



Guidance on Remote Formal Meetings of Councillors

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Remote Meeting Guidance

The production of this Guidance follows the removal of the previous requirement for meetings of Local Authorities, such as Tendring District Council, to be held at a physical place. With the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”) it is now possible for Local Authorities to hold meetings using digital technology and thereby Members do not need to be physically in the same place to make decisions on behalf of the Council. These are referred to here as ‘remote’ meetings and it is important to recognise that they are still formal meetings of the Council and during which, the usual high standards of conduct should be observed.

The Council’s Rules and Procedures as set out in the Constitution are being amended to reflect the legislation applying to remote meetings.

The Guidance is not a restatement of law. However, it does emphasise, as the 2020 Regulations emphasise, the following conditions for ‘remote’ meetings that Members must be able:

“(a) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance,

(b) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting, and

(c) to be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.”

The practical points set out in this document are aimed at achieving those conditions and otherwise supporting the consideration of business of the Council at remote meetings and thereby contribute to good decision making.

The practical points are respectively aimed at:

- The Chairman – of the Meeting (and should also be read by the Vice-Chairman)
- The Other ‘Committee’ Members
- Other Councillors ‘attending’ – those who are not members of the ‘Committee’

Separate guidance exists for Committee Officers attending for the purpose of facilitating the remote meeting and for recording the business decisions as well as guidance for other officers ‘attending’.

There are also some associated ground rules for participants in remote meetings.

The Council has formally decided that it will use Microsoft Skype for Business as its platform for remote meetings and where possible elected members should use their Surface Pro issued to them by the IT department, it is important that

this is adhered to endeavoring to ensure the smooth facilitating and running of the remote meeting.

Note: references in this guide to 'Committee' should be read as applying as appropriate to Cabinet, Panels, Sub-Committees, Working Parties etc where the meeting concerned is of those bodies.

Notes for the Chairman

Your role in leading a remote meeting is ultimately the same as your role during a face to face meeting. However, the techniques needed to keep everyone engaged, allow a good debate and determine the view of the meeting on each item of business may be different to those which you use for a face to face meeting. The points below can assist with the smooth running of the meeting:

You are also invited to read the “Suggested ground rules for participants in remote meetings” document that is provided at Appendix A.

Access arrangements

- Make sure you have been given the correct dial in details, start time and any alternative telephone number and conference ID code. We will send these to you as a Calendar invitation and separately as an email. It is intended that the meeting will have audio and video functions and to achieve this access for you should be using the full Skype for Business platform. For legal compliance the crucial element is that you can be heard and you can hear your colleague Councillors in the meeting (and officers and other parties to the meeting).

Know the technology

- Make sure you know how to use the technology and ask for assistance before the meeting if you are not familiar with the Skype for Business software.
- Consider how you are connecting to the internet. If others in your home/office etc are using the same wifi that could impact on the quality of the connection for your meeting. If you can arrange that your device for the meeting is the only one using the home/office wifi it could make a significant difference to your experience of it.
- All Members, Officers and anyone else having an active part in the meeting will be asked to log in the day before the meeting in a two hour window just to check that they have the right details and can talk through with the Committee Officer the arrangements for the meeting.
- Make sure you have enough devices/screens to run the meeting and read the papers at the same time.
- Make the best use of the technology – for example you may be able to see who is speaking, who is not on mute and so on. There is a messaging facility (instant messaging or IM) so that participants can alert you to the fact that they wish to speak, or that you can use to ask someone to mute their microphone.

Meeting management

- While the meeting will be open to the public, public access will be via a live stream on social media. The stream will also be recorded and made available as soon as practicable after the meeting to be viewed/listened to.
- The Committee Officer will host and control the call so that you don't have to deal with that aspect of the technology as well. For a larger or more complex meeting (e.g. Council) the Committee Officer will have a colleague to do this, so that they can concentrate on providing advice and taking the minutes.
- Make sure you have a list of all those due to attend the meeting and when they will arrive and leave. This will be provided to you by the Committee Officer before the meeting.

