meeting will continue. In order to continue, the meeting must still be quorate.

- If the connection to the public stream cannot be restored, the meeting must be adjourned to a future time and date.

Following the meeting

Minutes and the Recording

- Minutes will be produced in the normal way and a draft placed on the council's website.
- A recording of the meeting (excluding consideration of any exempt or confidential matters) will be placed on the council's website.