

## 23. PROCEDURE RULES FOR THE REGULATION OF REMOTE MEETINGS

### General

- 23.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (the Regulations) make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to, Council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021.
- 23.2 The Regulations enable the Council to hold meetings without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room. This allows for remote meetings through electronic, digital, virtual locations, live webcast, live interactive streaming, video and telephone conferencing. The Council intends to use Zoom as its preferred platform for the foreseeable future, but reserves its ability to use a different platform if it considers that necessary.
- 23.3 The procedure rules in this Constitution apply to remote meetings in the same way as they do for other meetings of the Council except where they conflict, in which case this procedure rule takes precedence over other procedure rules in relation to the governance of remote meetings.
- 23.4 The Chair, following consultation with the Chief Executive may alter the frequency move or cancel a remote meeting without notice.
- 23.5 The Council will endeavour to enable the public to participate in meetings where possible in terms of asking questions at Council and Committee meetings and making representations at regulatory meetings (Development Control Committee and Licensing) However, this will be restricted to the parties taking part in the meeting. Other members of the public and press will be able to view the meeting as it will be streamed at a remote location which will be advised in the meeting notice.
- 23.6 For the avoidance of doubt, neither the press nor members of the public will be able to access remote meetings which will consider exempt information and those meetings will not be webcast nor will the meeting access arrangements be made available other than to members of the Council.
- 23.7 If during a remote meeting a matter which could be considered exempt arises, the Chair in consultation with the Monitoring Officer or the Democratic Services Officer, will move that the item should be considered in private session and, if that motion is approved, will move the item to the end of the meeting agenda and the press and public will be excluded from that item. Members of the public and press can either leave the meeting or will be moved to the waiting room and the live stream will be cut.

### **Access to Information**

- 23.8 In terms of public and press access, requisite notice of the time of the meeting, the agenda and all agenda papers, together with details of how to view the meeting will be made available on the Council's website.
- 23.9 Elected Members and members of the public who wish to speak at a Council or Committee meeting and those who wish to make representations at regulatory meetings will be notified of a remote meeting by email which will provide them with the joining details.
- 23.10 For all purposes, the terms "notice", "summons", "agenda", "report", "written record" and "background papers" when referred to as being a document that is:
- (a) "open to inspection" shall include for these and all other purposes as being published on the website of the council; and
  - (b) to be published, posted or made available at offices of the Council shall include publication on the website of the Council.

### **Remote Access to Meetings**

- 23.11 For all purposes the term "meeting" is not limited in meaning to a meeting of persons who are present in the same place. Any reference to:
- (i) "place" is to be interpreted as where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers. (The meeting may also be held in a meeting room or Chamber with a proportion of the membership and any participating public additionally attending remotely.)
  - (ii) "open to the public" includes access to the meeting being through remote means including (but not limited to) video conferencing, teleconference, live webcast, and live interactive streaming and where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.
- 23.12 If the Chair is made aware that the meeting is not accessible to the public through remote means due to any technological or other failure of provision, then the Chair shall adjourn the meeting immediately for the connection to be restored. If the provision of access through remote means cannot be restored within fifteen minutes, the remaining business will be considered at a time and

date fixed by the Chair. If they do not fix a date, the remaining business will be considered at the next ordinary meeting.

### **Members in Remote Attendance**

23.13 A member in remote attendance is present and attends the meeting, including for the purposes of the quorum, if at any time both of the following conditions are satisfied, those conditions being that the member in remote attendance is able at that time:

- (i) to hear, and where practicable see, and be heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance.
- (ii) to be heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.

23.14 Attendance at the meeting will be recorded by a Democratic Services Officer and a member in remote attendance will be deemed to have left the meeting where, at any point in time during the meeting, any of the conditions for remote attendance contained above are not met.

### **Questions and Representations by members of the public**

23.15 There will be speaking rights for members of the public or their representatives at remote meetings in accordance with the provisions of the Council Standing Orders.

23.16 Members of the public will be able to participate in remote meetings in the following ways:

- Questions, representations and petitions should be submitted in advance of the meeting and will be made available to all members of the remote meeting by Democratic Services.
- Questions for Council and Committees (with the exception of Development Control Committee and Licensing Panel must be received by no later than 12 noon, 2 clear working days before the day of the meeting. Such notice must be by electronic mail to [democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk).
- Representations for Development Control Committee should be received by 12 noon 1 clear working day before the day of the meeting, exceptionally, the Council will consider late representations if appropriate.

- Representations for Licensing Panel may be submitted prior to the meeting, but applicants and their representatives will make oral submissions to the committee at their election.
- Members of the public or their representatives will be able to present their questions, or petitions to Council and Committees (with the exception of Development Control Committee and Licensing Panel) in the remote meeting.
- Public questions will, where appropriate, receive a response in the meeting. No supplementary questions will be permitted.
- Public petitions not referred to an officer in accordance with Council Standing Orders will be received by the Chair of the meeting without debate and sent to the relevant committee or council officer for a response.

### **Process at remote meetings**

23.17 The Chair will confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of a committee meeting that they can see and hear all participating members by carrying out a roll call of members present (this is unlikely to be practical for a meeting of full council).

23.18 Unless the member has declared an interest which precludes them from taking part, their attendance at the meeting must be continuous throughout the item and will be monitored and recorded by the Democratic Services Officer.