- On screen your fellow Councillors will have an icon/their video feed in individual boxes with their names showing if they are using the full Skype for Business platform. Officers of the Council will likewise have an icon and they are advised to turn their video feed and microphone off while not contributing. The same advice is given to Councillors who are not Members of the 'Committee'. This is designed to assist the public differentiate the decision makers from others in attendance. Other contributors and those who cannot use the Skype for Business platform will appear with a telephone icon, the word guest and their telephone number (or anonymous if their telephone ID is withheld). Those not using the full Skype for Business platform won't be able to see the detail of who is attending the call (unless they are watching the live stream on social media). The detail of names/telephone numbers will not appear on the live stream either. This is so we do not inadvertently disclose personal details via the live stream/recording that we should not disclose.
- Consider having a paper copy of the agenda to hand and referring to the rest of the (Committee) meeting pack online.
- Join the call 10-15 minutes before the start time to check everyone else joins in an orderly way, in case there are any issues. Use this time to remind everyone that the meeting will be live streamed and recorded by the Committee Officer. This should also be repeated at the very start of the meeting. It is important that you ask the Committee Officer to confirm the live streaming of the meeting is working.
- An example welcome text is set out at Appendix B to this guidance. You are invited to adjust it to your own requirements. However, it is important that the critical elements identified in it around Members being able to contribute to and hear (and preferably see) what is taking place and the public can also hear (and preferably see) the meeting are in place at the start and throughout the meeting.
- Following an initial welcome to the formal meeting and reference to the meeting being live streamed/recorded, welcome everyone and run a roll call/introduction in alphabetic order (starting with Members, then Officers and then other contributors). This allows everyone to be aware of who is present and that they can both hear and be heard. Repeat this if you adjourn and reconvene.
- You should remind participants that all contributions must be made "through the Chair". This may limit free-flowing conversation but is likely to keep things more focused.
- You should also address members of the public who may be observing and highlight to them the process. Where there are members of the public having a contributory role in the meeting you should set out the rules on their participation. Confirm to them that you will invite them to contribute at the appropriate time(s).
- You will also need to remind Members of the need to introduce themselves at the start of every contribution. This will be particularly important if the Member concerned is not using the full Skype for Business platform and likewise members of the public using the same audio only route to contribute.
- If there is someone who is being disruptive, you should ask them to stop and only contribute as the rules and your management of the meeting provides for. If they fail to adhere to this warning, and perhaps a reminder warning, you may ask the Committee Officer to remove them from the meeting. The Committee Officer should confirm this has been done. If the individual has an ability to rejoin the meeting, you may need to adjourn while all participants except for the individual excluded is sent

new details as to how to access a new teleconference. This could necessitate an adjournment to another day.

- Be clear at the beginning about how long you expect the meeting to last and how you would like participants to communicate with you if they need to leave the meeting at any point before the end. For longer meetings it will be necessary to have an agreed break and it is suggested you should not run for more than 2 hours continually without one. The adjournment/ break might be for 30 minutes (for example) with participants rejoining from say the 20 minute point so that you can start on time and address connection issues beforehand.
- Be clear about which agenda item you are on at any one time. You will have been given a list of which Officers will introduce which items. They should be asked to make their contribution as relevant to that item. Officers are asked to turn their video off if they are not directly contributing to the meeting at that point in proceedings. All Officers are asked to mute their microphones too except when contributing.
- Some of the Committees have set procedures to be followed such as Licensing Hearings and the Public Speaking Scheme for Planning and the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committees, these still apply and will need to be adhered to. For individual items where there are Members of the Public or other contributors, be prepared to allow a minute or so before starting the item to allow the Committee Officer to call the Member of the public so that they can 'attend' for their contribution. This enables the management of contributions to be managed appropriately.
- Invite questions at an appropriate time after any item. Go through each Member by name to ask them if they have a question. Following the initial round of questions do the same again. You may need to remind participants to mute and unmute their microphones. Go through each Member in turn and ask if they have a comment to make. Remind them of the need for clarity and brevity.
- Make sure everyone has had a chance to speak, by checking at the end of each item if anyone has any final points. If someone has not said anything you might ask them by name, to ensure they have not dropped off the call or assist them if they have not had a chance to speak.
- Ask the legal advisor to the meeting, if present, whether they have anything to say on the issue before moving to determining the item.
- At the end of the item, sum up your understanding of the conclusion / decision reached (in the form of a motion, which will either be the recommendation as printed within the agenda, as amended through debate or an alternative motion being proposed) and ensure this is a motion of the (Committee) meeting before you move on to the next item. Ask someone to move/second that understanding and then ask each Member in turn to indicate if they support that understanding (motion). Obviously, if someone else has moved a motion before that you will seek the views of all Members present in the meeting whether they accept it or whether there is an amendment.
- Remember to thank anyone who has reported to the meeting and indicate that they can leave the meeting. It can be easy to forget this if you can't see them.
- It will be particularly important to keep the discussion focused and not to let people become distracted with unimportant peripheral points. You will need to control this firmly but diplomatically.
- It will be important to curtail the length of the meeting so that people remain engaged. Having a timed agenda can assist with this. If the business has not been finished within a reasonable timeframe and you feel participants are no longer concentrating it may be better to reconvene the meeting after a short break or at another time and date.

