

Virtual Meeting Policy

Adopted: 10th June 2020

Review due: 7th May 2021

1. Introduction

Greatham Parish Council recognises the opportunities that in the current climate, where physical meetings are not possible, remote meetings may be convened under new legislation. This policy will assist the Chair, 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' and that are currently enacted for meetings taking place on and up to 7 May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed in accordance with legislation with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas may be published on village noticeboards if it is safe to do so. Any Councillor or member of the public unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda and documents to be forwarded as appropriate. Copies can be sent by post if there is sufficient time between the request being made and the meeting date.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Greatham Parish Council will utilise Zoom to provide video communications. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will publish via the summons:

- The Zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a physical place. Where Standing Orders differ from this Policy, then this Policy will apply.

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Attendee names

All councillors, when joining the Zoom meeting, should rename themselves to be 'Councillor' followed by their name. This allows for member of the public in attendance to identify Council members.

b. Discussions

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

During the meeting all persons 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 Chair and should 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 Councillors will raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item. Councillors will be unmuted during a discussion but will be placed back on mute once the discussion has ended.

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

c. Voting

All voting will be by a show of hands. Where a Councillor is not able to connect to the meeting by video they will be asked for their vote verbally.

d. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity the Chair 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 roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

e. 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 rejoin for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chair will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.

f. 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 Chair. For a member of the public or press this may result in them being dismissed from the Zoom meeting.

7. Declaration of Interests

A Councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the Zoom waiting room. 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 questions that have been submitted prior to the meeting from members of the public.

9. Confidential matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to Councillors only. On conclusion of the ordinary agenda items, the meeting will be suspended for Councillors to re-join using the confidential Zoom meeting link that will have been provided to Councillors only. Councillors should ensure other members of their household are not present when confidential items are being discussed.

10. Recording

Zoom meetings will be recorded by the Clerk and made available to Councillors, the press and members of the public on request.

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>