

32. Remote Meeting Protocol

a Introduction

i On 4th April 2020 the government introduced The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 to allow local councils to meet remotely. This protocol sets out how Ilminster Town Council will continue to operate during the pandemic.

ii Ilminster Town Council will operate on the Skype platform.

iii The Town Clerk informs all councillors of how to access the platform. Councillors are asked to contact the Clerk if they have any technical issues in relation to access, whether that be hardware or the need for headphones/microphone.

b Planning and Preparation

i The meeting will be advertised in the normal manner (other than on the public noticeboard) and an agenda will be issued within the normal timeframes.

ii Minutes will be taken at the meetings and displayed on the website in the normal manner. Minutes will be circulated after the meeting and signed when the council finally meets face to face.

iii Apologies need to be given in the normal manner.

iv The public are invited to observe the meeting. If they have a question to raise, they will have been asked to submit it in advance of the meeting and by 9am on the day of the meeting.

v The normal required standards of behaviour and discussion must be applied in the same manner as a face to face meeting. Attendees are required to be patient with those who are less experienced on this platform. They are to respect confidentiality, not to breach the code of conduct, and not to make enquiries about private matters, health, home etc.

vi If a councillor is deemed to have an interest in a matter and would normally leave a physical meeting, they will be asked to leave the virtual meeting and will receive a message when they will be invited back into the meeting by the Deputy Clerk.

vii There might be technical issues during the meeting and the Clerk might have to ask for clarification, or for dialogue to be repeated in order to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

c Process to host meetings for Councillors

- i The Deputy Clerk will host the meeting and set up the meeting perimeters. Each councillor will need to log into Skype and wait for the join button to appear on their screen.
- ii Before entering the meeting, attendees must ensure that they are in a private place where there is little background interference/noise/people. It can be difficult to hear on occasions and some might wish to use a headset with a microphone.
- iii A check will be made to establish that everyone can be heard. The Chairman invites someone to speak. Attendees are not to interrupt others. If a councillor would like to speak during the meeting, you should state your name as you speak, for the benefit of those who might not be able to see you at that moment.
- v The meeting will be chaired in the normal manner. The Clerk may have a greater input to guide the meeting to the next item, as some councillors may not have access to an agenda for the duration of the meeting (if they do not have a printer).
- vi If there is to be a vote, the Chair will ask each councillor in attendance by name if they are in favour or not. The councillor should reply clearly.
- vii If a councillor is unable to hear during the meeting, they are to use the chat box to type a message which will be seen by the Deputy Clerk.
- viii If people speak over others or if there is a time delay and matters are not heard, the Clerk will ask for people to repeat, and to speak in turn. All councillors will have access to the chat box and will be able to send a message during the meeting if they are experiencing issues.

d Public Participation

- i When the agenda is produced it will invite the public to contact the Town Clerk by email if they wish to be invited to the meeting. They will be sent an agenda prior to the meeting.
- iii If a member of the public wishes to ask any specific questions they will need to have informed the Town Clerk by 9am before the start of the meeting, by phone or email.
- iv If the Council resolves to exclude the public from part or all of a meeting, the Chairman will make a statement to explain reasons for the public's exclusion. On conclusion of the public business, the Chairman will thank the public for their attendance and they will be asked to end their Skype connection and close that part of the meeting. The Deputy Town Clerk will confirm when they have left and advise the Councillors they can commence the section of the meeting excluded from the public.