

PROTOCOLS FOR REMOTE PUBLIC MEETINGS v4

The following protocols have been established for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council when conducting remote Committee meetings.

In drafting the protocols consideration has been given to the flexibility provided by 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 override any existing procedure rules/standing orders or other rules authorities may have relating to the governance of meetings. Therefore, there is no need at this stage to make amendments to the Council's Constitution.

The Protocols have been drafted and amended based on the proposals agreed with political group leaders set out in the following papers:

- Protocol for Virtual Meetings (original), April 2020
- Enhancing Scrutiny During Recovery, 11 May 2020

1 Number and frequency of meetings

- 1.1 The number of meetings and their frequency will continue to be reduced until further notice.
- 1.2. Cabinet Advisory Boards and certain working groups of Full Council and/or Cabinet will continue to be suspended until further notice.
- 1.3 Cabinet, Planning, Licensing, Licensing Sub Committees, General Purposes and Audit and Governance will continue to meet when essential decisions need to be made, or to ensure the continued effective economic operation of the area (planning applications for instance).
- 1.4 Overview and Scrutiny will only meet to discharge its statutory duties (review the policy/budgetary framework) and the pre-scrutiny of Cabinet reports. Non-essential scrutiny items and working groups will be suspended until further notice.
- 1.5 Should a member approach the six-month rule for attendance at committees, remote meeting attendance is enough to satisfy this. If the member cannot attend a remote meeting, the Council is able to grant a dispensation.
- 1.6 Meetings times for remote meetings will take place in the daytime, starting at 10.30am. This is to ensure there is time to reschedule/restart the committee meeting (if necessary) should there be technological problems at the 10.30am meeting. It will also ensure there is sufficient ICT/Democratic Services cover available to mitigate or fix any problems.

2 Notice of Meetings

- 2.1 The notice of the meeting will only be published on the website. Hard copy notices will not be placed on the Town Hall notice boards or sent in hard copy to any other council building (such as the Gateway).
- 2.2 The notice will include instructions for the public on how to view the remote meeting webcast.

3 Publishing the Agenda

- 3.1 The agendas will be published in the normal way on the Council's website 5 clear working days before the meeting.
- 3.2 For Cabinet, as the Cabinet Advisory Boards are suspended, the agenda will be published three weeks (15 working days) in advance of the meeting.
- 3.3 Email notification of agenda publication will be sent to Members as normal.
- 3.4 Members of the remote committee may, on request, receive a hard copy of the agenda to assist with virtual attendance, provided that further social distancing restrictions do not prevent the operation of the post room and postal delivery services.

4 Training and practice

- 4.1 Democratic Services will run informal virtual training sessions throughout April and May to assist Members with attendance.
- 4.2 A Chairman's briefing will take place shortly before the meeting, to assist the Chairman in running the meeting.
- 4.3 Each committee will hold a practice session before the actual committee meeting, to allow members time to practice and prepare.

5 Operation of the Meeting (please note, order of business may run differently depending on committee)

5.1 *Public and guest member speaking*

- 5.1.1 Members of the public and Council Members not part of the Committee who wish to speak at the meeting ('visiting members') will be offered the choice of:
 - 1. An independent officer of the Council reading their statement out in full (subject to the normal time-limit).
 - 2. Speaking remotely in person using sign-in details for the Skype meeting, sent to them via email from Democratic Services. Sign in options will be either via a weblink if using a PC, or via telephone.

(Members of the public who want to speak at the committee themselves, but cannot use a computer will be sent a telephone number and code to join the meeting, but will be advised that their telephone number will be displayed on the website through the live stream, unless they are able to hide their number themselves (as hiding the number is dependent on device used, it is up to the individual to do this for themselves).

The council is not obliged to provide any other method for remote attendance at the meeting by members of the public wishing to speak, and is not responsible for providing any equipment and/or training to enable members of the public to speak using the Skype meetings facility.

- 5.1.2 Members of the public and visiting members speaking will join the Skype meeting when the Democratic Services Officer allows them to enter. Once they have spoken, the Democratic Services Officer will exit them from the meeting so that they can no longer take part through Skype. The public speakers will be advised to stream the live webcast to listen to the rest of the meeting.
- 5.1.3 Visiting members must join the meeting as described above in order to manage the meeting correctly. Visiting members should not remain a part of the remote meeting once they have spoken or asked their question. In the same way that members wishing to speak must leave the committee table once they have spoken in a physical meeting – the same applies to remote meetings.
- 5.1.4 All other members of the public will access the meeting via the live webcast stream (and so will not be part of the Skype meeting).

5.2 Committee member access

- 5.2.1 Members of the committee will receive an email before the committee meeting, which will re-iterate the sign-in details if not using the Skype app, the name of the Democratic Services officer running the Skype meeting, and the name of the Democratic Services officer running the webcast.
- 5.2.2 Committee members will sign-in to the meeting using the Skype for Business invitation on their tablet, or by using the weblink access to the meeting on their pc/laptop or a telephone (weblink is preferred).
- 5.2.3 The video conferencing facility in Skype will usually be disabled and only audio will be used. This is to ensure there is enough bandwidth for all members to take part in the committee.
- 5.2.4 If there are no presentations as part of the agenda item, then the Skype meeting application will be displayed and streamed live on the council's website.

