

Culmstock Parish Council - Remote Meetings Protocol & Policy

1. Introduction

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 give automatic authority for councils to hold remote meetings and amend standing orders as required.

These regulations remain in force until May 7th, 2021 or earlier if repealed, and require a number of temporary changes to Standing Orders.

Remote attendance is permitted as long as certain conditions are satisfied. These include that the Member is able to hear and be heard by the other Members in attendance. Also, being able to hear and be heard by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting (in line with the public participation scheme). A visual solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient.

This also relates to members of the public attending the meeting also being heard. The regulations are clear that a meeting is not limited to those present in the same place, but includes electronic, digital or virtual locations (internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers).

2. GoToMeeting

GoToMeeting is the system the Council will be using for the time-being to host remote / virtual meetings. It has functionality for audio, video, and screen sharing and you do not need to be a member of the Council or have an account to join a meeting.

3. Access to documents

The Clerk will publish the agenda on the Council's website in line with usual practice.

4. Setting up the Meeting

This will be done by the Chairman and the Clerk. A URL link will be included on the agenda, to click on to in order to join the meeting, carefully following the access code and password details.

5. Public Access

Members of the public will be able to use the link as displayed on the front of the agenda as (3) above.

6. Joining the Meeting

Councillors must join the meeting early (i.e. at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time) in order to avoid disrupting or delaying the meeting. Councillors should remember that they may be visible and heard by others, including the public, during this time.

7. Starting the Meeting

At the start of the meeting, the Chairman will check that all required attendees are present (viewing the participant list) and that there is a quorum. If there is no quorum, the meeting will be adjourned. This applies if, during the meeting, it becomes inquorate for whatever reason.

To avoid disruption of the meeting, the meeting may be locked once The Chairman is satisfied that everyone has joined – further attendees will be placed into a waiting room; this may mean that the meeting will be locked and unlocked a number of times to enable people to join.

The Chairman will remind all Councillors, Officers and the Public that **all microphones will be automatically muted**, unless and until they are speaking. This prevents background noise, coughing etc. which is intrusive and disruptive during the meeting. The Chairman will enforce this and will be able to turn off participant mics when they are not in use. Councillors would then need to turn their microphones back on when they wish to speak.

Councillors should only speak when invited to do so by the Chair, and make themselves known by raising a hand.

8) Councillors in Remote Attendance

- a) A councillor in remote attendance is present and counted for the purposes of the quorum when they can:
 - (i) hear and where practicable see other members of the council
 - (ii) hear and where practicable see members of the public wishing to participate during the public session of the meeting or as invited by the Chairman
- b) A councillor in remote attendance will be deemed to have left the meeting where, at any point in time during the meeting, any of the conditions for remote attendance at 8 a) are not met.
- c) Subject to 8 b) the Chairman may if appropriate
 - (i) adjourn the meeting to permit conditions for remote attendance to be re-established
 - (ii) count the number of councillors in attendance for the purpose of the quorum

9. Public Participation

Participation by members of the public will continue in line with the Council's current arrangements as far as is practicable. However, to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that no member of the public is missed, all those who wish to speak must register **by 3pm on the day of the meeting**. They should email their full name to the Parish Clerk email: clerk@culmstock-pc.org.uk. If they wish to circulate their question in advance, that would be helpful.

At public question time, the Chair will invite the public by name to speak at the appropriate time. At that point, all public microphones will be enabled. This means that, to avoid private conversations being overheard, no member of the public should speak until it is their turn and they should then refrain from speaking until the end of public question time, when all microphones will be muted again. In the normal way, the public should state their full name, the agenda item they wish to refer to **before** they proceed with their question.

Unless they have registered, a member of the public will not be called to speak.

