

West Hill Parish Council Virtual Meeting Policy

Approved 2nd February 2021 21/039

1. Introduction

West Hill Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times where physical meetings are not appropriate. This policy has been developed to assist the Chairman, councillors, members of the public and press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting. This policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020') and will remain in place until the legislation changes.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed, as per the regulation with the agenda and supporting documents being emailed to them in advance of the meeting, with 3 clear days' notice. They will be published on the Parish Councils website and noticeboard.

Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Clerk (clerk@westhillparishcouncil.gov.uk or Tel 01404 232 100) to request a copy of the agenda.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

The Council will utilise Zoom to provide video conference facilities to enable Cllrs to remotely attend the meeting. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using an internet enabled device such as PCs and also by telephone.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk will publish via the summons/agenda:

- The Zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders have been amended with an appendix to take into account the current change in the legislation to allow for remote meetings of the Council (ref xxxxx). Other than meeting by video-conferencing the decision making will operate as usual and will be subject to the Council's protocols and Standing Orders.

5. Virtual Meeting Arrangements

At the start of the meeting

- a. All participants are admitted to the meeting room via a waiting room.

- b. All participants enter are muted on entry to the meeting.
- c. Councillors should clearly display their names as “Councillor xxx xxxx”.
- d. The Clerk should clearly display their name as “Parish Clerk xxx xxxx”.
- e. Members of the public will be asked to display their full name and enable video (if not attending by phone).
- f. The Chairman can ask members of the public attending by phone to identify themselves.
- g. The Chairman should remind attendees that the meeting is being recorded (sound only).
- h. The Chairman should remind members of the public of the protocols for public participation.
- i. The Chairman can directly ask the attendees by phone if they wish to speak during the period for public participation.
- j. The Chairman can ask the attendees by phone to identify themselves when they wish to speak.
- k. The Chairman will remind attendees of the need to treat each other with respect. Councillors will be reminded of the need to observe the Council’s Code of Conduct

Discussions

- a. If attendees wish to speak they should raise their hand. The Chairman will then decide the order in which Councillors may speak.
- b. In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations embodied in the Data Protection Act 2018 (‘the Act’) members of the public when speaking MUST NOT provide information that either directly or indirectly identifies any individual.
- c. During the Public Participation item on the agenda the Clerk will read out any pre-submitted queries or questions from residents.
- d. 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 un-muted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address their microphone will be muted.
- e. During the meeting and after public participation has closed all persons other than Parish Councillors will be muted. During the meeting Councillors and Clerk will raise their hand to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item.
- f. All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands, either physically via video link or by using the electronic ‘raise hand’ feature within Zoom
- g. In the case of poor connectivity, the Chairman will decide whether to continue with the meeting, or to reconvene at a later date and time subject to the statutory days of notice.
- h. If a Councillor is believed to have ‘dropped out’ this will be minuted. If ‘drop outs’ result in the meeting becoming inquorate, Councillors will endeavour to re-join for a period of 10 minutes. After 10 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate, the Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date and time subject to the statutory days of notice. Councillors will be telephoned to advise of the suspension of the meeting.
- i. If necessary, the meeting host can mute speakers put them back in the waiting room or remove them from the meeting.

6. Declaration of Interests

A Councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting, will be moved to the waiting room whilst the item is under discussion and will then be re-admitted to the meeting for the subsequent agenda item. No other business will be conducted until the Councillor has re-joined the meeting, or a period of 5 minutes after the re-joining time (when it will be assumed that they have left the meeting).

7. Confidential Matters

For Confidential matters members of the public will be transferred to the meeting waiting room for the duration of the item. Once the Confidential item has been concluded persons in the waiting room will be re-admitted to the meeting.

8. Recording

Zoom meetings will be audio recorded only. Recordings are made available to Councillors, the press and members of the public where appropriate.

9. Minutes

Minutes will be signed at the first physical meeting of the Council.

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Next Review: Feb 2022 or when legislation changes

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/contents/made>