

# 26a Council Procedure Rules – ‘Virtual Meeting’ Addendum

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### Introduction

- 25.1 The [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to, council meetings **held on or before 7 May 2021**.
- 25.2 The regulations enable the council to hold meetings without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room. This allows for remote meetings through electronic, digital, virtual locations, live webcast, live interactive streaming, video and telephone conferencing or a combination of the above.
- 25.3 The ‘place’ at which the meeting is held may be a council building, or where the organiser of the meeting is located, or an electronic, digital or virtual location, a web address, or a conference call telephone number.
- 25.4 In order for members to be able to attend meetings of the council remotely, they need not be physically present, but must be able to hear and be heard (and, where possible, see and be seen by) other councillors and members of the public attending remotely or in person.
- 25.5 The procedure rules in this Constitution apply to remote meetings in the same way as they do for other meetings of the council except where they conflict, in which case this procedure rule takes precedence over other procedure rules in relation to the governance of remote meetings.
- 25.6 Where there is conflict with previous Regulations or with the Council’s Procedure Rules, the new Regulations take precedence.

### Circulation of Papers and Access to Information

- 26.1 Standard Access to Information rules set out in Section 27 of the Constitution apply to 'virtual' meetings including around publication of agendas and reports and access to meetings, except that:
- 26.2 Meeting locations/arrangements may need to be altered after the agenda has been published including but not limited to; use of different online meetings tools, delays to meeting start times, changes of location for any 'physical' or 'virtual' element of the meeting.
- 26.3 Paper copies of agendas and notices will not be provided at the Town Hall. Electronic papers will be made available on the Council's website.
- 26.4 Physical access may not be possible to meetings and details of web viewing will be provided as an alternative.
- 26.5 Where possible, any late changes made to meeting details will be advertised on the Council's website including (where relevant) being published as part of an updated agenda. However, Council Procedure Rule 8.2 is disapplied to allow meetings to begin a short time after their published start time in the event of technical or other difficulties.
- 26.6 Urgency procedures as set out in the Constitution (for example to set up Committee meetings with less than 5 days' notice) still apply.

#### Calendar of Meetings

- 26.7 Where changes are required to agreed meeting dates these must be agreed by the Monitoring Officer (or other relevant officer) under delegated authority.
- 26.8 Expected meeting start times may vary from those set out in the Calendar of Meetings but the revised start time will be published.

#### **Executive Decision Making**

- 27.1 Existing requirements in relation to Executive Decisions, including to;
- To publish a Forward Plan of Key Decisions,
  - To adhere to urgency provisions of notification/approval processes with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny,
  - To operate the Call-in Process,

remain in force.

#### **Meeting Participation and Attendance**

- 28.1 Virtual meetings will usually only involve:
- The Councillors, Co-optees and Independent members serving on the Committee;

- The Council officers supporting the Committee; and
- Other Councillors or members of the public (including applicants) who have the Chair's explicit advance permission to speak.

28.2 Note - It will not usually be possible to arrange for additional speaking or participation rights for those making a late request and previous deadlines for registering to speak may be brought forward where this is necessary. Revised deadlines will be published. In particular, it is unlikely that new requests to participate can be accepted during, or shortly before, a meeting.

28.3 Where a meeting currently allows public participation, this will extend to virtual meetings. The exact arrangements may vary from previous practice. Each Committee may publish its own public engagement protocols and these will be set out in the agenda. The Committee must provide reasonable adjustments to allow public participation and make allowances for those who are not able to access digital meetings.

28.4 Where a member of the public sets out in advance of the meeting that they are not able to participate through audio or video tools they will be offered the opportunity of making a written submission. It may also be possible for them to be represented by their Ward Councillor.

28.5 Members will be counted as 'present' for attendance purposes if they can hear all other participants and they can be heard by all other participants.

28.6 Where a Member declares a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they must leave the virtual meeting completely for the duration of the item concerned. Members must also refrain from using the chat function or communicating with the meeting participants during the relevant items.

#### Admission of the Press and Public

28.7 All meetings which would normally be open to the public will be broadcast for public access.

28.8 This will be through any suitable means but will normally be through the Council's existing webcasting portal.

28.9 Paragraph 26.1 sets out how meetings will be publicised.

#### **At the meeting**

29.1 All participants are expected to log in to the meeting in advance of the start time as required by the Democratic Services Officer.

29.2 The meeting only begins when the Chair formally opens the meeting.

29.3 The Chair will introduce themselves and every participant (for the benefit of other attendees and those watching from home) and set out expected meeting etiquette, including that:

- a) All participants microphones must be muted when not speaking.
- b) Where necessary participants may switch off their cameras when not speaking to save bandwidth.
- c) How to indicate a wish to speak.
- d) Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- e) When speaking state their full name before making a comment
- f) If referring to a specific page of the agenda pack, mention the page number.

29.4 In terms of general meeting protocols, the Chair must set these out (for example in terms of public participation) and in particular should explain how these vary from existing protocols.

29.5 At some meetings the 'Chat' function may prove useful to participants. However, this does not form part of the formal record of the meeting and is not, on its own, a method for taking decisions.

### **Voting**

30.1 Before a vote takes place the Chair will set out the recommendations/decisions being voted on.

30.2 The Chair will then conduct a roll-call vote whereby they read out each Member's name and they indicate their vote (for, against, abstain).

30.3 Other voting methods may be used at the Chair's discretion including using a 'show of hands' vote where all Members can be visible on screen at the same time.

30.4 The Democratic Services Officer will record the votes and if required confirm the vote result to the Chair.

30.5 A Chair's casting vote is available if required.

### **Technical and Other Issues**

31.1 Virtual meetings rely on stable ICT infrastructure linked to every participant.

31.2 Should a participant experience technical difficulties they must alert the Chair/Democratic Services Officer as quickly as possible.

31.3 The Chair and Democratic Services Officer must also monitor the attendance of key participants.

31.4 Where it becomes apparent a key participant (as defined in paragraph 31.6) is no longer connected the meeting will be adjourned until such time as they are able to re-connect.

- 31.5 Where re-connection is not possible the Chair will determine whether it is possible to continue with the item/meeting and where necessary defer an item to later or adjourn a meeting to a future date.
- 31.6 A key participant is defined as a participant whose continuing contribution to the meeting is vital to allow a decision to be made. For example, an applicant or objector at a Strategic Development Committee meeting before they have made their submission.
- 31.7 Normal quoracy rules apply to virtual meetings and if disconnections cause Member attendance to drop below quorum levels then the Chair will also adjourn the meeting.
- 31.8 Where the live webcast stream for public viewing is interrupted, a meeting must be temporarily adjourned whilst this is fixed, or adjourned to another date if this is not possible.
- 31.9 Should a participant need to leave the meeting for any reason this must be made clear to those participating. Where possible the meeting will continue and the participant may re-join at a later time.
- 31.10 The Chair, following consultation with the Democratic Services Officer, may adjourn a virtual meeting for any reason should they consider that it is not appropriate to proceed.

### **Standards and Code of Conduct**

- 32.1 The provisions of the Member and Officers' Code of Conduct apply to virtual meetings of the Council in the same way as they do to physical meetings of the Council.