For this reason, it will be key when planning the agenda to ensure the most urgent and important items are dealt with first, leaving those which are less so to the end of the meeting.

- At the end of the meeting, close it and thank everyone for their participation.
- If you need to exclude the public to, say, receive legal advice or consider other information exempt from publication this is likely to be achieved by simply turning off the live stream. Following the appropriate resolution being passed, direct the Committee Officer to do this and ask them to confirm when they are sure it has been done. Any members of the public who have a contributory role in the meeting and who have dialed in must also be excluded. Again, ask the Committee Officer to check that there are no Members of the public connected to the teleconference and ensure that, if there are, they are removed. It is also important to ensure that there is no one present within your own surroundings, as the exclusion of the public also applies to individuals who may be occupying the same space you are in during your participation in the remote meeting. Proceed only when the Committee Officer confirms this. For certain types of tribunal style hearings other Members may also need to vacate the teleconference (e.g. Personnel Appeal and licensing hearings).

Technical problems

- If the call is disrupted by technical issues, such as poor audio or video quality due to a lack of good internet connectivity it may be necessary to call for a short adjournment of the meeting and use the alternative dial in details. Likewise, if there is a failure in the live stream for public meetings.
- If there is background noise, you may be able to privately message (using an instant message (IM)) the person whose microphone is not on mute or you can make a general request for people to recheck that they are on mute. It is important for everyone to be able to hear each other.

LEGAL NOTE:

A Member in remote attendance will be deemed to have left the meeting where, at any point in time during the meeting, any of the conditions for remote attendance contained in (a) above are not met. In such circumstance the Chairman may, as they deem appropriate;

- (i) adjourn the meeting for a short period to permit the conditions for remote attendance of a Member contained in (a) above to be re-established;
- (ii) count the number of Members in attendance for the purposes of the quorum; or
- (iii) continue to transact the remaining business of the meeting in the absence of the Member in remote attendance.

Notes for ‘Committee’ Members

You are also invited to read the “Suggested ground rules for participants in remote meetings” document that is provided at Appendix A.

Access arrangements

- Make sure you have been given the correct dial in details, start time and the alternative telephone number and conference ID code. We will send these to you as a Calendar invitation and separately as an email. It is intended that the meeting will have audio and video functions and to achieve this access for you should be using the full Skype for Business platform. For legal compliance the crucial element is that you can be heard and you can hear your colleague Councillors in the meeting (and officers and other parties to the meeting).

Know the technology

- Make sure you know how to use the technology and ask for assistance before the meeting if you are not familiar with the app being used.
- Consider how you are connecting to the internet. If others in your home/office etc are using the same wifi that could impact on the quality of the connection for your meeting. If you can arrange that your device for the meeting is the only one using the home/office wifi it could make a significant difference to your experience of it.
- All Members, Officers and anyone else having an active part in the meeting will be asked to log in the day before the meeting in a two hour window just to check that they have the right details and can talk through with the Committee Officer the arrangements for the meeting.
- Make sure you have enough devices/screens to participate in the meeting and read the papers at the same time.
- Make the best use of the technology – if you are having difficulty being heard/seen you can send an IM (instant message) through Skype to the Committee Officer (details will be in the modern.gov email with the details of the meeting).

Meeting management

- Members are reminded that remote meetings are formal meetings of the Council and the usual high standards of conduct must be observed.
- While the meeting will be open to the public, public access will be via the live stream of proceedings organised by the Committee Officer. As such please publicise their contact details if individuals want to watch/listen in to the meeting. Please do not pass on the Conference ID details or the Calendar invite/email with the log in details.
- Join the call 10-15 minutes before the start time to check your connections in advance of the start time of the meeting. If you need to leave by a certain time let the Chairman know this.
- At the start of the meeting, you will be invited to introduce yourself. This allows everyone to be aware of who is present. You will then be invited to mute your microphone until the time you wish to say something. Before each contribution you should say your name. Having contributed to the meeting you should mute your microphone again. You are recommended to keep your video on throughout. If you are not using the full Skype for Business platform this will not be possible.
- Officers in attendance (and Councillors who are not Members of the Committee) will be asked to turn their video feed off other than when they are contributing.

