Protocol for Remote Council Meetings
Guidance for Members, Officers and the Public remotely participating in public Council meetings (including Committee, Commission and Board meetings)

Contents

West Berkshire COUNCIL

1   Introduction

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ("the Regulations") came into force on 4 April 2020.

The Regulations remove the legal obligation to hold local authority meetings at a specified physical location, by permitting members and others attending the meeting to do so by way of 'remote attendance'.

This Protocol should be read in conjunction with:

- the Council's Constitution ("the Constitution");

- the Resolution of Council relating to Remote Meetings dated 10 September 2020 ("the Resolution");

   and

- the Council's Guidance for Remote Council Meetings ("the Guidance").

2   Meetings

This Protocol applies to Participants as defined below in relation to meetings of the Council or its Committees, etc, that would, but for the coronavirus pandemic and the Regulations, be held in a physical location.

It does not apply to conferences, informal meetings, and meetings of task groups, advisory panels, etc (although the Chairman of the conference, meeting, task group, advisory panel, etc, may choose to follow the Protocol for convenience).

3   Zoom Webinars and Zoom Meetings

Generally, any streamed public meeting will be held via Zoom Webinar rather than Zoom Meeting. This is because there is greater security associated with Zoom Webinars and IT/ Strategic Support has more control over who is invited into the meeting. For most informal meetings Zoom Meetings will be used.

A difference between Zoom Webinars and Zoom Meetings is that Zoom Webinars distinguish between Panellists and Attendees, whereas Zoom Meetings don't. As follows, this is an important distinction for how public meetings are conducted – hence this Protocol describes how Zoom Webinars will be conducted and streamed.

4   Participants

For the purpose of this Protocol, a "Participant" is an individual who has registered for/accepted an invite to a meeting (see below). Participants will either be a "Panellist" or an "Attendee".

Panellists are:

- a West Berkshire Council elected Councillor ("Member") for a meeting of the Council;

- a member of the Executive, a member of the shadow executive or the leader of the minority group for a meeting of the Executive;

- a member (including a co-opted member or a substitute substituting for a member) of a Committee, Commission or Board for a meeting of that body;

- an individual permitted by statute to attend a meeting of the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee;

- an Attendee converted to a Panellist temporarily – either:

   ▪ any other Member whilst they are (in accordance with the Constitution) speaking or asking, answering, or receiving an answer to, a question;

   ▪ a member of the public who is asking, answering, or receiving an answer to, a question in accordance with the Resolution;

- an officer or professional adviser assisting proceedings.

Attendees are:

- any other Member permitted by the Constitution to speak at a meeting;

- a member of the public who has submitted a written question or a written submission to a relevant meeting in accordance with the Resolution;

- officers in attendance other than those described above.

5 Chairman of the Meeting

The Chairman of the meeting (eg the Chairman of Council, Leader of Council or the Chairman of the Committee/Commission/Board) will manage the meeting and will be assisted by an officer acting as 'Host', who will help to control access to the meeting and monitor Participants.

6 Members permitted to speak

Only Members permitted by the Constitution to speak at a meeting may be a Participant (whether as a Panellist or an Attendee).

All Members shall have been asked to provide IT/Strategic Support with a telephone member or numbers that might be used to access meetings via telephone only (see below).

For convenience, all members of committees – whether full members or substitutes – will be sent a meeting invitation (see below). However, substitutes should not join the meeting in question as a Panellist unless they are substituting for a full member (in which event Strategic Support should have been advised in advance in the usual way).

7 Members of the Public permitted to speak

Only members of the public who are permitted by statute to attend a meeting of the Council's Licensing Sub-Committee, or are permitted by the Resolution to ask or answer questions at a meeting, may be a Participant (whether as a Panellist or an Attendee).

Such members of the public will be asked to provide IT/Strategic Support with a telephone member that might be used to access meetings via telephone only (see below) and will be sent a meeting invitation (see below).

