

Waverley Borough Council

General Guidance Note and Procedure Rules for Virtual Meetings and Remote attendance at meetings

This Protocol, and accompanying Procedure Rules (Appendix 1), provide the means and guidance for the conduct of any remote (virtual) meeting of the Council, and its various Committees and the Executive, held under the provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ('the Regulations'), or remote attendance by Members at a physical meeting of the Council.

This Protocol and Procedure Rules should be read in conjunction with the Council's Procedure Rules within the Constitution. The Regulations, made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, apply notwithstanding any other legislation or current or pre-existing standing orders or any other rules of the Authority governing meetings and remain valid until 7 May 2021. This means that, wherever there is a conflict, these Virtual Meetings Procedure Rules take precedence in relation to any remote meeting.

Preparing for a virtual meeting

- You do not need to have a Zoom account in order to join a Zoom meeting.
- You do not need to join a Waverley Zoom meeting from your Waverley iPad – the security of the meeting is embedded within Waverley's account settings, not the device you use to join the meeting.
- Meeting appointments will be sent that include details of how to join the Zoom meeting – a link &/or Meeting ID and password. Depending on which device you are using to join the meeting, you may need to make a note of the Meeting ID and password – please refer to the appropriate guide from IT on how to join a meeting.
- In order to maintain the security of the Zoom meeting room, **do not** share the Meeting ID or Password with anyone.
- Give apologies or make declarations of interests prior to the meeting by contacting the Democratic Services Team in the usual way.
- Councillors who wish to speak on a particular item at a committee of which they are not a members are required to register in advance with Democratic Services in the usual way (by midday on the day of the meeting).
- Councillors who wish to observe a meeting but not participate may join the Zoom meeting, but will be asked to mute their microphone and video feed so as not to confuse members of the public about who is part of the active meeting. Alternatively, Members can observe the meeting by viewing the meeting on Waverley's YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/WaverleyBorough>

Setting up your virtual meeting room

- Think about where you will be situated in your home for the video-conference, and what aspects of your home will be on show.

- Check the physical set-up of the device that you will be using. You want the camera to be at eye-level, so you may need to adjust the height by propping your laptop or iPad up on some books.
- Practice speaking to the camera and not the screen - It can feel natural to look at the person on the screen, but you should look at the camera if you are speaking or presenting so your audience feels like you're talking directly to them.
- Check your lighting. Try not to sit directly near a bright light source, for example with a window behind you. Experiment with moving lamps and your camera until you can see your face lit brightly. If possible, try to provide a plain background to reduce distractions.
- Check that you won't be interrupted during the meeting – you might need to put a 'do not disturb' notice on the door of the room as a reminder to others who are in the house.
- Is there a smart speaker in the room or on your device (Amazon Echo, Google Home, Siri, etc)? Apart from the potential for an inadvertent interruption these devices may also record, so please switch them off during the meeting. Staff at these companies are also able to listen in to devices at any time and this could be a breach of data protection.

Access to documents

- Democratic Services will publish the agenda and reports for committee meetings on the Council's website and on Modern.Gov and will notify councillors by email.
- Printed copies will not normally be circulated other than to the committee members and substitutes; nor will they be available for inspection at the Council's offices.
- All documents will be page-numbered for ease of reference.
- Presentations given at a meeting will have a slide number on each slide and will be shared on screen by the presenter.

Joining the meeting

- Please dress appropriately for a formal committee meeting, even if you are joining from home.
- An online meeting invitation is like a physical room in that you can enter it as early as you want but the start time just reflects when everyone needs to be ready to start. This gives all users time to join the meeting and ensure that their internet connection, camera, audio speaker and microphone are working. Try to join the meeting 30 minutes in advance, have the confidence that everything is working, mute your microphone and go and grab a coffee.
- Everyone should have joined the meeting and tested their equipment 5 minutes before start time.
- Ensure you are correctly identified on your video feed eg as "Cllr Paul Follows" rather than 'Paul's iPad'.

- Turn off all nearby noise sources (radio, television, mobile phone) and try to separate yourself from any interruptions. Switch off smart speakers if they are in the same room.
- Bear in mind that some meetings may contain confidential information so make arrangements to ensure that other members of your household are not able to over hear this and that your papers cannot be overlooked or seen by the camera.

