**Virtual Committee Meetings using Microsoft Teams – General Guide**

This Guide has been developed following the introduction, with effect from 4 April 2020, of Regulations[[1]](#footnote-1) that permit ‘virtual meetings'

1. **General Principles**
2. Reference to ‘participants’ in this document refers to the Committee members and officers invited to join the Microsoft Teams meeting via an Outlook calendar appointment. Participants may also include members of the public who have registered to speak at the meeting (such as Planning Committee) or external advisers (e.g. Audit & Standards Committee).
3. Participants are encouraged to join the meeting (via the Outlook calendar invite) at least 10 minutes before the scheduled start time of the meeting, to ensure they have the necessary access and are comfortable with the arrangements before the meeting formally starts.
4. Copies of the agenda pack in pdf format will be circulated to all Committee Members and relevant officers prior to the meeting, to assist if any documents need to be referred to during the meeting (**Note**: hard copy agendas are not being produced while social distancing rules are in place).
5. Committee meetings will be webcast live, in much the same way as if the meeting was taking place in the Council Chamber. Participants should therefore avoid unnecessary ‘chat’, either audible or via the “Meeting Chat” facility, at the point that they join the meeting (before and after the official start time).
6. The DSO will produce a detailed Chair’s Procedure Note for each meeting.
7. **Before the meeting, all committee members should be made aware of the following etiquette**
8. With the exception of the Chair, all participants should switch off their camera (via the “Turn camera off” option in the Teams Meeting toolbar).
9. With the exception of the Chair, all participants should ‘mute’ their microphone (again via the toolbar) before the start of the meeting (**Note**: the DSO will monitor participants’ microphones during the meeting and may switch off active mics when the individual is not due to speak).
10. Participants should only speak when invited to by the Chair. Those wishing to ask a question or speak on an issue must indicate via the “Meeting Chat” facility (accessed via the “Show conversation” tab on the toolbar).
11. If a participant wishes to switch their camera on when presenting a report or asking a question, he/she should first select the “Turn camera on” option (and switch off again when finished).
12. All mobile phones to be off or on ‘silent’ mode for the duration of the meeting.
13. Committee Members should make every effort to remain in the meeting for its duration. If a Member wishes to leave, either for the remainder of the meeting or for a short time, they should indicate this to the Chair via the “Meeting Chat” facility. In such circumstances, the Chair may decide to adjourn for a short period. If a Member loses internet connection for any period, on re-joining the meeting they should notify the Chair via “Meeting Chat” and indicate the period that they were absent. (**Note:** Any Member missing a significant part of the discussion on an item(s), he/she should not take part in the decision on that item(s)).
14. The provisions of the Councillors’ and Officers’ Codes of Conduct apply to virtual meetings of the Council in the same way as they do to physical meetings.
15. **Commencement of the meeting**
16. At the commencement of the formal meeting, the Chair will ask the DSO to switch on the webcast and identify all those that are ‘present’.
17. The Chair will then read out the opening narrative from his/her Procedure Note which explains how the meeting will operate.
18. The Chair will invite Members / officers to present reports as appropriate and will only accept requests to speak via the “Meeting Chat” facility (in the order that they are received).
19. **Role of the Democratic Services Officer (DSO)**
20. Virtual committee meetings will be served by two DSOs to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.
21. DSO1 will be responsible for (i) announcing the names of those present; (ii) taking the notes to create the formal minutes; and (iii) conducting the roll call for any votes (see below).
22. DSO2 will (i) act as the liaison with the Webcast operator; (ii) assist the Chair in spotting who wishes to speak; (iii) monitor participants’ microphones (switching off active mics when not being used); and (iv) monitor participants’ attendance during the meeting.
23. **Voting**
24. At the end of the consideration of each report on the agenda, the Chair will ask the Members to vote on the item.
25. DSO1 will ask the Committee Members to switch on their microphones and conduct a roll call of each Member, asking whether they agree, disagree or wish to abstain, before announcing the outcome.
26. **Other Issues**
27. Where a member of the public has registered to speak in accordance with the specific arrangements for that meeting, the Chair will invite them to speak in accordance with the normal procedures (ie. for Planning Committee, a registered speaker may address the Committee for up to three minutes).
28. Councillors who are not a Member of the Committee but who wish to speak are allowed to do so at the discretion of the Chair but must contact the DSO in advance of the meeting, in order to be invited to join the Microsoft Teams meeting.
29. Representations/questions may also be given in writing, in accordance with the speaking arrangements for that committee, and will be read out by the appropriate officer during consideration of the matter.
1. *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)