



STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL

VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY

Introduction

Stotfold 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 Chairmen, 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 Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ("the 2020 Regulations")' and that are currently enacted for meeting on and up to 7th May 2021.

Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summoned as per regulation with the agenda and documents being placed on the council's website and emailed to members. When possible, agendas will also be displayed on the council's noticeboard at the Greenacre Centre. Any person unable to access to 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.

Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Stotfold Town Council will utilise Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) or Zoom to provide video communications. The Clerk will Host the meeting using the Town Council-paid account. If required by council, the meeting platform may be reviewed, and alternative suitable platform used.

An invitation to the public to register to attend the meeting will be published on the agenda, in order that they can be provided with a meeting link to attend, just as they would be able to attend a meeting in the Greenacre Centre.

Attendees will also have the ability to dial in to the meeting via telephone.

All attendees will collect in the virtual 'waiting room' prior to the meeting.

Standing Orders

The meeting will be a formal Town Council or committee meeting and will be held using the agenda and summons which the Clerk has published. It will be governed by the usual Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and associated policies.

Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

1) Identification

All councillor attendees will display their name in order for the public to be able to identify them, just as they would at an in-person meeting.

2) Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 4.

All attendees will be set to 'mute' on entry to the meeting to avoid unnecessary background noise and interference, and only the Chairman of the meeting and the Clerk, and those attending the meeting by telephone, will remain unmuted.

During the meeting, members of the public will be muted. During the public participation period, members of the public having previously requested to speak, will be invited to do so by the Chairman. Their microphone will be unmuted and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, their microphone will be muted.

Members should also remain muted during the meeting to avoid unnecessary background noise. Members wishing to speak, should indicate by raise their hands using the 'raise hand' button (or wave so that the Chairman can see), and they will be invited to unmute themselves and to speak. Where a member does not have a webcam or is not visible on the meeting screen, they may unmute themselves and request to speak.

The Clerk will have the ability to mute anyone who forgets during the meeting.

3) Voting

Voting will be undertaken by a show of hands and use of the 'raise hand' button is encouraged. Where all voting participants have webcams and are visible on the meeting screen, physically holding up a hand is also acceptable. Where this is not the case, a roll-call vote will take place – the Chairman will ask each member to give their vote by audio.

4) 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.

5) 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 re-join for a period 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' notice being given. Members will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.

6) 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.

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. As the Host, the Clerk will have the ability to mute or remove anyone

deemed a nuisance at the Chairman's request. For a member of the public or press, this may result in them being dismissed from the meeting.

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.

Public Participation

The Clerk will read any pre-submitted address from the press and public first, before the Chairman invites any member of the public who has requested to speak, to do so.

Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Teams meeting that is available to members only.

Recording

Teams meetings will not automatically be recorded, and those that are will be at the discretion of the Chairman – those present will be notified that the meeting is being recorded and the recording will be made available to members, the press and members of the public. Members are reminded that as per Standing Orders, a person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public – this means film, photograph, make an audio recording or to later provide an oral or written commentary about the meeting.

This procedure was considered by the Establishment Committee meeting on 27th May 2020, and the recommendation for approval was resolved by full Council on 17th June 2020. This procedure will be reviewed in one year.