



# **Virtual Meetings Protocol**

Review: November 2021

Next Review: November 2022

## **Introduction**

1. The provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales Regulations 2020) which allowed remote attendance at, and remote access to, council meetings ended on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
2. Whilst the Council is no longer permitted to hold Full Council or Committee meetings remotely, Working Party meetings and other informal meetings held by the Town Council or by third parties can continue to be held through electronic means.
3. This protocol is designed to provide a guide to virtual meetings involving Members, officers and third parties and will be kept under regular review.

## **Prior to the meeting**

4. **Meeting Notification** – Where a meeting is to be held virtually this will be set out in the notification for the meeting and Members and officers expected to attend will be provided with a link to access it.
5. **Disturbances** – Participants must try to limit disturbances wherever possible. For example, mobile telephones and other electronic devices such as tablets, must be on silent during the meeting.
6. **Visibility** – Participants must remain in view of their camera and a professional appearance must be upheld at all times – for example, no eating or smoking during the meeting. Non-alcoholic drinks may be consumed, but these must be prepared before the meeting commences. A short adjournment of the meeting may be requested through the Chair for a comfort break, for example, but Members must refrain from moving out of camera view or turning their camera off whilst the meeting is in progress.
7. **Code of Conduct** – The Code of Conduct applies to virtual meetings in the same way as a physical meeting.
8. **Technical** – The Zoom link will be established and tested before the commencement of the meeting. Participants in the meeting should join 15 minutes beforehand. Any problems establishing a video-conference link must be reported as soon as possible by telephoning the number in the joining email.
9. **Recording meetings** – Many software platform have a facility for recording meetings, so virtual meetings may be recorded for note-taking purposes.

## **During the meeting**

10. The Chair will commence the meeting at the allotted time. The Chair will remind councillors and officers to mute their microphones if there is any background noise in their vicinity.
11. At the outset of the meeting the Chair will confirm by which method Members should indicate that they wish to speak – either by raising their hand on screen or by utilising the ‘raised hand’ function. The Chair will also advise Members attending by telephone that they will be invited to comment on each agenda item.
12. In the event of a video-conference link failure, the Chair will call a short adjournment of up to 15 minutes to determine whether the link can be re-established. If the link is re-established the Chair will continue the meeting from the point at which the link had previously failed.  
  
In the event of an individual’s link failing, the Member or officer will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of equipment failure. The Chair will decide whether to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow the Member or officer to return or to continue provided the meeting remains quorate.
13. The voting procedure for Members during a virtual meeting will be at the discretion of the Chair – either by show of hands on screen or a roll-call vote with the Chair asking each voting Member individually for their vote.