

BILBROOK PARISH COUNCIL

Virtual Meeting Policy

Introduction

Bilbrook Parish Council (BPC) recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist the Chair, 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 7 May 2021.

1) Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda being placed on the Council's website and noticeboards

2) Virtual Meeting 'platform'

BPC will utilise Zoom to provide video communications. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile phones, laptops, iPads and desktop computers.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will provide councillors with the following:

- Zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

These details will also be published on the agenda to enable members of the public to attend.

3) Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting as they would if persons were present in a place.

4) Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

- a) **Dress Code for Councillors** – Councillors should wear similar attire to that they would wear if they were attending a physical meeting.
- b) **Discussions** - This section applies if councillors are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 4d.
 - i) Councillors should attend the meeting with their video switched on unless technical issues do not allow this. During the meeting, all persons other than the Chair will be muted.
 - ii) During the meeting, councillors and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item.
 - iii) During the public participation period, members of the public will be required to 'enable video' for them to be visible to the Chair and will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, the microphone will be muted.
 - iv) All councillors attending the meeting should monitor their background noise when they are muted to avoid interference with the meeting. The host can mute anyone

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who does not adhere to this rule. If video is switched on, councillors should be mindful of what is behind them for the duration of the meeting.

- c) **Voting** - All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.
- d) **Poor connectivity** - In the case of poor connectivity, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene. In the case of video not being available for some or all of councillors attending the Chair can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

If a Councillor is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'dropouts' result in the meeting becoming inquorate councillors will endeavour to re-join for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chair will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Councillors will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.

- e) **Telephone attendance** - Persons wishing to attend by telephone are advised to contact the Clerk in advance so that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

5) Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply concerning Conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with the operation of technology. Behaviour that is 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 the press, this may result in them being removed from the Zoom meeting.

6) Declaration of Interests

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

7) Confidential Matters

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

8) Recording

Zoom meetings will be recorded for the purpose of minute writing only and will be deleted once the minutes have been approved

9) Other Information

The "Chat" facility and virtual backgrounds will be disabled for the meeting.

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020