

Seighford Parish Council Virtual Meeting Policy May 2020

1. Introduction

Seighford Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairmen, 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.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas may or may not be published on physical noticeboards. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda and documents to be forwarded as appropriate. In cases that documents originate from a third party electronic links will be provided where available.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Seighford Parish Council will utilise Zoom to provide video communications. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems. In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will publish via the summons:

- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

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

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 5c. During the meeting all persons other than members will be muted. During the public participation period members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chairman 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.

During the meeting members and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item. All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and mute their own microphones, except when speaking, if necessary to negate interference with the meeting.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chairman will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene. In the case of video not being available for some or all of members attending the Chairman can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

d. Attendance

If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'drop outs' result in the meeting becoming inquorate members will endeavour to rejoin for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members 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 in order that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology. Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chairman. For a member of the public or press this may result in them being dismissed from the Zoom meeting.

7. 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

8. Public Participation

To assist with the timing and management of a virtual meeting, the press and public are required to pre-submit all addresses to The Clerk. These will be read by the Clerk at the meeting.

9. Confidential Matters

Where confidential matters need to be discussed, non-members will be placed in the waiting room until such business has been concluded.

10. Recording by the Council

The meeting may be recorded (audio and / or video) by the Clerk (or other such persons recording the minutes) for the purposes of accurate minute taking only. Copies of the recordings will not be retained after their usefulness has expired.

11. Information

The chat view box on the Zoom meeting may be disabled however it may provide additional information to attendees depending of the specific meeting.

Policy adopted 25th May 2020, next review May 2021

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>