KEYNSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Virtual Meeting Protocol
May 2020

1. Background

1.0 The legal framework for local council meetings requires that all council meetings are open to the public and that unless confidential, that the public can watch the debate and see the decisions that are made.

1.1. As soon as the Corona Virus 19 "lock down" period came into effect Local Councils were unable to meet physically i.e. all members and the public in one physical place. The advice was for Local Councils to adopt a scheme of delegation to the Clerk to allow essential decisions to be taken. The purpose of this delegation was to protect the council whilst the law did not allow decisions to be taken outside of properly convened physical meetings.

1.2. The legislation has now been changed and Local Councils are expected to meet whenever essential decisions need to be made using technology. It should be noted that:

- The council can choose to reduce the number of meetings whilst there is little or no business to transact and rely on a scheme of delegation to the Clerk between meetings. NOTE: If the council decides to rely solely on a scheme of delegation instead of meeting it may be challenged or criticised as there is now a statutory mechanism for holding remote meetings.
- The law still allows 2 councillors to demand a council meeting and this request would have to be fulfilled now that a remote meeting is possible.
- The legislation permitting remote attendance by members and members of the public remains in place until May 2021. The council will be required to offer remote access to its meetings until then, even when the "lock down" has been lifted and it decides to return to physical meetings, as some people may still wish to reduce their contact with others for health reasons.

2. Introduction to new legislation

2.1. On 4th April 2020 the Government introduced The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which allows local councils to meet remotely. These regulations apply to meetings held before 7th May 2021

2.2. In order to meet the regulations, the following conditions must be satisfied Members in remote attendance 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

2.3. The purpose of a remote meeting must be for the Council to deal with urgent business that it needs to transact. Matters that are not urgent should wait until social gathering restrictions are lifted and the Council and members of the public can safely physically convene together face to face in one room once again.

3.0 Technology

3.1. For the purposes of holding remote meetings, *Keynsham Town* Council will use the Zoom Video*Conferencing Platform*. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems

3.2. Guidance on how to use the video-conferencing platform will be circulated to all members and officers and will be publicly available on the Council's website. Instructions are also available on the Zoom website https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-How-Do-I-Join-A-Meeting-

3.3. It is recommended that Member test their accessibility and ability to log on to specific meetings in advance of the meeting start time and notify the Clerk of the meeting by telephone if there are technical issues relating to access to these meetings

4.0 Preparing for the Meeting

4.1. The meeting will be advertised on the Council's website and all members and officers due to attend will be issued with a notice and agenda by email. This will be within the usual timeframe for meeting notices

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

- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4.3. It may be necessary for members to prepare themselves for the meeting in a different way than usual. Where members do not have access to a printer, it may be necessary to familiarise themselves with the agenda and any reports beforehand

4.4. All non-confidential meeting papers will be available on the Council's website and will be circulated electronically to Councillors. Councillors who normally receive hard copies will continue to do so to their home address and any other Member requiring hard copies is asked to contact the Clerk of the meeting giving three days notice

4.5. Confidential documents are restricted to Town Councillors only. Electronic copies must be deleted after the meeting and hard copies will need to be returned to the Town Council offices/collected by the Clerk as soon as possible

4.6. Minutes will be taken in the usual way and displayed on the website *in line with the Council's Transparency Code.* Minutes will be circulated electronically after the meeting and signed at a future face-to-face meeting once restrictions have been lifted

4.7. Where a member is unable to attend a meeting, apologies will be submitted and received in the usual way

4.8. The meetings will be open to the public and ways of accessing the meeting will explained on the agenda (or on the meeting notice).