During the meeting

- Where using video-enabled equipment, keep your camera on at all times, but mute your microphone if you are not speaking. This helps to minimise background noise being broadcast. The meeting host is also able to mute your microphone.
- If you are in a room with others and have all joined the meeting on individual devices, then ensure that only one of you has your microphone on at any one time to reduce feedback.
- Be present: Don't work on other tasks (like emails) during the meeting.
- Be courteous and don't interrupt. Zoom has a 'hand raise' facility (within 'Participants') that you should use to indicate when you wish to speak.
- It is important to wait until the Chairman invites you to speak, particularly as there is not any eye contact now to indicate intention to speak. The Chairman will offer everyone the opportunity to contribute throughout the meeting.
- When you speak at the meeting, particularly if you have joined the meeting by phone and have no video feed, it is important to state your name so that viewers are aware who is speaking.
- If you have an interest in an item, you will need to declare that in the usual way. Once the Committee comes to consider this item, if you are required to leave the meeting the Chairman will announce that you will be leaving the meeting. **You will then need to leave the meeting by muting your microphone and switching off your camera feed. You will be able to re-join the meeting once the item has concluded.**

Voting

- The Council will use the polling facility within Zoom to enable councillors participating in meetings remotely to indicate their vote. Where a councillor joins the meeting by audio only, the Chairman will invite them to vote verbally.
- Notwithstanding this, where a vote is required on a particular item, the Chairman may seek the affirmation of the meeting if there is no dissent; or may ask each member of the committee to vote in turn. Councillors should express their vote verbally. This will be used to tally up the votes, but the way in which each councillor has voted will not be recorded in the minutes unless a Recorded Vote has been agreed in accordance with the Procedure Rules.

- The Democratic Services Officer will record the outcome of votes and announce this to the meeting.

Participation by members of the public

- Where there is no physical meeting room for members of the public to attend the meeting in person, there is a legal requirement that they should be able to hear, and where practicable see, the proceedings.
- Members of the public who wish to observe the proceedings of a committee are able to do so by watching the live stream on the Council's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/WaverleyBorough>
- A member of the public who has been given permission by the Chairman to address a meeting in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules will be invited to participate in the remote meeting for the duration of the item in question.
- A member of the public who has been given permission by the Chairman to address a meeting in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules may, as an alternative, submit a written statement that can be read out by the Chairman at the appropriate time.

Dealing with exempt items of business

- There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or "exempt" information – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – is under consideration.
- Councillors in remote attendance at a meeting considering exempt information must ensure that there are no members of the public (including family members) present that are able to hear or see the proceedings during such meetings or parts of meetings.
- Any councillor in remote attendance who fails to disclose that there are other persons present, such as those who may be able to see and/or hear the meeting, who are not so entitled will be in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Managing technical failures

- Similar to hosting a physical meeting when attendees get stuck in traffic, there will be occasions when an individual encounters a technical issue that cannot be resolved in time for the start of the meeting. Joining the meeting in plenty of time provides an opportunity for technical issues to be resolved before the start of the meeting.
- Within a timely manner before the issue causes a distraction, the Chairman should be clear when the meeting should go ahead without the attendee or be postponed/rescheduled.
- Where there is no physical meeting room for members of the public to attend the meeting in person, in the event that the Chairman or Democratic Services Officer identifies a failure of the remote participation facility, the Chairman will declare a

recess while the fault is addressed. If the problem cannot be resolved within 15 minutes, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as it can be reconvened.

- In the event of a councillor losing their connection during the course of a meeting, the Chairman may adjourn for up to 5 minutes to enable the councillor time to rejoin the meeting.
- If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting is inquorate, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as it can be reconvened. If the meeting is quorate, the meeting may continue. Those attending remotely would be aware and accept that the meeting would continue and a vote would be taken without their attendance.
- Dialling into a Zoom meeting can be an acceptable emergency workaround for one or two participants or very small meetings, but this may not be practicable when managing a meeting with multiple online attendees.
- If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter or one which is time-limited and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and where appropriate/possible the relevant Executive member, shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted by the Council's constitution.
- If a connection to a Member is lost during a regulatory meeting, the Chairman will stop the meeting to enable the connection to be restored. If the connection cannot be restored within a reasonable time, the meeting will proceed. If the Member is subsequently able to re-join the meeting they will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the facts.

Chairmen

- Chairmen will be supported at a meeting by the Democratic Services Officer clerking the meeting, and a separate 'Host' of the Zoom meeting. The Chairman can communicate privately with the DSO during the meeting using the Zoom chat function.
- Chairmen will need to work with DSO and Host regarding management of the meeting on the software (eg 'locking' the room once the meeting starts, allowing external speakers, arranging break out rooms, etc)
- Chairmen need to be very directive and explain the procedures at the beginning of the meeting, along with leading introductions of all present.
- Where the Chairman is required to interpret the Council's existing Procedure Rules in light of the requirements of remote participation, he or she shall take advice from the Monitoring Officer prior to making a ruling. The Chairman's decision in all cases shall be final.