- 5.2.5 Members will be asked to sign in 15 minutes before the official start time of the meeting, in order to ensure everyone has joined successfully and is able to hear each other.
- 5.2.6 If an individual member has problems with joining the meeting, it will be their responsibility to contact ICT to resolve any problems. As long as there is a quorate number of members who have successfully joined the meeting and can take part, the meeting will go ahead.

5.3 *Chairman's control and meeting etiquette*

- 5.3.1 The role of the Chairman in managing the speaking, questions and debate at the committee will continue, however the responsibility for facilitating speaking by 'guests' of the committee (i.e. visiting members, members of the public etc.) will be temporarily assigned to the Democratic Services Officer running the Skype meeting. The Democratic Services Officer will be responsible for 'admitting' and 'exiting' the guest through the Skype app at the allotted time.
- 5.3.2 Members will enter the meeting and will be asked to place themselves on 'mute' when not speaking. This is to limit the background noise that is picked up and also to ensure members do not talk over each other.
- 5.3.3 When a member of the committee wishes to speak, they will be asked to use the Instant Messaging (IM) system on Skype to make a request – this is similar to a member raising their hand to speak at a normal committee meeting.
- 5.3.4 For the instances where a member cannot use the Skype app or the weblink on a pc/laptop (i.e. where they have had to telephone in), those members will need to ask the Chairman to speak at the appropriate time, and then wait for their turn.
- 5.3.5 The Chairman will recap the discussion at regular intervals, and regularly ask committee members if they continue to have a full understanding of the relevant issues being discussed.

5.4 *Agenda items*

- 5.4.1 The Chairman will welcome attendees and those watching the webcast to the meeting, confirming the Council name and meeting type (i.e. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Planning Committee).
- 5.4.2 An attendance register will be taken by the Democratic Services Officer, who will ask Members to confirm they have signed-in successfully, and apologies will be read out.
- 5.4.3 Declarations of interest will be taken by the Chairman. It would be extremely helpful if members of the committee advised the Chairman/Democratic

Services Officer before the start of the meeting whether they have an interest to declare. This will help with smooth progression through the agenda.

- 5.4.4 The Chairman/Democratic Services Officer will note the visiting members who wish to speak on items, as per prior notification.
- 5.4.5 Unless there are proposed changes to the minutes (and we ask that Members advise the Chairman/Democratic Services Officer in advance if they had amendments to the minutes), the minutes will be agreed by a vote.
- 5.4.6 On each substantive item on the agenda, the Chairman will ask the Officer to first present the item.
- 5.4.7 When the officer has presented the item, the Chairman will then hand over to the DSO to manage the public speaking element of the meeting. The DSO will 'admit' any waiting speakers for the item, or read out the representations if the public speakers do not want to attend. When the speaker has spoken (representation been read), the committee will wait for the DSO to 'exit' that speaker from the meeting, and to 'admit' the next speaker if necessary (and so forth).
- 5.4.8 When all the public speaking is completed, the DSO will hand back to the Chairman for progression of the rest of the item.
- 5.4.9 When the public speaking is completed, the Chairman will open to debate, and Members will be asked to IM if they wish to speak. Any IMs requesting to speak before this point will be disregarded. This is to ensure fairness and good management of the meeting.
- 5.4.10 If a Member is late to the meeting they will not take part in the debate or voting for the item that is currently being discussed (as normal). If a Member is present at the start of the meeting or item, but drops out of the call intermittently for technical reasons, as long as the drop out is not substantial, and the Member feels that they still have a full understanding of the discussion and relevant issues, then they can continue to take part in the debate and voting. Members must ask for a recap of the discussion if they feel they have not understood the issues thoroughly.
- 5.4.11 A Member who is required to withdraw from the meeting having disclosed a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Significant Interest (unless a dispensation is granted) or because they are pre-determined, will be muted by the Democratic Services Officer until such time that they may return to the meeting.

5.5 Voting

- 5.5.1 The usual procedures will be followed in relation to the movement of motions, which should be raised during the debate.

- 5.5.2 When voting on any recommendations/amendments, the committee Chairman will ask the Democratic Services Officer to read out the name of each committee member in person and ask if they are in favour, against or abstaining. This is to ensure transparency for members of the public listening to the webcast, who will not be able to physically see which way members have voted on an item. By voting the Member would be confirming that they have been present for the whole debate on that item.
- 5.5.3 Whilst the method of voting will, in effect, be a recorded vote, the minutes of the meeting will only show the majority view unless a recorded vote is specifically requested by a member before the vote is taken.
- 5.5.4 Once each of the agenda items have been discussed, the DSO will close the meeting. Members will disconnect themselves from the remote meeting.

6 Minutes and webcast archive

- 6.1 The Minutes of the meeting will be circulated to the Chairman and relevant Officers, as per current procedures. The draft minutes will be published on the Council's website for the public to view. Once the Minutes have been approved at the next relevant committee meeting, arrangements will be made for the final minutes to be signed. A record of the final minutes will be retained and published on the Council's website.
- 6.2 The recording of the meeting will be published on the council's website within 24 hours after the meeting event. Recordings of meetings will be verbatim and unedited unless a decision by the Monitoring Officer is made to edit part of the meeting for strong legal reasons.

7 Feedback

- 7.1 Members will be given the opportunity to provide feedback to Democratic Services once a remote meeting has taken place, in order to improve the running of remote meetings. Implementation of any changes as a result will be based on the majority of opinions expressed, subject to the proposed changes being in compliance with the regulations and other statutory requirements.