- A regular points in proceedings the Chairman will ask each Member of the 'Committee' whether they have any declarations of interest, questions, comments and whether they are for, against or abstain on a given motion/amendment. Where possible, please contribute at those opportunities. If there is a need to contribute/ask a question outside of those times please do so by requesting the Chairman to speak.
- If you need to leave the meeting at any point before the end please alert the Chairman. If this is not possible send an IM (instant message) through Skype to the Committee Officer (details will be in the modern.gov email with the details of the meeting). If you have left the meeting at any point during the debate, it may be considered you are unable to vote on the item, especially for regulatory matters such as licensing or planning.
- If the meeting is to last more than 2 hours the Chairman is invited to seek an adjournment. On this basis, at the reconvened meeting a roll call will again be taken.
- Be clear about which agenda item you are on at any one time. If you are unsure ask the Chairman.
- The Chairman will invite questions at an appropriate time after any item has been presented. He may also ask 'Committee' Members to indicate to him if they wish to speak on the particular item and remind them of the need for clarity and brevity.
- During remote meetings it is even more important to keep the discussion focused and not to become distracted with unimportant peripheral points.

Technical problems

- The Chairman may seek a short adjournment if the call is disrupted by technical issues, such as poor audio or video quality due to a lack of good internet connectivity.
- Throughout the meeting it is important for you to be able to hear all participants. It is imperative that you alert the Chairman/Committee Officer if you do not hear anything that is said.

LEGAL NOTE:

A Member in remote attendance will be deemed to have left the meeting where, at any point in time during the meeting, any of the conditions for remote attendance contained in (a) above are not met. In such circumstance the Chairman may, as they deem appropriate;

- (i) adjourn the meeting for a short period to permit the conditions for remote attendance of a Member contained in (a) above to be re-established;
- (ii) count the number of Members in attendance for the purposes of the quorum; or
- (iii) continue to transact the remaining business of the meeting in the absence of the Member in remote attendance.

Notes for Other Councillors

You are also invited to read the “Suggested ground rules for participants in remote meetings” document that is provided at Appendix A.

- If you do not have any intention of making a contribution to the meeting, you are encouraged to observe formal meetings of Councillors using the live stream of it (for public meetings). Please check the agenda sheet/web page for the meeting to obtain the link details for the live stream.
- If you are to make a contribution to the meeting under a provision of the Constitution/participation scheme the Committee Officer will offer to call you just before your contribution will be due. Before that (and afterwards) you may watch the live stream. It is preferable to have two telephone numbers for you so that we can do everything we can to provide for your contribution at the appropriate point in the meeting.
- If you wish you may join the meeting from the very beginning if it. Again, liaise with the Committee Officer so that they can discuss how they invite you to attend just before the start of it.
- Make sure you know how to use the technology and how to join the meeting. If you are not clear, ask the Committee Officer beforehand. Feel free to ask the Committee Officer for a trial run of your preferred connection on the day before.
- Consider how you are connecting to the internet. If others in your home/office etc are using the same wifi that could impact on the quality of the connection for your meeting. If you can arrange that your device for the meeting is the only one using the home/office wifi it could make a significant difference to your experience of it.
- All Councillors who are not Members of the ‘Committee’ and should turn their video and microphone off when they are not contributing. Introduce yourself each time you make a contribution. Turn the video and microphone on when you contribute and off again afterwards.
- Be absolutely clear what you want the meeting participants to know and how much time you have.
- Before the meeting, provide to the Committee Officer any written material or photographs etc which you intend to present at the meeting so that they can be circulated by email or put onto the (‘Committee’) meeting portal. This will ensure everyone can see them, even if there is an unexpected glitch with the technology.
- Follow any ground rules for the meeting.
- Make sure you only speak for your allotted time slot.
- When you have finished hand back to the Chairman. If questions of you are permitted or if you have an opportunity for a supplementary question/statement the Chairman will advise you.
- Once your item is finished and if you do not have a planned contribution for another item, you are encouraged to leave the meeting and you may watch proceedings on the live stream.