8 Viewers

Any Member who is not permitted by the Constitution, or member of the public who is not permitted by statute or the Resolution, to speak at a meeting, will not be a Participant but will be able to view proceedings by accessing the live stream – details of which will appear on the Council's web agenda page for the meeting.

9 Protocol

9.1 Access to the meeting

9.1.1   Participants will either have an individual Zoom Profile created for them by IT/Strategic Support for each meeting, linked to their meeting ID, or effectively create such by registering to speak (in accordance with the Resolution) at a meeting. This will ensure that they are readily identifiable to those observing proceedings as a member of the Council/Executive/Committee (Chairman, Leader, Portfolio Holder, etc), or as a Member, or as an Officer, or as a member of the public entitled to speak.

9.1.2   Participants should make a note of their meeting ID, which can be found in two places: (a) at the bottom of the meeting invite, and (b) in the top left hand side of the Zoom screen (indicated by ⓘ). This will be of assistance in the event that a Participant is experiencing technical difficulties, and requires support during a meeting. (The meeting invite will also contain a telephone number enabling a Participant to access the meeting via telephone if, eg, their internet connection drops out – see further below.)

9.1.3   The Zoom meeting Calendar invite will contain a link to the relevant meeting at the relevant time and Participants should click on this link to connect to the meeting.

9.1.4   The meeting invite link/meeting ID will be unique to the Participant and must not be shared with anyone.

9.2 Joining the meeting

9.2.1   To ensure the smooth running of the meeting and so that it can start promptly, Participants should connect via Zoom 10 minutes before the start time of the meeting and wait until they are admitted to the meeting by the Host.

9.2.2   Panellists will generally be admitted to the meeting at the outset. Attendees will be admitted to a virtual ante-room/viewing gallery (see further below).

9.2.3   Before the start of the meeting, the Clerk will check to ensure that only the Panellists who should be present are in the virtual meeting room.

9.2.4   Connecting to a meeting by telephone only should only be used if connecting via the internet is impossible. Panellists who do not use video will not be shown on the public live stream, although any contribution to the meeting will still be heard.

9.2.5 As stated above, to connect by telephone only the Participant must have supplied IT/Strategic Support with one or more telephone numbers they might use for this purpose – this will be checked against the incoming call for security. To connect, the Participant should dial the telephone number, and use the meeting details, on the meeting invitation.

9.3 Live Streaming and Recording

9.3.1 The meeting will be live streamed and recorded. Before the formal start of the meeting the Host will ask the Chairman's permission to make the video stream public; once started the Host will inform the meeting. From this point onwards the meeting will be available to view by the public. If there is a problem with the live stream for any reason the Host will inform the Chairman immediately.

9.3.2 Members are welcome to record the public element of any meeting, but may not record Participants prior to the Host informing the Chairman that the meeting is being publically live streamed. Similarly, Members may not record any element of a meeting following a resolution to exclude the press and public. Members are reminded that in any event the public element of a meeting will be available to view after the meeting via the link published on the Council's website.

9.4 Video/Audio

9.4.1 Subject to technology, all Participants will be able to see and hear any Participant speaking at a meeting.

9.4.2 Panellists with their video switched on for the duration of their attendance at the meeting (eg Attendees converted to Panellists whilst they are Panellists) will be:

- a Member or a member of the public;
- the Clerk;
- any legal adviser attending;
- any other officer integral to the purpose of the meeting (eg a planning officer in relation to a planning meeting).

9.4.3 Panellists with their video switched off unless they are speaking (as invited by the Chairman) will be:

- the Host (video will be off at all times, even if speaking);
- any officer other than as described above.

9.4.4 At the point that an Attendee is invited by the Chairman to speak (see further below), eg a Ward Member making a submission to an Area Planning Committee, a Member asking a question at a meeting of the Executive, or a member of the public in accordance with the Resolution, they will be made a Panellist by the Host or Chairman (nb that, depending on the nature of the meeting and the order that Attendees are converted to Panellists, there may be a slight delay in proceedings while this takes place). Such an individual should wait until they appear on screen before speaking.

