

WALPOLE PARISH COUNCIL

VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY

1. Introduction

Walpole Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times when a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairs, councillors and members of the public and press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting and to assist people to engage in debate and decision making. The policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' and that are currently enacted for meeting on and up to 7th May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors will be summonsed as per regulations, with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will be published on Council's physical noticeboards as far as is practicable.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

The Parish Council's chosen platform to provide video communications is Zoom, which enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems (Zoom is compatible with Windows, macOS, iOS, Android, and Linux). In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will make available, via the summons:

- The Zoom meeting link
- The meeting ID
- The meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were physically present.

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 5c.

During the meeting, all persons, other than councillors, will be audio-muted. During the public participation period from 7.15 – 7.25pm, members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chair and should raise their hand to indicate if they wish to speak.

Their microphone will then be unmuted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, their microphone will be muted.

During the meeting members and officers will physically raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and, if necessary, mute their own microphones except when speaking, to negate interference with the meeting. If a member fails to mute their microphone, the Chair/Clerk will mute the member's microphone to ensure no interference takes place.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of physical hands. For matters that the Chair deems to be of especial importance or contention, he will call a roll, by alphabetical sequence of members present, to cast their votes.

c. Poor Internet connectivity

In the case of poor Internet connectivity or in case of a power failure at any location, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available but audio remaining for some or all of members attending, the Chair can choose to continue, but to operate on a roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

d. Attendance

If a member is believed to have 'dropped-out' this will be minuted. If 'drop-outs' result in the meeting becoming inquorate, members will endeavour to re-join for a period of 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, if the meeting is still inquorate, the Chair will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date and time, subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to inform them of the suspension.

e. Telephone attendance

Persons wishing to attend by telephone are advised to contact the Clerk in advance, in order that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is disruptive or contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. For a member of the public or press, this may result in them being dismissed from the virtual meeting.

7. Declaration of Interests

A councillor who has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting, will be placed in the virtual 'waiting room'. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made, the councillor will be returned to the meeting

8. Public Participation

The published agenda will either include a link to the meeting or a note that members of the public who wish to attend the meeting should contact the Clerk for an invitation. Invitations will not be issued once the meeting has commenced.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda, the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

Or

Confidential agenda items will be dealt with by members of the public being placed in the virtual 'waiting room' for the duration of that item. At the conclusion of the item they may be brought back into the meeting if they have not previously left.

10. Recording

While recognising that a member of the public may decide to record the virtual meeting, the Council will not routinely record meetings. However, recordings may be made at the discretion of the Chair to assist with the taking of the meeting minutes. If a member of the public decides to record the meeting they are asked to abide by the Council's policy on "Recording Parish Council Meetings".

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>

[ADDENDUM from 7th MAY 2021](#)

Voting – as online meetings are no longer allowed for any voting purposes, it has been recognised that voting on planning applications could miss the deadline from KLWNBC and therefore, in this instance only, email/telephone comments will be permitted to the clerk in line with the delegated authority.