



Virtual Meeting Policy

November 2020

1. Introduction

Wareham Town Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist the Mayor, Chairmen, Councillors, staff 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 meeting on and up to 7 May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will continue to be published on physical noticeboards. Any person 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. In cases that documents originate from a third party electronic links will be provided where available.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Wareham Town 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 Town Clerk will publish via the summons:

- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID

Passwords will not be required in compliance with NALC guidance to make the meetings as accessible as possible.

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a place.

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

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

During the meeting all persons other than the Mayor/Chairman and Clerk will be muted. Members of the public will also have their video turned off.

Members of the public have been advised, through the summons to submit their questions or comments under 'Public Participation' in advance of the meeting to the Clerk and these will be made available to all Councillors. Members of the public may also link in to observe the meeting but will not be invited to speak at the meeting unless under exceptional circumstance and by express permission of the Mayor/Chairman.

During the meeting members and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

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

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity the Chairman 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. In this event the Mayor will seek confirmation from the Member that they were present for the entire debate on the item in order to be able to vote.

d. Attendance

Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly (i.e. at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time) in order to resolve any issues with joining and avoid disrupting the meeting. 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 10 minutes. After 10 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chairman 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.

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

Members are asked to treat virtual meetings with the same respect that they would if they were present in the Council Chamber. Members should be professional throughout the proceedings and should therefore:

- Dress as though they were in attendance at the Council Chamber
- Be aware of their screen appearance and background
- Ensure that there are no interruptions to their attendance from external influences

Members should not:

- Drink alcohol during the meeting
- Eat during the meeting
- Hold discussions with others in their household while the meeting is taking place
- Wander away from screen
- Leave the meeting without explanation or apology

7. Declaration of Interests

A councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the 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 pre-submitted addresses from the press and public.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with by exclusion of the press and public under *Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960*. Members of the press and public will be removed from the meeting to enable Councillors to continue with confidential matters

10. Recording

Zoom meetings will be recorded at the discretion of the Clerk and for the purposes of the minutes and the recordings of such will be deleted once the minutes of that meeting have been approved.

11. Information

The chat view box on the Zoom meeting will be disabled however it will provide additional information to attendees depending on the specific meeting.

Policy adopted 24 November 2020

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/contents/made>