

PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS

Introduction

1. This Protocol provides the means and guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of the Council and its various Committees and Sub-Committees held under the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392 ('the Regulations'). The Regulations came into force on 4 April 2020 and remain valid until 7 May 2021.
2. The Regulations enable the Council to hold meetings remotely at virtual locations without all, or any, of the Members being physically present together in a named room. Members in remote attendance must be able to hear and be heard by (and, where possible, see and be seen by) other Members and members of the public attending remotely or in person.
3. This protocol is intended to give practical guidance on the Council's arrangements for the holding of remote meetings involving Members, Officers, and the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. This protocol is supplementary to, and should be read in conjunction with, the Procedures Rules within the Council's [Constitution](#). The Regulations apply notwithstanding any other legislation or pre-existing procedure rules of the Council governing meetings. This means that, wherever there is a conflict, the Protocol for Remote Meetings takes precedence in relation to the governance of any remote meeting.

Access to meeting paperwork

4. Meeting agenda packs and minutes will continue to be made available to Members on the normal timescales through the Modern.gov app, the intranet and the extranet, all of which provide Members with access to any exempt or confidential pages.
5. Meeting agendas packs and minutes will continue to be made available to the public on the normal timescales via the Council's [meetings webpages](#). Hard copies of agenda packs for remote meetings will not be available to view in the Town Hall or provided to any participants.

Officer support to remote meetings

6. Remote meetings will be attended by various Officers including a Committee and Member Services Officer who will clerk the meeting ("the Clerk") and a Host (who may be another member of the Committee and Member Services Team) who will control the live streaming, grant and deny access to participants, ensure a quorum is maintained and provide other technical support to the Chair and the meeting.

The Host will also ensure that a “meeting starting soon” message is displayed on the live stream prior to the start of meetings and a “meeting has ended” message is displayed when meetings have been called to a close. A Legal Advisor may also be present.

7. If the Clerk loses connectivity the Host may take on the responsibilities of Clerk until the Clerk reconnects to the meeting.
8. If the Host loses connectivity the Chair will act as host or transfer the responsibilities of the Host to the Clerk until the Host reconnects to the meeting.

Access to remote meetings

9. The Regulations enable the Council to hold meetings with Members and other participants attending by way of remote access. This means enabling participation by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts and live streaming.
10. The Council facilitates remote attendance and access to meetings through the video conferencing platform Zoom. This enables the following:
 - Members in remote attendance to hear and be heard, and to see and be seen, by other Members in attendance as well as any member of the public attending the meeting with a right to speak.
 - Contributions from people using a wide variety of devices, not all of whom are on the council network.
 - Unlimited access to members of the public wishing to observe a live stream of the meeting.
 - Presentations and documents to be displayed.
11. The agenda pack for each meeting will state the start time and location of the meeting, which may be a virtual location.

Members’ access to remote meetings

12. Members will have been offered training on the use of the Zoom video-conferencing platform and provided with a choice of accessing meetings using a Council-issued laptop or their own device.
13. Those Members participating in Council and Committee meetings by virtue of being a Member of that meeting will be provided with instructions for joining the meeting remotely.
14. A telephone number will be provided in the joining instructions to enable Members to dial in to the meeting if they are unable to connect to a video link.
15. Any Member who is not a member of a meeting but is attending under a provision in the Council’s Constitution, will be able to obtain joining instructions from an email sent to all Members when the meeting agenda is published, or by contacting the Committee and Member Services Team on democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk.

Public access to remote meetings

16. The Council will continue to facilitate public contributions to meetings as set out in the Constitution and the [Get involved at council meetings webpages](#).
17. Members of the public who register to speak at a meeting in accordance with a Procedure Rule within the Council's Constitution will be provided with joining instructions and guidance on public participation in remote meetings by the Committee and Member Services Team.
18. Members of the public registered to speak at a remote meeting will be held in a virtual "Waiting Room" or will join the meeting as "attendees" until the Host admits them to the meeting or promotes them to "panellists" for the start of the agenda item they have registered to speak on. Members of the public will not be able to observe the meeting from the Waiting Room but may do so by accessing the live stream accessed via a link on the Council's [meetings webpages](#).
19. Members of the public wishing to observe a meeting will be able to do so via a link from the Council's [meetings webpages or the Council's YouTube channel](#) where they will be able to access a live stream of the meeting. Instructions on how to observe the meeting will also be provided in the agenda pack.
20. Minutes form the lasting public record of meetings. Recordings of meetings of Council will also be retained and available to view by the public on the [Council's YouTube channel](#) (accessible via the [Council's website](#)). Recordings of other meetings will be available to view for a limited period and will be removed once the draft minutes have been published.