Appendix A

Suggested “ground rules” for participants in remote meetings

- If possible, attend the meeting in a quiet space (such as a home office), away from other family members and pets. Let the other members of your household know that you need to be on the call without interruptions and when you are likely to be finished. If you have children, it is best to arrange for childcare for the duration of the meeting if children are too young to be left unattended or play quietly for that long and you are attending the meeting from home.
- Be well prepared, assemble all you need in good time, including any papers for the meeting, pens and paper to write on, devices to read the papers on and to join the call, your glasses and any refreshments you may need. Remember that others can hear you on the call and noises of eating and drinking will be off putting. Try to stick to drinks only and go on mute when you consume them. Remember to use the bathroom before the meeting - much better than having to leave the call part way through. Comfort breaks should be offered if the meeting is a long one.
- Make sure all the devices you need for the meeting are fully charged or connected to power from the start of the call if there is any doubt that their remaining battery life is enough for the expected duration of the call.
- Put your mobile phone (and any other devices which are close by) onto silent mode, or switch them off if you don't need them.
- You may find it easier to concentrate if you use headphones or a headset as these will cut out any background noise in your location.
- Join the call in plenty of time, try joining or dialling in at least 10-15 minutes before the start so that if you have any connection issues you have time to resolve them.
- Make sure your microphone is working but keep it on mute throughout the meeting, except when you wish to make a comment or ask a question.
- Speak clearly and with sufficient volume into the microphone – you need to be heard but there should not be a need to raise your voice unduly.
- Remember to mute your microphone again after speaking.
- Participating successfully in a remote meeting can be difficult. Try not to speak across others or interrupt and where possible wait to be invited to speak by the Chair. If you do start to speak at the same time as someone else, pause and offer them the opportunity to go first. The person chairing the meeting should come back to you. If not try again once the other person has finished.

And additionally for video teleconferences:

- If you are using a video link remember that everyone will be able to see what you are wearing and make sure it is appropriate. Neutral colours and backgrounds work well.
- Check the view people will get from your camera and remove anything in the way or which might cause a distraction.
- Ensure your location is well lit, natural light is regarded as best but may vary during the day and may not be bright enough in the evening. So a

good artificial light (preferably not immediately behind you) is recommended.

- Look at the camera if you are on a video call. If you can be seen by everyone else all of the time, keep this in mind for the duration of the meeting.
- If connection issues are affecting your experience of the meeting you can turn off your video to see if that improves things. It would be advisable to let the others in the meeting know this is the case.

Appendix B

Example welcome text for the Chairman of the Meeting

Welcome everyone to this meeting, my name is Councillor [.....]. I am the Chairman for this meeting. I will shortly invite my fellow Councillors on the Committee to confirm they can hear the meeting and preferably see it too. I will then ask the appropriate Committee Officer to confirm that the live stream of this meeting is active. The purpose of both of these actions is to ensure that we meet the legal requirements for remote meetings of Councils.

Following this, I will move through the agenda for the meeting. This agenda is available on line at the Council's website following the links to 'Council and Democracy', 'Committees' and then the [.....] Committee. A link to the live stream of the meeting is also available from there and in the next few days there will be a copy of the recording of the meeting.

My fellow Councillors on the Committee are being asked to keep their video feed on during the entire meeting. Officers of the Council and Councillors who are not on the Committee are respectfully asked to keep their video feed off while they are not contributing to the meeting. Everyone is asked to mute their microphone unless they are contributing. When contributing everyone is asked to say their name so that those listening in can follow who has said what.

At relevant times during the meeting I will check that Members of the Committee can hear the meeting, and preferably see it too. I would ask that where possible Members of the Committee contribute at those times so that we only have one person talking at a time. If a Member of the Committee does need to contribute at other times, for instance to declare an interest not already declared, then they should alert me as Chairman by interrupting briefly and then allowing me to invite them to make their point. Something like 'Chairman, it's Councillor XXX, I wish to make a point' will be sufficient.

As we move between items on the agenda, if there are members of the public who are to be invited to speak on the next item, I will pause after the end of the one item and before starting the next one. I will ask the Committee Officer to confirm if we have the members of the public invited in so that, when ready, they can make their contribution. Once this is confirmed I will start the item concerned. The same will apply to Councillors who are not members of the Committee and who are to contribute.

For the purposes of managing the meeting I will ask the Committee Officer to confirm that all members of the public who no longer have a contribution still to make under our public participation schemes have either left the meeting or will be removed. I will await that confirmation before moving on. They may continue to watch the live stream of the proceedings.

At the end of each item I will either move a motion and ask for it to be seconded or I will ask someone to propose and second a motion if one has not already been proposed. I will then ask each Councillor on the Committee in turn to identify how they vote on that motion. The Minutes will only record the overall

decision of the Committee unless a recorded vote is requested in accordance with the normal rules.

So, in thanking you for your patience as I went through these arrangements for the meeting, I now intend to start by inviting my fellow Councillors on the Committee to confirm in turn they can hear the meeting and preferably see it too. Councillor [.....], Councillor [.....], Councillor [.....], etc.

Waiting for responses at each point

Now, the Committee Officer please confirm that the live stream of this meeting is active.

Waiting for the response.

Now we are at the first item on the agenda 'Apologies for absence and Substitutions'. Can the Committee Officer please read out the details please?

Waiting for the response.

And then proceed as indicated through the agenda