

5.11 Protocol for Online Meetings

Reference from Council Procedure Rule 51

In accordance with the [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) the Council is able to make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to, council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021. This Council has done that and makes reference to that at Council Procedure Rule (CPR) 51. This is the protocol referred to in CPR 51 and shall apply to Council meetings which are held entirely or partially in a virtual way up to and including 7 May 2021.

This protocol should be read in conjunction with CPR 51.

In order for members to be able to attend meetings of the council remotely, they need not be physically present, provided they are able to hear and be heard (and, where possible, see and be seen by) other councillors and members of the public attending remotely or in person.

In this Protocol:

“Remote Access” means by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.

“Remote Attendance” means attending a meeting by Remote Access and complying with the conditions set out in the interim Council Procedure Rules about being heard and seen by other attendees.

1. Prior to the meeting

- 1.1. Attendees should join the meeting 15 minutes prior to the meeting start time or at such earlier time as may be specified in advance by the Governance Team.
- 1.2. Attendees should use a headset wherever possible
- 1.3. If using video, attendees should avoid sitting in direct sunlight
- 1.4. Attendees should adjust their settings prior to the start of the meeting to:
 - 1.4.1. Mute their microphone
 - 1.4.2. Select a suitable background as instructed by the Governance Team
 - 1.4.3. Switch video off
 - 1.4.4. Open a chat window
 - 1.4.5. If applicable, set Skype to ‘Do not disturb’

2. During the meeting

- 2.1. At the start of the meeting, attendees will be expected to introduce themselves. They will not be called by the Chair to speak but will be brought ‘live’ by the Chair to introduce themselves. Attendees will know they are ‘live’ when their video window has a red outline, this means that their video feed is visible to all attendees.
- 2.2. Attendees who wish to speak should type the word ‘speak’ in the open chat window.
- 2.3. Attendees should not use the chat window for any other purpose.

- 2.4. Attendees who have indicated that they wish to speak should turn their video feed on when they are third in the chat queue.
- 2.5. Attendees should speak only once invited to do so by the Chair and should only unmute their microphone once the Chair has called them to speak.
- 2.6. Attendees should only speak once the 'live' red outline appears around their video window.
- 2.7. Attendees should always state their name before speaking, even though the Chair will have just called them.
- 2.8. Attendees should avoid asking if they can be seen or heard, the Chair will monitor and address any problems.
- 2.9. If attendees are referring to any of the published documents, they should announce the page or slide number clearly.
- 2.10 Attendees should remember to mute themselves when they have finished speaking and to turn their video feed off.

3. Role of the chair

- 3.1. The Chair will communicate with the meeting production team, governance and other officers independently of the meeting. This is to enable administrative tasks to be undertaken and for advice to be taken where applicable.
- 3.2. The Chair or a Council officer will go through the meeting etiquette before the stream goes live.
- 3.3. The Chair will introduce the meeting and confirm that the meeting is being streamed.
- 3.4. The Chair will ensure that attendees introduce themselves.
- 3.5. The Chair will manage speakers using the chat window, inviting attendees to speak by name when they are next.
- 3.6. Once a speaker has finished the Chair will thank them and introduce the next speaker if applicable.
- 3.7. The Chair should be proactive and verbally note the order of speaking at the beginning of discussion on an item.
- 3.8. The Chair or a member of the Governance Team will facilitate any voting and will do this by means of a roll call, asking each voting attendee by name whether the vote for or against any motion, or abstain.

4. Officers

- 4.1. A Governance Services Officer must be present at the meeting and should, wherever possible, be in the room if a meeting is held in a physical room with some Members in Remote Attendance. If this is not possible, then a Governance Services Officer must be present remotely.

- 4.2. Other Council Officers will be present as required to present reports or assist in the administration / production of the meeting.

5. Other Attendees

- 5.1. Any other person may attend and contribute to a meeting (in accordance with Standing Orders or otherwise invited to do so by the Chair), provided that they have Remote Access to the meeting which enables them to be heard by attendees including the public.

6. Exempt and Confidential Items

- 6.1. The usual requirements in relation to these continue to apply.
- 6.2. These items should be considered at the end of a meeting to facilitate prohibiting the public's access during these items.
- 6.3. An Officer will be responsible for ensuring that the public do not have access to the meeting during these items.
- 6.4. The Chair must not allow the meeting to discuss any exempt or confidential item until the Governance Services Officer has verbally confirmed that the public does not have access to the meeting.
- 6.5. A Member in Remote Attendance must not breach their duty of confidentiality to the council by allowing any unauthorised person to be present in the same room as them when the meeting discusses an exempt or confidential item.

7. Technical Difficulties

- 7.1. If the Chair is made aware that the live link to the meeting is lost or interrupted, the Chair should adjourn the meeting during any item which is open to the public.¹
- 7.2. The Chair should also adjourn the meeting if the Governance Services Officer loses their connection.
- 7.3. The Chair may briefly adjourn a meeting if made aware that a Member in Remote Attendance has lost their connection to the meeting.
- 7.4. If a significant number of Members in Remote Attendance lose their connection at the same time, the Chair may adjourn the meeting to another date or time even if the meeting is still quorate.
- 7.5. During any period when a Member has lost their connection, they are not deemed to be present at the meeting. In such circumstances, a Member should consider whether their absence during the item is such that it is inappropriate for them to take part in the vote.
- 7.6. The Chair may also defer an item if any other person who was expected to participate or contribute in relation to that item loses their connection and it is not possible to reconnect in a reasonable time period during the meeting.

¹ The Chair would only be expected to adjourn if the public link was down and would not be expected to adjourn if only a single member of the public were to lose their connection.

8. Conflicts of interest

- 8.1. Members need to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct including making declarations of interest at a meeting. Any declarations made will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 8.2. A Member in Remote Attendance with a disclosable pecuniary interest in an item who has to leave the meeting should declare their interest verbally to the Chair and leave the meeting. Once the item has been dealt with, the officer responsible for controlling access to the meeting, will tell the Member that they may re-join the meeting.