



Guidance for Officers 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:

- Committee Officers
- Other Officers

Separate guidance exists for Committee Chairmen, Committee Members and other Councillors ‘attending’ formal meetings of Committees.

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 officers should use their work laptop/Surface Pro. 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 Committee Officer

- Check that the Calendar invite went out with the Skype link (and external telephone number and conference ID) and was repeated in the separate email about the meeting (including the link to the documents to be considered). Make sure other contributors to the meeting outside of the Council have the external dial in/Conference ID details as required. Make sure that the meeting set up permits those in the organization to join automatically and those outside of the organization are held in a lobby for you to bring them in when the meeting starts/at the appropriate point. Members of the public will not normally be sent the connection details for the meeting. They will instead be sent the link to the live stream for them to listen/watch and be asked for contact details so that they can be invited to join at the appropriate point.
- 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.
- Join the call 20-15 minutes before the start time to check everyone else joins in an orderly way, in case there are any issues. Make sure you know how each individual should be accessing the meeting, how to record it and how to remove any individuals identified by the Chairman as disruptive and who (s)he wants removed.
- Make sure the live stream is working and ready for the start of the meeting. If there is a problem with the live stream you will need to alert the Committee Chairman.
- As with all officers, you should turn your video and microphone off when you are not contributing. Remember to introduce yourself each time you make a contribution. Turn them on when you do and off again afterwards.
- Make sure you have the agenda, papers and correspondence with Members etc. on hand to refer to. Also have a copy of the Constitution in either paper or electronic format with you to refer to and thereby offer advice as appropriate.
- Check with the Chairman when those in the lobby area are to be given access to the meeting. Then let them in and confirm this has happened to the Chairman.
- Check that the Chairman has said the meeting will be live streamed and recorded. Then start the live feed and press the record button as referenced on the separate guide for recording and accessing those recordings. You will host and control the meeting.
- Make sure everyone (including you) understands how to use the technology and remember to offer the two hour slot the day before as a practice session (and then crucially to be available during that 2 hour slot). You can continue to work while the session is on as long as you acknowledge the Members and others as they connect in. In particular, ensure everyone knows how to mute and unmute their microphones and how to send a message if they need to.
- Have IT support on standby for the duration of the meeting to assist with any issues with the technology and make sure you have their mobile phone number.
- Check that each participant will have access to enough screens or devices to access the (Committee) meeting pack and see any video input from the call if needed. It may be necessary to supply co-optees (e.g. independent persons at Standards Committee remote meetings) with devices/headsets

and so on if they don't have their own. These will be on loan while they hold that position (or for a shorter time).

- Make sure other officers know how they will be told to dial in or join the meeting and message them at the appropriate time if it is your job to do so, or remind anyone else who should be doing that.
- Agree with the Chairman beforehand how you will communicate with them during the meeting, if you need to. Instant messaging (IM) may be the fastest and most reliable method.
- Agree the ground rules with the Chairman and circulate them ahead of the meeting.
- Send the Chairman a list of all contributors in alphabetic order based on Members, Officers and then Other contributors. This list should identify who should be called to present which item (and if two officers are to present on the same item who is to be called first). For other contributors it is really helpful to have the telephone number they will be calling from so that you can identify whether they are on the line or not. An alternative number will help with any connection issues.
- Agree with the Chairman the optimum meeting length and bear in mind a remote meeting may take longer than a face to face one run in the same way. Talk to the Chairman about scheduled comfort breaks if appropriate.
- Make sure Members know they can send you an instant message (IM) if they need to during the meeting. Be aware that this is separate from the IM facility for the meeting itself which is visible to all participants. Set up an IM group for all officers attending the meeting. This avoids multiple IMs between officers running during the meeting and issues being lost.
- As well as taking notes during the meeting be aware of what is going on in the discussion and with the technology and offer support if required. For public meetings, from time to time check on the live stream to ensure it is working. If it isn't you will need to advise the Chairman.
- On each item, the Chairman will seek to ascertain the views of Members. For some items this may just be by checking that everyone is in agreement, nobody against or abstaining. More likely though is that he will need to ask each Member to say if they are approving an understanding/decision/motion in turn. Only if the Member asks for their vote to be recorded should this be the case. Nothing in this removes the right in meetings to implement a recorded vote and in those cases a full record will be inserted in the Minutes.
- If there is someone who is being disruptive, the Chairman should ask them to stop. If they fail to adhere to this warning, and perhaps a reminder warning, the Chairman may ask you to remove the disruptive person from the meeting. You should confirm this has been done. If the individual has an ability to rejoin the meeting, you may be asked to set up a new teleconference and send to all participants except for the individual excluded the new details. This could necessitate an adjournment to another day. If so publication of the revised arrangements should not be forgotten.
- Make sure other officers leave after their particular item, unless they have been invited by the Chairman to remain.
- The meeting will normally be open to the public. For most this will be through the live streaming you will have activated. For those members of the public who have a contribution to the meeting (e.g. public questions, right to speak, submission of petitions), they will be asked to provide you with contact details to use to invite them into the meeting. Identify what item they are interested in and their contact details (including the telephone number they will be using to dial in). Make sure they understand the limitations on their role. They will not be able to see the detail as to who else is present and participating unless they are watching the live feed for the meeting. So make sure they are aware

of this. They should be asked to leave the conference call after their contribution.

- If a member of the public having a right to make a contribution to the meeting cannot actually attend in person they could submit their contribution to you to be circulated, played or otherwise made available to the Committee at the relevant point in the meeting. It is always useful to have any prepared contribution sent to you for the purposes of constructing the record of the meeting (particularly if some of what they say is distorted on the call).

Notes for Other Officers

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

- Make sure you know how to use the technology and how to join the meeting. If you are not clear, ask beforehand.
- 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 officers should turn your 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 the meeting participants need to know, what you want to say, and what you want from the meeting
- Provide all materials (including slides) which you intend to present at the meeting to the Committee Officer beforehand 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. Where possible convert documents to pdfs as these take up less bandwidth to present and for participants to receive.
- You should have been given an indication of the approximate time when you will be required to join the meeting. You should also have been told how long you are expected to present and allow time for questions. If you haven't been, then ask beforehand.
- You should have been told about how you will know exactly when to join, usually by a call or message when the meeting has reached your item on the agenda.
- Don't join the meeting before you are invited to, meetings rarely run exactly to time. For public meetings you can watch the proceedings on the live stream and enter the meeting in good time for when you are required.
- Follow any ground rules for the meeting.
- If there is more than one person presenting, agree beforehand who is going to do what so the presentation runs smoothly and seamlessly. Be clear when you are handing over to each other.
- If you are referring to a (Committee) meeting paper or slide deck, regularly refer to where you are in the document or deck, so that others can easily follow, mentioning the page/ slide number when you move on. It may be possible for you to share your paper or slides within the app, although the (Committee) meeting may prefer to see you and have the slides separately.
- Make sure you only speak for your allotted time slot.
- When you have finished hand back to the Chairman, who may invite questions from the (Committee) meeting.
- Once your item is finished and if you are not needed for any others you should be asked by the Chairman to leave the meeting. If not, then you should indicate that you are about to leave the meeting if you are no longer required. You should ensure you close the app or hang up the call when you leave the meeting

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 keep your video off to see if that improves things. It would be advisable to let the others in the meeting know this is the case given the earlier advice.