

Woodhall Spa Parish Council

Remote Meetings Protocols and Procedures June 2020

1. Introduction

1.1

This protocol and procedures document provides the means and guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of the Woodhall Spa Parish Council and its various Committees, held under the provision of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meeting) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No. 392 (The Regulations).

1.2

This document should be read in conjunction with the Parish Council's Standing Orders. The Regulations, made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, apply notwithstanding any other legislation or current or pre-existing standing orders or any other rules of the Parish Council governing meetings and remain valid until 7th May 2021. This means that wherever there is a conflict, these Remote Meeting Procedure Rules take precedence in relation to any remote meeting.

2. Annual Parish Council Meeting

2.2

The requirement to hold an Annual Parish Meeting in 2020 is to be disregarded and the current appointments to the Parish Council, Committees and Outside Bodies will continue.

3. Access to information

3.2

The Chairman will publish the date and time of remote meetings including associated agendas and supporting documentation through the Parish Council's website in line with legislative requirements.

3.3

For all purposes, the terms "notice", "summons", "agenda", "report", "written record" and "background papers" when referred to as being a document that is:

- (i) "open to inspection" shall include for these and all other purposes as being published on the web site of the Parish Council; and
- (ii) To be published, posted, or made available at offices of the Parish Council, shall include for these purposes being published on the Parish Council website.

3.4

An electronic copy of the agenda and supporting papers will be available to Councillors via e mail.

4. Organisation of Remote Meetings of the Parish Council

4.1

The Chairman and the Clerk will organise and support the facilitation of remote meetings. Facilitation is likely to include but not be limited to controlling access to the meetings, supporting microphone/speaker management, advising on speaker times, supporting voting procedures and acting as a contact point for issues.

5. Place of the Remote Meeting

5.1

A reference to a meeting of the Parish Council is not limited to a meeting of persons present in the same place. Any reference to "place" at which the meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses, or conference call telephone numbers.

6. Attendance of Members at Remote Meetings

6.1

A member attends the meeting at any time if all the following conditions are satisfied at any given time in the meeting:

- (i) to hear, and where practicable see, and be heard and, where practicable, be seen by the other members in attendance.
- (ii) To hear, and where practicable see, and be seen by any other members of the public entitled to attend the meeting to exercise a right to speak at the meeting, and
- (iii) To be heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other member of the public attending the meeting.

6.2

Should any aspect of an individual's remote participation fail, the Chairman may call a short adjournment of up to ten minutes to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established, either by video technology or telephone in the alternative. If the connection is not restored within that time, the meeting shall continue to deal with the business whilst this happens providing the meeting remains quorate.

6.3

In the event of a connection failure, the remote Councillors will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Councillors before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with agenda items.

6.4

If the connection is successfully re-established, then the remote Councillor(s) will be deemed to have returned to the meeting at the point of re-establishment. If the Councillor who was disconnected has missed part of the debate, then they will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the facts.

6.5

The final decision of whether a Councillor is deemed to have been in attendance shall be that of the Chairman of the Meeting.

6.6

The attendance of Councillors at the meeting will be recorded by the Clerk.

6.7

The quorum requirements for remote meetings will be 4 Councillors for Full Council Meetings and 3 Councillors for Planning & Resource Committee Meetings.

7. Public Speaking at Remote Meetings

7.1

Any member of the public participating in a meeting remotely in exercise of their rights to speak at Council or Committee meetings must meet the same criteria as members of the Parish Council. Members of the public attending a meeting remotely must, likewise, when they are speaking, be able to be heard (and ideally be seen) by all Councillors in attendance, and the remote participant must, in turn, be able to hear (and ideally see) those Councillors participating and be heard, and where practicable, seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting

The Chairman/Clerk shall be able to mute the members of the public once they have spoken and remove them from the remote meeting to maintain good administration of the meeting or to retain order.

8. Joining a Remote Meeting

8.1

Details of where to attend the remote meeting will be included on the Parish Council's website and on the meeting agenda.

8.2

Participants, observing Councillors, members of the public and the press will be able to join the Remote Meeting prior to the start time of the Meeting using the details provided. Sound and visual checks will take place with each participant following which the participants microphone should be muted. Members of the public intending on speaking at the meeting are requested to follow these procedures.

9. Attendance of public, press and Member observers at Remote Meetings

9.1

Where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.

10. Opening the Remote Meeting and confirming attendance

10.1

The first item on the agenda will be Register of Attendance (replacing Apologies for Absence). The Clerk will conduct a visual check of all Councillors present and record this for the minutes.

11. Approving Minutes

11.1

For ease the Chairman and Vice Chair will propose and second minutes of the previous meeting. The Chairman will then invite Councillors to confirm the minutes as accurate. This shall be confirmed by Councillors clicking the green button if they agree or the red button if they do not support.

11.2

Any inaccuracies shall be recorded in the usual manner.

12. Declarations of interest

12.1

Any Councillor participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or other declarable interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. Their departure will be confirmed by the Clerk who will remove the Councillor from the meeting and then re-admit them at the appropriate time.

13. Meeting Procedures

13.1

The Chairman will follow the rules set out in Standing Orders when determining who may speak, as well as the order and priority of speakers and the content and length of speeches in the normal way.

13.2

The Chairman, at the beginning of the meeting and if required during the meeting will explain the protocol for Councillors and members of the public participation and the rules of debate. The Chairman's ruling during the debate will be final.

13.3

Councillors are asked to adhere to the following procedures during remote attendance at a meeting:

- Councillors are asked to join the meeting 15 minutes before the start to allow themselves and the Clerk the opportunity to test the equipment.
- Any camera (video feed) should show a non-descript background or a virtual background and Councillors should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video feed.
- Councillors shall type their name on joining the meeting in full, i.e. "Cllr John Smith".
- All Councillors must mute their microphone when not talking due to sound feedback.
- Councillors should use the raise hand button if they wish to speak. The Chairman will call the names the name of speakers, assisted by the Clerk if required, in the order they are received. Councillors will unmute their microphone when the Chairman invites them to speak, once they have spoken, they will mute their microphone and close the raise hand option down.
- Only one person may speak at any one time.
- When referring to a specific agenda item, report or page, Councillors are required to state the item they are speaking about so all participants have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

13.4

When members of the public are exercising speaking rights at the meeting via remote attendance, the Chairman will as part of their introduction explain the procedures for their participation which will reflect those relevant elements of the above. Members of the public must adhere to the procedures otherwise they may be excluded from the meeting.

13.5

When the Chairman is satisfied that there are no more speakers the item will be required to be proposed and seconded and the Chairman will progress to a decision by Councillors clicking the green button to support the motion, or red button to object. Any Councillor not placing a vote will be recorded as abstaining. The Clerk will record all decisions made in this manner and announce the outcome.

14. Exclusion of Public and Press

14.1

There are times when Council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential or exempt issues (as defined in Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972) are under consideration. If a meeting is required to enter closed session then the Clerk remove from the remote meeting all participants who are not entitled to hear the proceedings. The Chairman will ask for this to be confirmed before proceeding.

14.2

The Chairman will ask each Councillor in remote attendance to verbally declare that there are no other persons present at their location who are not entitled to either hear or see proceedings and that no recording of proceedings is taking place at their location.

14.3

Any Councillor in remote attendance who fails to disclose that there were in fact persons present who were not entitled to be would be in breach of the Councillors Code of Conduct.