

Virtual Meeting Policy
Adopted at Council Meeting by correspondence on 9th June 2020
Revised by correspondence on 9th July 2020

1. Introduction

Mepal Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times when a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairs, 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 7th May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors will be summonsed as per regulations, with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will be published on Council's physical noticeboards as far as is practicable. Any person unable to access the Council's website, may contact the Council and request that a paper copy of the agenda is posted to them.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

A variety of different platforms including Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts or Zoom are available and Mepal Parish Council used Zoom initially but has chosen to use the Microsoft Teams platform as the default in order that the meeting is accessible by all Parish Councillors and is publicly available. The Microsoft Teams platform enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems. The platform (Zoom or Microsoft Teams) will be clearly specified in the meeting notice.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will make available on request the meeting link and any meeting ID and meeting passcode required to attend the meeting, just as they would be able to attend a meeting in Mepal Community Pavilion.

For Teams meetings, The Vice-Chair will Host the meeting using their Microsoft account and will assign the Clerk or Chairman of the meeting as a Host if necessary. For Zoom meetings the Clerk will use their free Zoom account and will assign the Chair as Host if necessary. Attendees will also have the ability to dial in to the meeting via telephone if required.

Attendees will collect in a virtual 'waiting room' prior to the meeting and will be admitted by the host when the meeting starts.

4. Standing Orders

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

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a) Discussions

During the meeting, all persons, other than councillors, will be audio-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 Chair and should raise their hand to indicate if they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, their microphone will be muted and the Clerk will have the ability to mute anyone who forgets.

If members of the public are in attendance all Councillor attendees will be asked to give their names at the beginning of the meeting to enable members of the public to identify them. Members of the public may introduce themselves if they wish to do so.

b) Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of physical hands. For matters that the Chair deems to be of especial importance or contention, he will call a roll, by alphabetical sequence of members present, to cast their votes.

c) Poor Internet Connectivity

In the case of poor Internet connectivity or in case of a power failure at any location, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available but audio remaining for some or all of members attending, the Chair 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 no longer being quorate, members will endeavour to re-join for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, if the meeting is still not quorate, the Chair will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date and time, 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 disruptive or contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. For a member of the public or press, this may result in them being dismissed from the virtual meeting.

In order to protect participants from malware, the 'chat', file sharing and screen sharing function will not be operated during the meeting. If necessary, the Clerk will display any documents required using the 'share screen' function.

7. Declaration of Interests

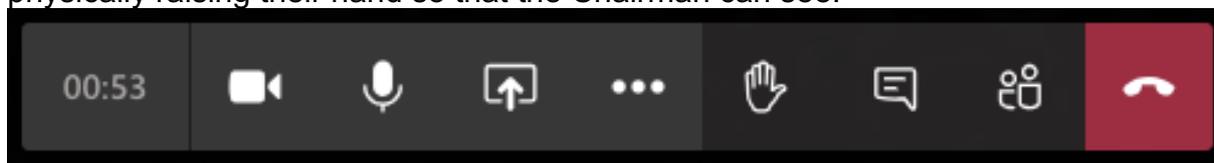
A councillor who has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting, will be placed in the virtual 'waiting room'. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made, the councillor will be returned to the meeting

8. Public Participation

The published agenda will either include a link to the meeting or a note that members of the public who wish to attend the meeting should contact the Clerk for an invitation. Invitations will not be issued once the meeting has commenced.

As with meetings in Mepal Community Pavilion, members of the public will be given the opportunity to speak during public participation on Agenda items only, but will not be permitted, unless invited to do so by the Chairman, to speak at other times.

Anyone wanting to speak should raise their hand using 'raise hand' in the options within the Participants section or, if they're using a camera, by turning it on and physically raising their hand so that the Chairman can see.



Meeting participants may wish to protect their personal environment by considering what can be seen behind them while on camera.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Microsoft Teams or Zoom meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda, the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

Or,

Confidential agenda items will be dealt with by members of the public being placed in the virtual 'waiting room' for the duration of that item. At the conclusion of the item they may be brought back into the meeting if they have not previously left.

10. Recording

While recognising that a member of the public may decide to record the virtual meeting, the Council will not routinely record meetings. However, recordings may be made at the discretion of the Chair and made available to members, the press and members of the public

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>