

## Participants Guidance – Virtual Meetings

1. Regulations have been introduced to provide local authorities with the power to provide 'virtual' meetings. To ensure the quality and consistency of 'virtual' meetings councillors and officers need to work together to assist the process in every way they can.
2. Council officers have differing roles in 'virtual' meetings. Democratic Service officers are the 'Producers' of the meeting. They need to know who is going to speak and in what order as far as they are able. They need to be able to know who to connect to next. There is a 3 second time lag between speakers. IT support the network and connectivity during the meetings. They 'Enable' the meetings to take place. Legal Services 'Direct' the meetings as they work on the procedure and advise during the meetings. Officers 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.
3. To enable the smooth production of a 'virtual' meeting it is necessary for Legal Services and Democratic Services to know the following in advance of each meeting:
  - Apologies for 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.
4. 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 the participant where necessary.
5. All councillors should regularly check their internet connectivity and council issued devices are in working order. If there is a technical issue then Councillors should contact IT Helpdesk without delay. The sooner a problem is reported the sooner it can be resolved. This is important as the meeting may need to be adjourned if not quorate or if councillors are late joining the meeting they may not be able to participate in an agenda item.
6. 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. Headsets provided by the council must be worn by all councillors during 'virtual' meetings.
7. Depending on the type of meeting 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. Councillors need to be aware that what they do in

front of the camera is in the public domain such as eating, drinking, using mobile phones, talking to other members of the family etc. Please do not turn your camera off for the duration of the meeting or leave the meeting except if you have a prejudicial interest. Members of the public need to see councillors are present at the meeting and there for the voting process. Please speak clearly when voting. Councillors should ensure that they have the Council's logo as their background without exception.

8. Meeting participants can use the 'raise your hand facility' available on Teams when they wish to speak. For council meetings, a councillor's name will be called out when they have raised their hand. Councillors must lower their hand after their name has been called out and not re-raise their hand after their name has been called out.
9. Meeting participants should also consider the lighting arrangements to ensure that their image is clearly seen on screen.
10. When considering Part 2 items councillors should ensure that there is no one else in the room who may be able to hear confidential council information. They 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 and other persons. Please ensure that the space that you are using remains free for the expected duration of the meeting.
11. 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.
12. 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 in any doubt as to how this could happen please contact IT Helpdesk.
13. Contact between participants within the meeting can take place but remember if you use the chat function for the meeting this is visible by members of the public. If you want to message privately with a participant of a meeting hover over the person's name and then chat. The chair of a meeting is asked to take legal advice as and when required. This is not disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act.

14. 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.