If a member of the public wishes to ask a question but cannot attend the meeting for whatever reason, there is nothing to prevent them from emailing members of the Parish Council or the Clerk with their question, views or concern in advance. However, if they do so, it would be helpful if a copy could be also sent to both the Parish Clerk: clerk@culmstock-pc.org.uk and the Chairman: lizzie@culmstock-pc.org.uk

10. Remote Attendance by members of the public

a) A member of the public is in remote attendance when they can:

- (iii) hear and where practicable see and so be heard and where practicable seen by members of the council at the meeting
- (iv) hear and where practicable see and so be heard and where practicable seen by other members of the public attending the meeting including those wishing to speak during the public session or as invited by the Chairman

b) A member of the public in remote attendance will be deemed to have left the meeting where, at any point in time during the meeting, any of the conditions for remote attendance at 10 a) are not met.

d) Subject to 10 b) the Chairman may if appropriate

- (i) adjourn the meeting to permit conditions for remote attendance to be re-established
- (ii) vary the order of the agenda or complete the remaining business of the meeting in the absence of the member of the public in remote attendance.

11. Code of Conduct - Declaration of Interests – councillors excluded from the meeting.

Councillors should declare their interests in the usual way. Where a councillor is required to leave the room, this means of remote attendance and access will be severed for the duration of this item whilst any discussion or voting takes place. They will only be invited back into the meeting when discussion on the relevant item has finished.

12. The Meeting and Debate

The Council will not be using the Chat function. Councillors should make the Chairman aware that they wish to speak by raising a hand. The Chair will call each councillor to speak in turn, and will continue in this way until no member has anything more to add.

Councillors need to make it clear to all members as to what item they are referring, so that all members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

13. Voting

Unless a recorded vote is demanded, the Chair will take the vote by:

- a) Confirmation of the meeting that there is agreement, or
- b) A roll call and the number of votes for or against the motion or amendment or abstaining will be announced by the Chairman and recorded.

14. Meeting Etiquette Reminder

- Mute your microphone – you will still be able to hear what is being said.
- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair, and request to speak by raising your hand.
- Speak clearly and please state your name each time you speak
- If you're referring to a specific agenda item please make it clear to what you are referring.

15. Exclusion of Press and Public (Part 2)

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or “exempt” issues are under consideration. It is important to ensure that there are no members of the public at remote locations able to hear or see the proceedings during such meetings. Where the council has resolved to exclude the press and public from any part of the meeting, due to the confidentiality of the business to be discussed then:

- a) The means of remote attendance and access to the meeting by members of the press and public will be severed
- b) Each councillor present shall declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (hearing or seeing), and/or recording the meeting - failure to do so could be in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Please turn off smart speakers such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or smart music devices. These could inadvertently record phone or video conversations, which would not be appropriate during the consideration of confidential items.

16. Interpretation of standing orders

Where the Chair is required to interpret the Council's Constitution and procedural rules in light of the requirements of remote participation, they may take advice from the Clerk prior to making a ruling. However, the Chair's decision shall be final.

17. Disorderly Conduct by Members

If a Member behaves in the manner as outlined in the Constitution (persistently ignoring or disobeying the ruling of the Chair or behaving irregularly, improperly or offensively or deliberately obstructs the business of the meeting), any other Member may move 'That the member named be not further heard' which, if seconded, must be put to the vote without discussion.

If the same behaviour persists and a Motion is approved 'that the member named do leave the meeting', then they will be removed as a participant by the Chairman.

18. Disturbance from Members of the Public

If any member of the public interrupts a meeting the Chairman will warn them accordingly. If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Chairman will remove them as a participant from the meeting.

19. After the meeting

Please ensure you leave the meeting promptly by clicking on the red phone button to hang up.

20. Technical issues

In the event that the Chairman, identifies a problem with the systems from the Council's side, the Chairman should declare a recess while the fault is addressed. If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting becomes inquorate through this fault, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as it can be reconvened.

If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter or one which is time-limited and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman (or two councillors if either of the aforementioned are unavailable) shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted by the Council's Scheme of Delegation or Standing Orders.

For members of the public and press who experience problems during the course of a meeting e.g. through internet connectivity or otherwise, the meeting will not be suspended or adjourned.

May 2020.