5.0. Public Participation

5.1. The agenda will invite the public to attend and will include information of how to access meetings and a link to published documents

5.2. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda/supporting documents to be forwarded as appropriate

5.3. In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will publish via the summons:
- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

Any person wishing to dial in with a telephone is asked to contact the Clerk for details of the dal-in number to join the meeting

5.4. The usual public participation session will take place. In accordance with Standing Order 3(e) (ii), Members of the Public will have the opportunity to ask the Chairman any question concerning, or make observations upon, the business of the Council, at the start of the meeting, provided notice of the question along with the name and address of the member of public has been given to the Town Clerk at least four clear days before the meeting where possible, and in any case to the Chairman before the meeting. This also applies to all Committees of the Council

5.5. The Council will be prioritising and focusing on urgent issues/business. Members of the public wishing to address the Council during Public Participation are asked to bring this to the attention of the Clerk or in any case the Chairman before the start of the meeting and are reminded that the Council cannot make any decision on matters that do not appear on the agenda. If any members of the public have questions about matters not on the agenda, they are requested to contact the Clerk of the meeting by telephoning 07904 161097 or emailing townclerk@keynsham-tc.gov.uk

5.6. The Clerk will read any presubmitted addresses from the press and public

5.7. The Chairman of the meeting may instruct the meeting host (If not the Chairman) to remove anyone from the meeting who is being intentionally disruptive, using offensive language or incessantly interrupting the meeting proceedings.

6.0 The meeting

6.1. The Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk will set up and technically host the meeting

6.2 Councillors are asked to ensure they are in a place with as little background noise as possible. Once checks have been carried out to ensure that everyone in attendance can be heard, all those in attendance are asked to "mute" their microphones until such a time as they are ready to speak. This eliminates background and feedback as well as ensures people are not talking over one another as there can sometimes be a time delay. Where this is not done, the host of the meeting may mute attendees

6.3. Whilst the [*Proper Officer*] is hosting the meeting, it will be chaired in the usual manner. There is a possibility that there will be more input from the [*Proper Officer*] than is usual given that, where members do not have access to a printer, it is

possible that they will not be able to use the computer video function and look at the agenda and/or supporting papers at the same time.

6.4. It is possible that the meeting will be recorded (via the video conferencing platform itself). This is to aid the writing of minutes in a situation where the minute-taker is involved with technical aspects of the meeting as well as for openness and transparency

6.5 The Chair will open the meeting and confirm that all those present are able to hear/see the proceedings. A roll call of members present at the meeting will be taken and the quorum for the meeting confirmed based on those members attending remotely

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

6.7 Those in attendance are asked to physically raise their hands when they wish to speak. Anyone dialing in by telephone will be advised of a word to use to enable them to "raise a hand" vocally

6.8 If a vote is required, those attending by video will be asked to raise their hand until they have been advised that their vote has been recorded. Any members attending by telephone will be asked to express their vote vocally

6.9 If you have difficulty hearing or being heard throughout the meeting, you are asked to advise the host of the meeting via the text "chat" function. Please be aware that this can be seen by everyone in attendance

7.0 Conduct and etiquette at Remote Meetings

7.1 The same standards of behaviour are applied to remote meetings as to physical meetings. Members are reminded that meetings cannot occur where alcohol is being served. All members are bound by the Council's Code of Conduct and Members and Officers Protocol

7.2 Where a councillor has an interest in a matter and would normally leave a physical meeting, they will exit the meeting. They will either wait in the virtual "waiting room" or leave completely and be advised by text message (by the [*Proper Officer*]) when they can return to the meeting

7.3 Members, officers and members of the public are asked to be patient with those who are less experienced in such meetings

7.4 Members and officers in attendance at the meeting are reminded to check the background of their video range in order to ensure confidentiality, data protection and Code of Conduct requirements are met

7.5 It is possible that technical issues may arise. It may be necessary for the host to request clarification or ask for dialogue to be repeated to make sure everyone can be heard and that they have the correct information for the minutes

7.6 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 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

8.0 Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with either through removing non-Councillor participants or through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non confidential matters on an agenda the meeting will be suspended for the host to disengage non-Members and/or for members to rejoin using the confidential zoom meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

9.0 Further Information

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

Approved and Adopted by Keynsham Town Council Tuesday 19th May 2020