

Virtual Meeting Policy

1. Introduction

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist the Chairman, Councillors and members of the public and press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting, and to assist people to engage in debate and decision making. The policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' that are currently enacted for meeting on and up to 7 May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda being placed on the Council's website. The agenda will be published on the noticeboard at the office entrance only. Any person unable to access a copy of the agenda must contact the Council and request an electronic copy, which will be forwarded as appropriate.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council will utilise Microsoft Teams (as part of its subscription to Office 365) to provide video communications. Teams enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices and desktops.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will email the link to 'join' the meeting via email to all Councillors and any other invited person(s). Members of the press and public will be required to express their interest in joining the meeting to the Clerk via email, and will receive a link to 'join' the meeting prior to the scheduled start time.

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a place.

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 5c.

During the meeting all persons other than the Chairman and Clerk will be muted. During the public participation period members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chairman and will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be muted.

During the meeting members and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item. Microsoft are working on an update to Teams to allow participants to raise a 'virtual' hand, which will apply once this is in place. The Chairman has the discretion to operate a rollcall for Councillor views on individual agenda items as an alternative to this, if more appropriate to the matter under discussion.

All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and mute their own microphones if necessary, except when speaking, to negate interference with the meeting.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chairman will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available for some or all of members attending the Chairman can choose to continue, but to operate on a rollcall for Councillor views on individual agenda items.

d. Attendance

If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'drop-outs' result in the meeting becoming inquorate members will endeavour to re-join for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be contacted to advise of the suspension.

e. Telephone attendance

Persons wishing to attend by telephone are advised to contact the Clerk in advance in order that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chairman. For a member of the public or press this may result in them being dismissed from the Teams meeting.

7. Declaration of Interests

A Councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the 'lobby'. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made, the Councillor will be returned to the meeting

8. Public Participation

The Clerk will read any pre-submitted addresses from the press and public.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Teams meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda (matters up to the exclusion of the press and public) the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential Teams meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

10. Recording

Teams meetings will be recorded for the purposes of aiding the Clerk to produce accurate minutes of decisions made.

11. Information

The chat box on the Teams meeting will be available should a participant be unable to make themselves heard to others. However, the Council reserves the right to suspend the chat box should it be used inappropriately (as under point 6).

Policy adopted 4th May 2020

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>