



Meopham Parish Council Remote Meetings

Protocol September 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1. On 4 April 2020, the government brought The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 into force to allow local authorities to conduct meetings remotely. NALC produced guidelines for the conducting of meetings remotely and these underpin this protocol.
- 1.2. Where possible the aim is for the Council to conduct the meetings as per existing standing orders. This less formal document is as an addendum to our standing orders explaining how these will be interpreted and how the meetings will run.
- 1.3. Meetings will be held as normal on a Tuesday evening at 7:30pm as per our annually agreed scheduled. Other meetings may be held as and when required.

2. Planning and Preparation

- 2.1. The Clerk should send out agendas and documents by email, together with a separate 'session ID' for the remote meeting platform (Zoom). Agendas will be published on the council website. Session IDs will not be included on the agenda. Members of the public should request the information and a link will be provided by email.

3. Virtual platform

- 3.1. The council has agreed to use Zoom as the platform for its remote meetings. Participants can either load the app on their computer or access via the web for those worried about security.

- 3.2. All councillors have confirmed they have access to appropriate hardware such as laptops, tablets or mobile phones.

4. Council and Committee Meetings

- 4.1. All attendees will join a Waiting Room prior to the meeting and wait to be admitted by the Clerk
- 4.2. Councillors should check that their microphone and speaker are working
- 4.3. During the meeting, councillors should have their microphone on mute unless they wish to speak, to avoid any background noise
- 4.4. To help manage the meeting, the Chairman will:
 - 4.4.1. Explain how the meeting will run at the beginning of each meeting and how and when attendees and members of the public can speak.
 - 4.4.2. Consider whether to mute all participants and unmute people when they ask to speak (by a show of hands). This decision will be dependent on the number of participants in the meeting.
- 4.5. A member of the council, by prior agreement, will be appointed to co-host the meeting with the Clerk
- 4.6. The Clerk can record the meeting at any time, should the Chairman request this. Closed sessions will not be recorded.

5. Council discussions

- 5.1. The Chairman of the Council or Committee should still chair the relevant meeting.
- 5.2. The Chairman should consider the following options at the start of each meeting:-
 - The Chairman will consider whether to mute everyone when they are not speaking to help keep background noise to a minimum which will improve everyone's ability to hear the discussions. This may not be necessary in smaller meetings.
 - Councillors will raise their hands when they wish to speak or use the hand icon. For larger meetings, typing on the Chat option could be used.

- The Chairman should ask everyone to state their name before they start speaking in larger meetings so that it is always clear who is speaking.
- Some individuals may have technical issues that mean that they 'leave 'the meeting', if for example their internet connection means that they are cut off. Zoom is very clear on who is present, and the Clerk will note who is present during the meeting as normal.
- It is important that when an item is introduced each Councillor has the opportunity to speak at least once on that item. The Chairman will ask everyone if they have had the opportunity to speak on the matter.
- Another option might be for the Chairman to read from a list of councillors names and ask them in turn if there is anything they wish to say or ask. This may take more time but allows for a more controlled approach.
- The Chairman will then summarize the item.

6. Voting

- 6.1. Councillors will vote by raising hands as in a physical meeting
- 6.2. The Chairman or Clerk will then read back the votes of the council so that everyone is sure their vote has been recorded correctly
- 6.3. The Chairman should make sure that every vote is clear and unambiguous

7. Meeting Papers/Documents

- 7.1. Paper copies will not be provided to councillors.
- 7.2. Electronic copies of documents can either be viewed on a second separate device, if available, or the screen can be split to view both the meeting and your papers.
- 7.3. It is also possible for the host to share their screen and display papers for attendees, if requested

8. Behaviours and Conduct

- 8.1. The required standards of behaviour and discussion are the same whether in remote or face-to-face meetings. Everyone in the meeting will need to be respectful and compassionate towards one another and comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

9. Declaring Interests

- 9.1. The Council will need to consider how it will manage councillors leaving meetings if they have an interest and do not wish to be part of the meeting, particularly if they consider there will be negative public perception if they remain.
- 9.2. Therefore, the Chairman will mute the audio and blank the picture for any Councillor who has declared an interest. The Councillor will be able to hear the discussion but not take part.
- 9.3. If a Councillor has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, they will “leave” the meeting and wait in the “waiting room” while discussion on the topic takes place. They will be allowed back into the meeting once the item has been discussed.
- 9.4. At the end of the item the Chairman will invite the Councillor to rejoin the meeting.
10. **Confidential Items**
- 10.1. These should be at the end of a meeting
- 10.2. The Clerk will remove non councillors from the meeting to allow the confidential session to continue
11. **Public Participation**
- 11.1. Council meetings must still be advertised, and the public have a right to observe.
- 11.2. Members of the public must contact the clerk to ask for the meeting code which will be emailed to them prior to the meeting.
- 11.3. The Chairman or Clerk should also take a note who wishes to speak, from the public, to ensure that no one is missed out.
- 11.4. When a member of the public contacts the Clerk prior to the meeting, they should indicate on which item on the agenda they wish to speak about, if any.
- 11.5. Once a member of the public has been admitted to the meeting, they must be muted until such time they are permitted to speak. At this time, the Chairman will indicate that they speak. They should be muted for the rest of the meeting unless further questions need to be answered.
- 11.6. Once the public speaking session is over only Councillors will be able to speak. The Chairman should explain this to the members of the public at the end of the public session.

12. After the Meeting

- 12.1. Minute taking should be done as usual with the Clerk seeking clarity at any point, should it be needed. The minutes should be agreed at the next meeting and should be signed as soon as practical by the relevant Chairman.

Adopted by Administration and Resources Committee – 15/10/2020