23.19 The normal quorum requirements for meetings as set out in the Authority's Constitution will also apply to a remote meeting. In the event of any apparent failure of the video, telephone or conferencing connection, the Chair should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate and (Subject to Paragraph 23.20):

- if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or
- if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chair, expected to be a maximum of fifteen minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established after which time the meeting will be abandoned and any remaining items adjourned to the next meeting.

23.20 If there is a disruption to any members attendance due to the quality of internet connection, the Chair will, initially, pause the meeting for up to five minutes to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established, either by video technology or telephone in the alternative. If the connection is

not restored within that time, the meeting should continue to deal with the business whilst this happens, providing the meeting remains quorate.

- 23.21 In the event of a connection failure, the member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure. If the connection is successfully re-established, then the remote member(s) will be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment.
- 23.22 If a connection to the Chair is lost, the Vice Chair will stop the meeting to enable the connection to be restored. If the connection cannot be restored within five minutes, the Vice Chair will proceed with the meeting in the absence of the Chair. If the connection to both the Chair and Vice Chair is lost, the committee will wait for a period of five minutes and, if the meeting is still quorate, will elect a Chair Pro Tem. If connection to the Chair or Vice Chair is restored, they will take control of the meeting at the end of the item being discussed.
- 23.23 If a connection to a member is lost during a regulatory meeting, the Chair will stop the meeting to enable the connection to be restored. If the connection cannot be restored within five minutes, subject to the meeting being quorate, the meeting will proceed, but any member who has been disconnected will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the facts.
- 23.24 The Chair will follow the normal rules set out in the Constitution when determining who may speak, as well as the order and priority of speakers and the content of speeches in the normal way.
- 23.25 Members will be able to indicate to the Chair that they wish to ask a question or speak in the debate on an item by raising their hand physically, by using the raise hand function or by sending a message via the chat facility.
- 23.26 In respect of large committees, it will assist the meeting if those members who wish to speak on a particular item could indicate their wish to speak to the Chair and to the Democratic Services Officer in advance of the start of the meeting. Political groups are also encouraged to co-ordinate this activity wherever possible.

### **Meeting Etiquette**

- 23.27 Members are asked to adhere to the following etiquette during remote attendance at a meeting:

- Committee members are asked to join the meeting no later than fifteen minutes before the start to allow themselves and the Democratic Services Officer the opportunity to test the equipment.
- Elected members and any members of the public who are to speak at the meeting will initially enter the waiting room and will be admitted to the meeting by the Chair.
- All entrant microphones will be muted on entry.
- Any video-feed should show a non-descript background with no background noise where possible.
- Members should be careful not to allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
- To enable identification for the public in the remote meeting and to gain access from the 'waiting room', members must log in using the username provided to them by Democratic Services.
- All members should have microphones muted when not talking unless they have joined with audio only (e.g. telephone).
- Members will unmute their microphone when the Chair invites them to speak and then mute their microphone when they have finished speaking.
- The chat facility must not be used for private conversations between members and will be mindful that if they select 'everyone' all participants in the meeting will be able to see what they write.
- Members should only speak when invited to by the Chair and only one person may speak at any one time.
- For the benefit of anyone listening to an audio feed, anyone speaking should state their name before making a comment.
- When referring to a specific report, page, or slide, members should mention the report, page, or slide so that all members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

23.28 The Chair and / or the Democratic Services Officer may:

- Pause (adjourn) the meeting by taking down the stream (live feed) from public viewing and then resume it when needed and / or placing everyone in the waiting room.
- Switch on each active participant's microphone when they are invited to speak and switch them off afterwards.
- Mute someone speaking at any time.
- Mute everyone speaking except themselves at any time.
- Allocate different levels of access to people logging in based upon whether they are a councillor, an officer, or a member of the public or press who is an observer of the meeting.
- Switch some observers off or move observers to a 'waiting room', so they are paused and have neither 'live' visual or audio feed whilst the

committee deliberates in private or an officer present gives the committee advice. By taking down the live feed content from the public and just displaying a holding slide, decision makers may hold a separate meeting. The live stream can then be resumed when needed.

### **Voting**

23.29 When the Chair is satisfied that there has been sufficient debate and there is a proposer and seconder, who will indicate by showing their hand on the video or speaking if on an audio feed, for the item being discussed the Chair will progress to a decision.

23.30 The method of voting may be one of the following methods:

- A vote by electronic means or
- A role call where the Chair or Democratic Services Officer will call out the name of each member present with members stating 'for', 'against', or 'abstain' to indicate their vote when their name is called.

23.31 At the conclusion of the voting the Chair shall announce the numbers of votes cast for, against and abstentions and announce whether the motion has been passed or lost.

23.32 Details of how members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is called. Where a Recorded Vote is requested the Chair will ask members in turn to signify verbally whether or not they support that request.

### **Declaration of Interests**

23.33 Members will declare interests in the normal way at the appropriate point in the meeting, or if they realise that they have an interest in the item under discussion.

23.34 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, must also leave the remote meeting.

23.35 The Chair will place the member into the waiting room whilst the matter is considered and their departure will be confirmed by the Democratic Services Officer before progressing with the item of business. The Chair will then allow the member to re-enter the meeting from the waiting room when the matter has been determined and before moving onto the next item of business.