9.4.5 They will then have the opportunity to speak and once their contribution to that element of the meeting has concluded (see further below) they will be moved back from Panellist to Attendee by the Host.

9.4.6 All microphones (except the Chairman's) will be muted on entry into the meeting and, except for a point of order or explanation, must remain muted unless a Participant is invited to speak by the Chairman (see further below).

9.4.7 Participants invited by the Chairman to speak should unmute their microphone (and wait to be made a Panellist (and appear on screen) if they are an Attendee). After speaking they should mute their microphone again.

9.4.8 Participants who fail to mute themselves when required to do so may be muted by the Host.

9.5 Speaking

9.5.1 Participants wishing to speak must indicate this by using the 'Zoom Raised Hand' (which can be found under the Reactions Tab on the ribbon at the bottom of your screen). The Clerk will make a note of Participants wishing to speak, and will provide the Chairman with details of those who have indicated a desire to do so, by reading a list of names at an appropriate point in the meeting.

9.5.2 If any of the Participants have entered the meeting via telephone rather than by way of the video facility, they will be asked by the Chairman whether they wish to speak. This will usually be after other Participants who have indicated they wish to speak, have spoken.

9.5.3 The Chairman will invite Participants to speak in any order (this will not overrule the rules of debate at full Council). Participants should remain seated whilst speaking. Once they have finished speaking, Participants should mute themselves and lower their Zoom Raised Hand.

9.5.4	As detailed above, Participants who have been moved from Attendee to Panellist status before speaking should wait to appear on screen before speaking. They will be moved back to Attendee status again after they conclude.
9.5.5	If any statutory officer (such as the Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer) or any Director indicates a desire to speak by using Zoom Raised Hand, the Clerk will notify the Chairman of this as soon as practicable (normally be at the conclusion of a Participant's speech).
9.5.6	To ensure that all Members who wish to speak have done so, the Chairman will ask the Clerk if there are any hands still raised before moving to the next part of the agenda.

9.6 Declared Interests

9.6.1	Where a Member is a Panellist and has declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Registrable Interest in an agenda item that would in ordinary circumstances require them to leave the meeting room for the duration of the item, the Clerk will ask the Host to change that Member's status from Panellist to Attendee for the item in question, and change them back again before the Chairman takes the next agenda item.
9.6.2	A Member who has made such a declaration and been moved to Attendee status may not communicate with any other Panellist (eg via Zoom Chat, text, email, etc) for the duration of the item.

9.7 Points of Order

9.7.1	Panellists wishing to raise a point of order or matter of personal explanation should signal this by unmuting their microphone, stating their name, and saying either, "Point of Order" or "Matter of Personal Explanation", then muting their microphone again. Attendees wishing to raise a point of order or matter of personal explanation should signal this by raising their Zoom Hand.
9.7.2	The Chairman will then invite the Participant to address the meeting (if they are an Attendee it will be at the Chairman's discretion whether to make them a Panellist for the purpose).

9.8 Zoom View

9.8.1	During the normal course of a meeting the live stream will use Zoom Gallery View, allowing up to 25 Panellists to be shown on screen (please see the Guidance for more about screen views). However, depending on the nature of the meeting, debate, etc, the Host can choose to 'spotlight' a Panellist who is speaking, particularly if that Panellist's contribution is of some length (eg a Member presenting a paper, motion, etc) so that they appear in a larger window within the page – this both highlights who is speaking and allows their full name/title/etc to be seen by anyone viewing the stream. Documents can also be spotlighted (shared).
9.8.2	Participants should be aware that if a Panellist/document is spotlighted/shared by the Host, this will change everyone's screen view to Speaker View (again, see the Guidance for more), so if they prefer Gallery View they will need to change their Zoom View (but nb that if the Host then uses spotlight again it will change their view again).