Press access to remote meetings

21. Journalists wishing to attend a remote meeting are advised to inform pressoffice@oxford.gov.uk not less than 24 hours before the meeting is due to start to be issued with joining instructions. Journalists who join a meeting will remain muted with their video feed turned off. Alternatively journalists can access meetings by viewing a live stream via a link from the Council's [meetings webpages](#).

Security of access

22. Any person provided with details of how to join a meeting must ensure these are treated as confidential and not shared with any other person.
23. Should a Member wish to invite another person to join a remote meeting they must notify the Committee and Member Services Team on democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk who will, if that person has a right to participate in the meeting, issue them with joining instructions.

Members in remote attendance

24. All Members should join no later than 10 minutes before the meeting is due to start to allow for any slow connections and to give themselves and the Host the opportunity to test the equipment.
25. At the commencement of a remote meeting the Clerk will take a roll call of participants and apologies for absence (substitutes will be allowed in the normal way). When a Member's name is called out, they may be required by the Chair to unmute their microphone, respond "Present" and then mute their microphone again.
26. It may become necessary during a meeting for a Member to cease attending for a short temporary time, for any reason, but including a temporary loss of remote connectivity. Before deliberately leaving a meeting, including for a temporary period, a Member should notify the meeting using the Chat function.
27. Non-attendance means either a Member cannot hear the other participants of the remote meeting or cannot be heard by them. A loss of visual connectivity would not lead to non-attendance. For clarity:
 - a) If a participant cannot see the other participants but can hear and be heard they are in attendance.
 - b) If a participant cannot be seen by the other participants but can hear and be heard they are in attendance.
 - c) If a participant cannot hear or be heard they are not in attendance.
 - d) If a participant loses their connection to the meeting they are not in attendance.
28. If a Member loses connectivity and cannot immediately re-join the meeting by video link, they should dial in to the meeting using the telephone number provided in the joining instructions. The Host will alert the Chair to the issue and the Chair will decide whether to pause the proceedings until the member reconnects to the meeting, either by video or telephone, or to continue with the business of the meeting in their absence (provided that a quorum is maintained).
29. If a Member loses connectivity during a Planning Committee or Licensing Sub-Committee meeting, they will be prohibited from participating in the debate and voting on that agenda item unless the discussion is paused for the period of their non-attendance. If a Member is in attendance at the time a vote is taken but was not in attendance for the full discussion on the item, they are required to abstain from the vote.
30. The Host will ensure that a quorum is maintained and will advise the Chair if it is not, in which case adjournment will be required to a time when a quorum can be achieved, or to a later date.
31. If the Chair loses connectivity the Vice Chair will assume the role of Chair and may adjourn the meeting until the Chair reconnects to the meeting. If the Chair is unable to reconnect to the meeting the Vice Chair will resume the meeting as Chair.

Public attendance at remote meetings

32. Members of the public who register to speak at a remote meeting in accordance with a Procedure Rule within Council's Constitution may join the meeting by video or telephone link and will be able to view and hear the public business of the meeting until they are invited to speak by the Host, at which point they will have their microphone enabled. When joining a meeting members of the public with a right to speak must ensure that they can be identified as a registered speaker otherwise their access to the meeting will be blocked.
33. Once the member of the public's contribution has been heard the Host will disable their microphone for the remainder of the meeting unless the Chair invites them to speak again, at which point the microphone will be re-enabled.
34. If a member of the public exercising their right to speak at a remote meeting loses connectivity during their contribution, they should immediately dial back in to the meeting using the telephone number provided in the joining instructions.
35. Members of the public are recommended to submit their contribution in writing to democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk by before 9am on the day of the meeting. This will ensure that their contribution can be taken into account and, where necessary, responded to, in the event that the connection is poor. Members of the public who register to speak will be advised of any time limit on verbal submissions and any word limit on written submissions.
36. If a member of the public exercising their right to speak at a remote meeting loses connectivity and is unable to re-join the meeting their written contribution will be considered. If no written contribution has been submitted the meeting will proceed without considering their contribution.

Meeting etiquette

37. To ensure the smooth running and orderly conduct of remote meetings all participants including Members, Officers and members of the public are asked to adhere to the following etiquette. The etiquette applies to all participants unless stated:
 - a) Any camera (video-feed) used by Members and Officers shows a non-descript background or a virtual background. Members and Officers should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
 - b) Any camera (video feed) will be available for all to see. Cameras should be positioned with the head and shoulders in the centre of the screen and participants should avoid eating on camera or looking at other devices (other than to view the paperwork for the meeting).
 - c) Officers dress in office attire as they would for a meeting held in the Town Hall.
 - d) The Host will ensure that names are displayed in full on any video feed to enable easy identification, for example "Cllr Joanne Smith", "Officer, John Smith (Head of Housing)"
 - e) Microphones are muted when not speaking.

