

Chilton Town Council



VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL POLICY

Policy Effective from: Adopted by Chilton Town Council at a meeting on 20 th October 2020		
Revision Dates:	May 2022	

CHILTON TOWN COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETINGS PROTOCOL

1 Purpose of 'Virtual Meetings' and making official recordings of Council Committees

1.1 The main purpose of 'Virtual' Meetings is to enable the Council to continue to function during the suspension of public gatherings/meetings during Covid 19. Virtual meetings allow Council and committees to transact business and fulfil designated functions.

1.2 The streaming and recording of virtual meetings does not replace the formal minutes of the meeting and the decisions made. The council will continue to produce formal minutes and agendas which we are required to be maintained and retained, publicly, for up to 6 years.

1.3 For the avoidance of doubt, where video and audio recording is practical, this will be made available for public inspection, for up to 6 years, and will form a new and official part of the council's meeting.

2.0 Operating Procedure

2.1 The virtual meeting will commence at the beginning of a meeting when the Chairperson opens the meeting. Under the new regulations¹ members who are in remote attendance must be able to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance.

2.2 At the start of any public committee the Chairperson will ensure that the meeting complies with this rule by asking attending members of the meeting to confirm they can hear and be heard during the virtual meeting. The meeting will not start until confirmation that all attendees are in compliance with these rules. **This is a legal requirement.**

2.3 The assumption is that video as well as audio will be used during virtual meetings. If it is not practicable for an attendee to be filmed whilst speaking to the committee, that committee member will be permitted to switch their camera off and speak using the audio facility only.

2.4. The virtual meeting will finish when the Chairperson formally closes the meeting. The chairperson should confirm with democratic services that the live stream and recording has been switched off.

3.0 Managing contributions from members during virtual meetings

3.1. All microphones, at the start of the virtual meeting will be set to mute, apart from the Chairperson and co-host. The chairperson will un-mute microphones during debate and deliberations either by inviting a member to contribute or in responding to a member 'raising their electronic hand' to indicate that they wish to speak.

3.2 During the meeting, the 'chat function' will be disabled – members will continue to be able to communicate via the chat facility.

3.3 Once all members in attendance have been confirmed as being present, the chairperson or co-host will 'lock' the meeting down. This means that no other participants can join the meeting without the chairperson's knowledge or agreement. The broadcast and recording of the virtual meeting.

4.0 Managing members and member interests

4.1 The virtual meeting system in operation by the council will notify members when a participant leaves the meeting. However, members in attendance wishing to leave the meeting before it finishes should notify the chairperson of the committee before leaving the meeting. This will allow for formal minutes to record the time and agenda item at which point the member left the meeting.

4.2 For members declaring any schedule 1 or 2 interests the chairperson of the committee will place the member(s) in a virtual 'waiting area' (where the member has no audio or visual contact with the meeting) while that item of business is considered. The chairperson will bring members back to the 'virtual meeting' once that item of business has been concluded.

4.3 Conduct of members in attendance. The chairperson has the right to remove virtual attendees from the meeting if their conduct falls short of the expected standards in public life.

5.0 Confirming the minutes and voting on items during committee

5.1 The minutes of the previous meeting will be agreed by the committee using the following procedure. The chairperson will go to each individual member, alphabetically, and ask that they confirm verbally their agreement to the minutes. Where members disagree, or wish to propose amendments to the minutes, these should be raised with the committee chairperson prior to the meeting.

5.2 Where a vote is required during a committee, this will be undertaken on the voices of members. The Town Clerk will ask each attending member in turn to vote on the item at hand. The formal minutes will not record the names of members or how they voted on an item unless a named recorded vote has been requested in accordance with standing orders.

7.0 Attendance

7.1 All virtual meetings will require to be quorate in accordance with the council's standing orders. For the avoidance of doubt, 'virtual' attendance will count toward the committee's quoracy and the councillor's attendance.

8.0 Interpretation of standing orders

8.1 Where the Chairperson is required to interpret the Council's existing standing orders in light of the requirements of remote participation, he or she shall take advice from the Town Clerk prior to making a ruling. The Chairperson's decision in all cases shall be final.

ⁱ The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020