

### **Councillor Protocol for Virtual Committee Meetings (including public attendance)**

Additional protocol for virtual meetings, to be considered alongside standing orders:

#### **General points about councillors joining and participating in a virtual meeting**

- Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting no later than fifteen minutes before the scheduled start time to ensure any technical issues can be resolved with ICT, and in order to avoid disrupting the meeting.
- Where using video-enabled equipment, councillors should leave their cameras on throughout the meeting as far as practicable.
- Councillors should ensure they are in a quiet location for the Meeting with minimum disruptions and blur or show a non-descript background.
- Councillors are reminded that virtual meetings are generally meetings in public and members of the public will be able to view them. Councillors should be mindful of this in their conduct and dress code. Non-verbal communication such as body language may be picked up and broadcast even when not speaking.
- The Chairman will remind councillors to mute their microphones when not speaking. This is done in order to reduce feedback and background noise. Democratic Services Officers may perform this function as well.
- In all cases councillors will need to unmute their microphone before speaking and mute when they have finished speaking.
- Please be patient with one another and the meeting Chairman.

#### **Protocol for councillors speaking at meetings**

- The Council has put in place a technological solution that will enable councillors participating in meetings virtually to indicate their wish to speak.
- Notwithstanding this, in the case of all meetings, in particular Council, Executive and Planning Committee, councillors who wish to speak on a particular item are encouraged to notify the Chairman and to Democratic Services of their wish to speak in advance of the meeting.
- The Chairman will follow the rules set out in the Constitution and usual protocol when determining who may speak and the order of speakers. The Chairman's ruling in this regard shall be final.
- The length of speeches will be timed in accordance with the Constitution. If practicable, a countdown clock will be displayed, and the Democratic Services Officer shall give a 30 second warning.
- Councillors should only speak when called by the Chairman and only one person should at any one time.
- Councillors should turn on their microphone and state their name before making a comment. Once finished, the microphone should be turned back to mute.
- When referring to reports or making specific comments, councillors should refer to the report and page number so that all Members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.
- Interruptions, such as 'point of order' should be kept to an absolute minimum and raised at the end of a speech not during.

## Appendix 2

- If felt necessary, at the end of the debate, when all speakers have been heard, the Chairman will ask those present if anyone else wishes to speak before completing the discussion on that item and moving to the vote.
- The Chairman's ruling on Members speaking shall be final.

### Dealing with Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)

- To facilitate this process, Members are asked to notify the Democratic Services Officer in advance of a meeting if they will be declaring an DPI or other declaration that requires them to absent themselves for an agenda item.
- Where a Member has disclosed a DPI or other declaration in an agenda item that requires them to be absent from the meeting for that item, the Member should leave the virtual meeting for the duration of the item. Failure to do so would be a breach of the council's code of conduct.
- At the conclusion of the item, the Chairman and Democratic Services Officer will ensure that any member who has absented themselves from the meeting has re-joined the meeting before moving to the next agenda item.

### Voting

- At a meeting using virtual meeting technology any matter will be decided by a clear majority of those in attendance, physically or virtually.
- When the Chairman is satisfied that there has been sufficient debate, the meeting will move to the vote. Unless a Recorded Vote is requested, the method of voting will be at the Chairman's discretion and will be by one of the following methods:
  - a vote by electronic means; or
  - an officer calling out the name of each member present with:
    - members stating 'for', 'against', or 'abstain' to indicate their vote when their name is called
    - the Democratic Services Officer clearly stating the result of the vote and the Chairman then moving onto the next agenda item
  - by the general assent of the meeting.
- Details of how councillors vote will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is called/required or requested by a Member.

### Participation by members of the public

- Members of the public who wish to observe the proceedings of a committee are able to do so by watching the live stream. The Council will make a live stream available on an appropriate channel and will publicise this on the website agenda page for that particular meeting.
- Public participation will be permitted in line with the procedures set out in the Constitution (as amended for virtual meetings).
- A member of the public who has requested to address a meeting in accordance with the Council's Meeting Procedure Rules (as amended for virtual meetings) will be invited to participate in the virtual meeting for the duration of the item in question and will address the meeting when invited to do so by the Chairman. Once a member of the public has addressed the meeting, they will leave the virtual meeting and resume viewing on the live stream
- The Chairman may re-order the agenda in order to facilitate this participation at the beginning of the meeting.
- As an alternative, if a member of the public who wishes to address the meeting but is unable to join for technological reasons, they may submit a written statement

## Appendix 2

that can be read out by the Chairman or Democratic Services Officer at the appropriate time. The written statement must be submitted to the Democratic Services Officer by noon on the day of the meeting.

### **Dealing with exempt items of business**

- There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or “exempt” information – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – is under consideration.
- Any councillor in virtual attendance who fails to disclose that there are in fact persons present who are not so entitled will be in breach of the Council’s Code of Conduct.

### **Dealing with technical difficulties**

- In the event that the Chairman or Democratic Services Officer identifies a failure of the virtual participation facility, the Chairman will declare a recess while the fault is addressed.
- If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting is inquorate, the meeting will be abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened. If the meeting is quorate, the meeting will continue. Those attending virtually would be aware and accept that the meeting would continue, and a vote would be taken without their attendance.
- In the event of connection failure, the Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure, and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Member(s) before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with the item(s).
- If a connection is successfully re-established, then the Member(s) will be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment, but the Member(s) should not vote on a matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the debate.
- In the event of the Chairman losing connection, the Vice-Chairman will take the chair until the Chairman’s connection is re-established.
- If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter or one which is time-limited and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and where appropriate/possible the relevant Executive member, shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted by the Council’s Constitution.

### **Interpretation of standing orders**

- Where the Chairman is required to interpret the Council’s existing standing orders in light of the requirements of remote participation, s/he shall take advice from the Monitoring Officer prior to making a ruling. The Chairman’s decision in all cases shall be final.