

Herne and Broomfield Parish Council



Remote Meetings Policy

July 2024

Purpose of this policy and procedure

Herne and Broomfield Parish Council recognises that it may use remote meetings in the incidents where HM Government has advised against face-to-face meetings due to a local or national emergency. This policy ensures that these meetings are carried out in the correct manner in order to correspond with our Standing Orders and the ability of the Parish Council to remain functional. Remote meetings are still permitted for other council business, where public and press are not permitted, such as working groups and event planning.

Participation

All members must be able to access the meeting through a remote device such as a mobile phone, or laptop. If the meeting is taking place inside normal working hours, then the member may request to use the Parish Council computers to gain access only to the meeting taking place. This is only if they have no other reliable provision, but this must be agreed with the Clerk first before the meeting the member confirms attendance. The Clerk has the right to refuse without giving a reason, especially if it will interfere with the running of the Parish office.

In case of national or local emergency and Councils are prohibited from face-to-face meetings, this policy shall be implanted. In this case the Parish Council's policy on public participation at meetings will apply to all remote meetings. All such meetings must be advertised, and members of the public must be given access to observe the meeting and participate during the meeting adjournment for members of the public to speak. In this case the basic requirement for a member is a mobile phone and access to the Parish Council computers will not be granted.

Protocol for meetings

The meeting software used must allow all participants to be identified to all other participants, allow for visual observation of the person speaking, allow for self-muting of voice input and have a means of indicating to the chair, or the person heading the meeting, that a member wishes to speak (which may include raising a hand).

Before each meeting all relevant documents will be forwarded to each member via email along with the necessary meeting invitation code, date and time of the meeting.

In case of national or local emergency and Councils are prohibited from face-to-face meetings, the above will apply. The following protocols will also apply:

The Clerk will ensure all meetings follow the previously advertised meeting agenda.

Meetings will be held at the same time and date as previously scheduled, had the emergency arrangements for virtual meetings not been in place.

The Council Chair will chair all Parish Council meetings as usual. Participants wishing to speak must indicate in the agreed way (dependant on the facilities available on the meeting software)

and wait until they are invited to speak by the chairman. Members will all “mute” themselves and will only “un-mute” when invited to do so by the chairman.

All voting at virtual meetings will be by a show of hands unless a member calls for a secret ballot, in which case members will email their votes to the Clerk within 30 minutes of the end of the meeting. After a secret ballot the Clerk will inform the members of the outcome by email at the earliest opportunity. Although this is not an entirely secret ballot the Clerk will be bound to keep every member’s voting preferences secret.

Agenda items which are to be dealt with in the absence of members of the public or press, will be held separately from the regular meetings so that invitations can only be sent out to bona fide participants only. Such items may be dealt with on the same date as the original meeting, if time allows, or may be deferred to a date and time agreed by all members.

Declaring an interest

If a member declares a pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda, which would preclude them from participating when that item is being addressed that agenda item will be deferred. A new meeting session will be convened, to which the precluded member will not be invited. This will be after the regular meeting has finished, if time allows, or may be deferred to another date and time as agreed by all members. The precluded member will be given the opportunity to make a statement relating to the agenda item to the council before the original meeting is adjourned.

Member standards

Members will be covered by the Code of Conduct for Local Councillors and will be expected to conduct themselves in the same way as face-to-face meetings, so as not to bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

Recording of meetings

Some forms of virtual meeting software allow for meetings to be recorded. Members should not record and retain meeting material due to data protection, whether that be on the device they are using for the meeting or a separate device. However, the Clerk may record an audio and / or video recording of the meeting for the purpose of compiling the minutes of the meeting, as long as the recording is deleted immediately afterwards, and members are aware of the initial recording taking place.