

# Pembury Parish Council Remote Meetings

## Protocol April 2020

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. On 4 April 2020, the government brought The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 into force to allow local authorities to conduct meetings remotely. NALC produced guidelines for the conducting of meetings remotely and these underpin this protocol.
- 1.2. Where possible the aim is for the Council to conduct the meetings as per existing standing orders. This less formal document is as an addendum to our standing orders explaining how these will be interpreted and how the meetings will run.
- 1.3. Meetings will be scheduled as required.

### **2. Planning and Preparation**

- 2.1. The Clerk should send out agendas and documents by email, together with a separate 'session ID' for the remote meeting platform (Zoom). Agendas will be published on the council website.
- 2.2. If required, a confidential 'session ID' should also be set up for councillors only. A password will be set up on the meeting.

### **3. Virtual platform**

- 3.1. Zoom, has been selected for remote meetings. It allows participants to either load the app on their computer or access via the web for those worried about security.
- 3.2. The discounted cost of £9.99 per month for unlimited time for meetings has been set up.
- 3.3. All councillors have confirmed they have access to appropriate hardware such as laptops, tablets or mobile phones.

### **4. Council and Committee Meetings**

- 4.1. The Clerk will publish written minutes after the meeting.
- 4.2. All attendees will join a Waiting Room prior to the meeting.
- 4.3. To help manage the meeting, the Chair will:

- 4.3.1. Explain how the meeting will run at the beginning of each meeting and how and when attendees and members of the public can speak.
- 4.3.2. Consider whether to mute all participants and unmute people when they ask to speak (by a show of hands). This decision will be dependent on the number of participants in the meeting.
- 4.3.3. Co-host the meeting with the Clerk.

## **5. Council discussions**

- 5.1. The Chair of the Council or Committee should still chair the relevant meeting.
- 5.2. They should take the opportunity to practice ensuring they are confident following the agenda, managing input from councillors and staff, and keeping the meeting to time.
- 5.3. Some suggestions to aid this are:
  - The Chair will consider whether to mute everyone when they are not speaking to help keep background noise to a minimum which will improve everyone's ability to hear the discussions. This may not be necessary in smaller meetings.
  - The Council will experiment with Councillors raising their hands when they wish to speak, typing on the Chat option or using the voting buttons.
  - The Chair should ask everyone to state their name before they start speaking in larger meetings so that it is always clear who is speaking.
  - Some individuals may have technical issues that mean that they 'leave' the meeting, if for example their internet connection means that they are cut off. Zoom is very clear on who is present, and the Clerk will note who is present during the meeting as normal.
  - It is important that when an item is introduced each Councillor has the opportunity to speak at least once on that item. The Chair will ask everyone if they have had the opportunity to speak on the matter.
  - Another option might be for the Chair to read from a list of councillors names and ask them in turn if there is anything they wish to say or ask. This may take more time but allows for a more controlled approach.
  - The Councillor who introduced the item then answers any queries and summarizes the item.

## **6. Voting**

6.1. There is no right way to conduct voting in a remote meeting. You will have to find an approach that works best for the Council. Some things to consider are:

- Councillors could raise hands to vote as in a physical meeting.
- The Chair or Clerk to read back the votes of the Council so that everyone is sure their vote has been recorded correctly.
- Councillors could vote via the chat option.
- Councillors could vote via the reactions option with a thumbs up sign to show agreement.
- Councillors could vote via the voting buttons (yes/no).
- The Chair should make sure every vote is clear and unambiguous.

## **7. Meeting Papers/Documents**

7.1. Paper copies will not be provided to councillors.

7.2. Electronic copies of documents can either be viewed on a second separate device, if available, or the screen can be split to view both the meeting and your papers.

7.3. It is also possible for the host to share their screen and display papers for attendees.

## **8. Behaviours and Conduct**

8.1. The required standards of behaviour and discussion are the same whether in remote or face-to-face meetings. Everyone in the meeting will need to be respectful and compassionate towards one another and comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

## **9. Declaring Interests**

9.1. The Council will need to consider how it will manage councillors leaving meetings if they have an interest and do not wish to be part of the meeting, particularly if they consider there will be negative public perception if they remain.

9.2. Therefore, the Chairman will mute the audio and blank the picture for any Councillor who has declared an interest. The Councillor will be able to hear the discussion but not take part.

9.3. If a Councillor has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, they will “leave” the meeting and wait in the “waiting room” while discussion on the topic takes place. They will be allowed back into the meeting once the item has been discussed.

9.4. At the end of the item the Chairman will invite the Councillor to rejoin the meeting.

## 10. **Confidential Items**

10.1. These should be at the end of a meeting wherever possible – therefore the meeting will close and reconvene with a separate meeting ID which is only available to Councillors.

10.2. A password will be used to protect confidential sessions in meetings.

10.3. The Chair will inform members of the public that the public meeting has finished and will continue on a separate meeting ID.

## 11. **Public Participation**

11.1. Council meetings must still be advertised, and the public have a right to observe. As we normally allow public questions or input in our meetings then it is worth trying to keep this approach with remote meetings too.

11.2. The Chair or Clerk should also take a note who wishes to speak, from the public, to ensure that no one is missed out.

11.3. Once the public speaking session is over only Councillors will be able to speak. The Chair should explain this to the members of the public at the end of the public session.

## 12. **After the Meeting**

12.1. Minute taking should be done as usual with the Clerk seeking clarity at any point, should it be needed. The minutes should be agreed at the next meeting and can always be retrospectively signed at the next face-to-face meeting.

12.2. Once you have held your first remote council meeting it is worth taking a little time to reflect on how it went and what you might wish to change or improve for next time.