

Participants Guidance – Virtual Meetings

Since the introduction of regulations providing local authorities with the power to provide 'virtual' meetings Democratic Services, IT and Legal Services have worked together to enable these to happen.

This has created more demand on officer's time especially in IT and Democratic Services. To ensure quality and consistency of meetings we all need to work together to assist the process in every way we can.

There is a necessity for Democratic Service officers to know who is going to speak and in what order as far as we are able. That is because they are the 'Producers' of the meeting. They need to be able to know who to connect to next. There is a 3 second time lag between speakers and we are trying not to increase that.

IT are supporting the network and connectivity during the meetings. They 'Enable' the meetings to take place. Legal Services work on the procedure and advise during the meetings. They 'Direct' the meetings. Colleagues from IT, Democratic Services and Legal Services may be present at Muriel Matters house for the duration of the meetings in order to facilitate the process.

There needs to be much more communication and co-operation between us all before the meeting. That is to enable the slick production of the meeting so that the public and press watch an image which is as good as if they were in the room.

With this in mind it is necessary for Legal Services and Democratic Services to know the following in advance of each meeting;

- Absence and lateness
- Items to be called and any changes to the agenda
- Proposer and seconder of motions
- Who will be presenting and speaking on agenda items

It is necessary for officers to contact participants before the meeting takes place so that we can check that there are no issues with the link and we can see and hear you if necessary.

All participants should regularly check their internet connectivity and council issued devices are in working order. If you are aware there is a technical issue then please contact IT Helpdesk without delay. The sooner you report a problem the sooner it can be resolved. This is important as we may need to adjourn the meeting if we are not quorate or if you are late joining the meeting you may not be able to participate in an agenda item.

If equipment or network failure occurs there is a telephone 'dial in' procedure in to the meetings. It is good practice for participants to remain on mute when they are not speaking. This significantly improves the sound quality as does wearing provided headsets which **must** be worn.

At the start of a meeting it is expected that the Chair will introduce all councillors present so that the public get to see the decision makers. Depending on what meeting we are producing the participants may be visual all of the time or just when they are speaking. Councillors should have their cameras switched on at all times.

Meeting participants can use the 'raise the hand facility' available on Teams when they wish to speak. For council meetings your name will be called out when you have raised your hand. Please lower your hand after your name has been called out as the Mayor has a note of your name. Please do not re-raise your hand after your name has been called out.

Meeting participants should also consider the lighting arrangements to ensure that their image is clearly seen on screen. Councillors should ensure that they have the Council's logo as their background without exception.

When considering Part 2 items participants should ensure that there is no one else in the room who may be able to hear confidential Council information. Similarly, participants need to be aware of their surroundings if they are participating in meetings on mobile devices and generally. Anyone can be seen publicly if they are in view of the camera, children, pets, other persons. Please ensure that the space that you are using remains free for the expected duration of the meeting.

Councillors need to be aware that what they do in front of the camera is in the public domain. Eating, drinking, using mobile phones, talking to other members of the family etc. However, please do not turn your camera off for the duration of the meeting or leave the meeting. Members of the public need to see you are present at the meeting and that you are there for the voting process. Please speak clearly when voting. The Chair of the meeting will ensure participants are given breaks during the meeting.

It will be necessary for virtual council meetings for political group leaders to work with officers to agree speakers on agenda items before the meeting. It may also be necessary to deal with members questions in a different way procedurally.

It is likely, due to the demands of producing each meeting that in future we will have shorter meetings more frequently.

All participants should familiarise themselves with the virtual meeting procedure available on the website. Participants need to be very careful that they do not click other screen shots during a meeting as that can be shown to the public as a 'screen shot' breaking Data Protection rules. If you are any doubt as to how this could happen please contact IT Helpdesk.

Please contact officers as soon as you are able before the meeting to deal with any concerns.

Contact details -

Democratic Services democraticservices@hastings.gov.uk

01424 451723

IT – helpdesk@hastings.gov.uk

01424 451411

Legal Services cbarkshire-jones@hastings.gov.uk 01424 451731

kcameron@hastings.gov.uk 01424 451728

Contact between participants within the meeting can take place but remember if you chat generally this is visible by the public. If you want to chat privately with a participant hover over the person's name and then chat. The chair of a meeting is asked to take legal advice as and when they want. This is not FOIable.

All chairs of meetings have or will be given training before they chair a live virtual meeting. Training can also be carried out for any participants on request. Please contact IT Helpdesk. Participants are advised to watch themselves on available recordings as a training exercise.