- f) A request to be heard is indicated by using the “raise hand” icon or, for those connected by video, the physical raising of a hand. The Chair may express a preference for either method at the start of the meeting. A virtual hand should remain raised until invited to speak and then lowered.
- g) Contributions are only made on the invitation of the Chair who will determine the order in which participants speak.
- h) When invited to speak, participants will unmute any microphone.
- i) Only one person speaks at any one time.
- j) When referring to a specific report, page, or slide, that report, page, or slide is identified before the point is made so that all participants and observers have a clear understanding of what is being discussed.
- k) Contributions remain relevant and concise.
- l) The Chat function is to be used to assist with the smooth administration of the meeting only, for example to alert the Host to a loss of audio connectivity or to inform others when leaving a meeting including when leaving for a temporary period.

Management of remote meetings

38. To ensure the effective management of a remote meeting the Chair, Host or Clerk may at any time:
- a) Pause (adjourn) the meeting by taking down the stream (live feed) from public viewing and then resume it when needed.
 - b) Switch participants’ microphones on and off.
 - c) Mute someone speaking at any time.
 - d) Mute everyone speaking except themselves at any time.
 - e) Allocate different levels of access to participants (based upon whether they are a Member, an Officer, or a member of the public who has registered to speak).
 - f) Use the “Chat” function to communicate with participants in writing for the purposes of administering the meeting. The Q & A function will be disabled for all meetings.
 - g) Exclude people from the meeting who are causing disruption and prevent them from re-joining.

Meeting procedures

39. The usual Procedure Rules including rules of debate within the Council’s Constitution apply to remote meetings, subject to the contents of this Protocol.

Declarations of interest

40. Members should declare interests in the usual way. Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or other declarable interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, will be placed in a “waiting room” or “on hold” by the Host for the duration of that item of business and will be unable to see or hear the meeting, and will not be seen and heard, during the debate on that item.

Voting at a remote meeting

41. For meetings other than Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee meetings, the method of voting may be by:

- a) The general agreement of the meeting, if no one speaks or indicates against the proposal;
 - b) A virtual vote, for example by a physical or virtual show of hands or use of the “polls” functionality in Zoom.
 - c) A roll-call. The Clerk will perform a roll-call of all Members present and ask them to state their voting intention (For, Against or Abstain). These will then be counted and recorded. At the conclusion of the voting the Clerk shall announce the numbers of votes cast for, against and abstentions and announce whether the resolution or amendment has been passed or lost.
42. For Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee meetings, the method of voting will be by a roll call (option c) only. Any Members who have not been in attendance to hear the full presentation and debate on an agenda item will be required to abstain from voting on that matter.

Exclusion of the press and public

43. If a resolution is passed for the meeting to enter into private session to consider exempt or confidential material, the Host will stop the live streaming of the meeting and will ensure that any members of the press or public, including those with a right to speak, will not be able to see or hear the private part of the meeting. Before moving into private session, the Chair will indicate whether the meeting is expected to move back into public session. If the meeting does move back into public session the Host will restart the live streaming and ensure that any other attendees may re-join before the meeting continues in public. Meeting held in private may be privately recorded to assist officers (e.g, where the Clerk has a poor connection) in which case the meeting will be alerted to this.

Petitions

44. While the Council is operating remote meetings, it will not be possible to accept paper petitions. An electronic petition will be acceptable provided it meets the requirements as set out in the Constitution (Part 11.15).

Members standing

45. Any requirement in Council Procedure Rules to a Member needing to stand up does not apply to a remote meeting.

Disruption

46. If a participant is disrupting the meeting, the Chair or Host may mute their microphone, turn off their video feed or remove their access to the meeting, either immediately or after warning them first. Once excluded those participants will not be allowed to re-enter the meeting.

Technical difficulties

47. If two or more of the Clerk, Host and Chair lose connection to the meeting at the same time, the Chair, or in their absence the Vice Chair, will adjourn the meeting until at least two of the Clerk, Host and Chair have reconnected to the meeting.

48. If the Host identifies a failure of the remote participation facility including a failure of the live stream for a meeting held in public, the Chair will declare an adjournment while the fault is addressed. This may involve the Host establishing a separate virtual meeting and issuing new joining instructions to participants. If it is not possible to address the fault the Chair may decide that the meeting should be abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened. The business may be adjourned to the next scheduled meeting of the committee or to a date and time agreed by the meeting on advice from Officers.