9.9 Voting

9.9.1	Where a vote needs to be taken at any stage of a meeting, the method of voting will be at the option of the Chairman, advised appropriately by the Clerk.
9.9.2	The different methods of voting are:

- a visible, physical raised hand;
- a Zoom poll;
- a Called Vote;
- a Named Vote.

9.9.3	*Visible, physical raised hand* – for small meetings, where all Panellists can be seen on a single screen, or for routine items that are not controversial (such as minutes), the Chairman may call for a vote by members raising their hand in front of the camera, much as would happen in a physical meeting.
9.9.4	*Zoom poll* - where the agenda item being voted upon is likely to be uncontroversial (adoption of minutes, motion to exclude press and public, etc) the Chairman may seek a vote via Zoom poll. In this event, each Panellist will see a poll statement appear on the screen with three options (for, against, abstain – see below) and (only) those voting members should respond by keying one of the options. The Host/Clerk will then announce the result by way of percentages (eg "80% for, none against, 20% abstaining") and the Clerk will announce the result of the vote. The names of those voting for whichever category will be available to the Clerk after the meeting has finished (but not within the meeting which is why this method cannot be used for all purposes). If there is any doubt at all about the poll (eg five committee members but six votes) another method of voting will be moved to.

9.9.5 *Called Vote* – the Clerk, Monitoring Officer or other officer will read the names of each Panellist entitled to vote in respect of any item and the Panellist will respond in one of three ways: "For", "Against" or "Abstain". (The minutes will simply record the results of the vote (eg "minutes agreed", or "motion carried") but not how members voted individually.)

9.9.6 *Named Vote* – if a Named Vote is requested in accordance with the Constitution a Called Vote will be conducted with the names and votes of those voting recorded for the minutes.

9.10 Adjournment

9.10.1 If the Chairman considers that the meeting should be adjourned for any reason, they will advise the meeting of this fact and provide a time at which the meeting will resume.

9.10.2 If the meeting is adjourned, the Host will display (share) a slide explaining this, for any viewers who may access the live stream or view the recording.

9.11 Exclusion of Press and Public

9.11.1 If a meeting contains items which are confidential (ie a Part II item) then, following a resolution to exclude the press and public, the Chairman (or one of the supporting officers) will explain that confidential items are to be discussed and:

- if the meeting is due to resume after the confidential item has been discussed, will further explain that the meeting will close for viewing by members of the public but be re-opened subsequently (in which event the Host will display (share) a slide explaining this, for any viewers who may access the live stream or view the recording); or

- if the meeting is not due to resume after the confidential item has been discussed, will further explain that the meeting will close for viewing by members of the public.

9.11.2 The Host will be asked to:

- lock the meeting to prevent further individuals attending, and

- stop live streaming and recording the meeting.

9.11.3 Before the meeting resumes for the confidential item, the Host will be asked to confirm that there is no-one other than Members and officers remaining as a Participant, and that the meeting is no longer being streamed or recorded.

9.11.4 During the confidential item all Participants must ensure that the meeting cannot be seen or overheard by anyone who is not a Participant.

9.11.5 If the meeting is to continue after the confidential item has been dealt with, at that point the Host will begin recording again and ask the Chairman's permission to make the video stream public, and once started the Host will inform the meeting.

9.12 End of Meeting

9.12.1 At the close of the meeting the Chairman or Host will ask all Panellists to remain in the virtual meeting room and not to leave until the Host has confirmed that meeting is no longer being streamed.

Document Control

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Change History

Version	Date	Description
1	08/06/2020	First version
2	15/06/2020	Added reference to the Council's Licensing Sub-Committees being excluded from this Protocol
3	28/09/2020	Voting at paragraph 9.9.3 to make it possible to vote by a show of hands for routine items (such as minutes) Under Exclusion of the Press and Public, a requirement has been added at para 9.11.3 reminding Panellists of the need to ensure confidentiality
4	07/01/2021	Amendment to the location of the raised hand function in paragraph 9.5.1