



# VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY

Document Control		
Version Number	V1	
Adopted on	27/08/2020	Item 6.(a)
Review Date	By May 2021	

Please note that alternative formats of this document may be available upon request.

## 1. Introduction

Westmeston Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually where a physical meeting is not appropriate. This policy has been developed to assist Members, the public & the press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting & to assist people to engage in debate & decision-making. Parish Councils have been given provision under 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' to hold legal 'virtual meetings' on & up to 7 May 2021 so that Council business can be maintained.

## 2. Agenda

Members will be summonsed as per regulations with the agenda & documents being placed on the Council's website. An agenda will be displayed on the Notice Board situated in Westmeston, if safe to do so. Any person unable to access the Council's website should contact the Clerk & request an electronic copy of the agenda & documents to be forwarded as appropriate. In cases where documents originate from a third-party electronic links will be provided where available.

## 3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

A variety of different platforms are available including Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts or Zoom. Westmeston Parish Council has chosen to use the Zoom platform so that the meeting is publicly available. The Clerk will "host" the meeting using the Council-paid account. Zoom enables video & audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices & desktops. In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will publish via the summons:

- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

#### **4. Standing Orders**

The meeting will be a formal Council meeting & will be held using the agenda & summons which the Clerk has published. It will be governed by Standing Orders, Financial Regulations & associated policies in the usual manner.

#### **5. Virtual Meeting Etiquette**

All attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Attendees will collect in the Zoom “Waiting Room” prior to the meeting. As the “Host”, the Clerk will have the ability to mute or remove anyone deemed a nuisance at the Chairman’s request.

Behaviour that is disruptive or contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chairman. For a member of the public or the press this may result in them being dismissed from the Zoom meeting. For this reason, the Chairman will, at their discretion, abort individual members, or if necessary, the whole meeting.

All attendees will be set to “mute” on entry to the meeting & only the Chairman of the meeting will remain unmuted. All other participants, if they wish to speak will be invited to “unmute”. The Clerk will have the ability to mute anyone who forgets.

All Councillor attendees will display their name in order for the public to identify them.

Councillor participants will introduce themselves. Members of the public may introduce themselves, if they so wish.

#### **6. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements**

##### **a) Discussions**

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity.

During the meeting all persons other than Members will be muted. During the public participation period members of the public will be required to ‘enable video’ if available in order for them to be visible to the Chairman & will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be “unmuted” & they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be muted.

During the meeting Members will ‘raise their hand’ to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item. To raise a hand using the desktop software, click on ‘Participants’ at the bottom of the screen then click on the small icon that looks like a hand. The Chairman will indicate when it is the Member’s turn to speak. If the Chairman is using a Smartphone they may only have the current speaker in view, so will not be able to see others physically waving or using the ‘reactions’ button to indicate they want to speak, please make sure to use the ‘raise hand’ icon.

Smartphone users, scroll to bottom left of screen & tap on the icon 'raise hand'.

Those Members attending by telephone can use \*9 to indicate they wish to speak.

All Members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise & mute their own microphones, except when speaking, if necessary, to negate interference with the meeting.

#### **b) Voting**

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands or a verbal 'yes/no' spoken in turn for those Members not using video.

#### **c) Poor connectivity**

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chairman will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available for some or all of Members attending the Chairman can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for Members' 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 becoming inquorate Members will endeavour to re-join for a period of 15 minutes. After 15 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate the Chairman will suspend the meeting & reconvene at a later time & date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to be advised 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. Telephone attendees can mute/unmute by keying \*6 & can 'raise their hand' by keying \*9.

### **7. Declaration of Interests**

A Member who has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the virtual Waiting Room for the duration of the Agenda item. Once the item for which the declaration is made has been concluded, the Member will be re-admitted.

### **8. Public Participation**

As with meetings at Westmeston Parish Hall, members of the public & press will be given the opportunity to speak during **Public Forum & Questions** but will not be permitted, unless invited to do so by the Chairman, to speak at other times.

### **9. Confidential Matters**

Confidential matters will be dealt with at the end of the meeting & members of public & the press

will be removed from the meeting & anyone joining the meeting after the meeting goes into confidential session will enter the virtual Waiting Room & only Members of the Council will be admitted to the meeting.

#### **10. Recording**

Zoom meetings will be recorded by the Clerk for minute-taking purposes & will be deleted once the draft minutes are available.

#### **11. Information**

To protect participants from malware, the Chat View box on the Zoom meeting will be disabled.

Meeting participants may wish to protect their personal environment by choosing a virtual background in the Zoom Settings "Virtual Background" or alternatively, should consider what can be seen behind them while on camera.

For further information see The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020.