

## **Appendix 9 - Ferndown Town Council's Virtual Meeting Protocol**

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### **1. Introduction**

Ferndown Town Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairmen, councillors, officers 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 7 May 2021.

Remote attendance is permitted as long as certain conditions are satisfied. These include that a member is able to hear and be heard by the other members in attendance; also, being able to hear and be heard by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting (in line with the public participation scheme). A visual solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient.

### **2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents**

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will not be published and not distributed on physical noticeboards. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda and documents to be forwarded as appropriate. Councillors will be sent the agenda and associated documents electronically within the three working day rule (not including the day of issue and day of meeting).

### **3. Virtual meeting 'platform'**

Ferndown Town Council will utilise the video communication software platform called Zoom to provide video communications. In preparation for meetings an officer will publish via the summons **the contact details for requesting the Zoom meeting link, meeting ID and passcode to negate the attendance of inappropriate and offensive participation by members of the public that have no interest in the business to be transacted other than to disrupt the meeting).**

The officer clerking the meeting is effectively the 'host' of the meeting and gives them slightly more functionality than other participants - this will be used to support the Chairman of the meeting.

### **4. Joining the Meeting**

Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly (i.e. at least five minutes before the scheduled start time) to avoid disrupting the meeting.

Councillors and members of the public will enter a waiting room, and the Town Clerk will admit all members into the meeting before it starts. Any Councillors or members of the public arriving late will be admitted but there may be a delay.

## 5. The Meeting

- (i) **Start of the meeting**, the Town Clerk will check all required attendees are present. The Town Clerk will also note members of the public attending and / or press. The Chairman will ask all participants to mute their microphones. This prevents background noise, coughing etc which is intrusive and disruptive during the meeting. It may also be necessary to ask all participants to turn off their video as this may help with call and video quality - the Chairman or Town Clerk will advise if this course of action is required.
- (ii) **The Chairman will read out the following statement:**  
"We are here to discuss and agree decisions in relation to the listed agenda items. This Council is a corporate body and as such we will all behave in a professional manner in line with our Standing Orders and Code of Conduct. Anyone that obstructs the transaction of business at this meeting or behaves in a way that is contrary to our Standing Orders and/or Code of Conduct will be told by the Chairman of this meeting that their behaviour is contrary to our Standing Orders and Code of Conduct. If that behaviour continues the Chairman will then make a resolution for the Clerk of the meeting to remove that councillor from any further involvement in this meeting. This motion will require a seconder and a subsequent vote. If carried that councillor will then be removed from the meeting."
- (iii) **During the meeting** all persons other than the Chairman will continue to be muted unless invited to talk by the Chairman. Councillors will raise their hand or use the 'right to speak' facility or chat bar to let the Chairman know they wish to speak. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be muted.
- (iv) During the **public participation** part of the meeting 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 unmuted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be muted. The Clerk will read any presubmitted addresses from the press and public.
- (v) Full Council meetings will be **recorded**, and members of the public may wish to turn off their video so that they are not recorded.
- (vi) All **voting** will be undertaken either physically raising hands or virtually using the website 'thumbs up' icon or the 'blue hand' to indicate 'all those in favour', 'all those against' and then 'any abstentions'. The Chairman may also need to ask each councillor for their vote individually especially for those councillors joining the meeting by audio.
- (vii) 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 councillor views on individual agenda items.

If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'dropouts' 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 and reconvene at a later date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned by the officer at the meeting to advise of the suspension.

- (viii) 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**

Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct will apply to all meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the **Chairman and as laid out in the Chairman's opening statement (see 5 (ii) above). Members of the public or press present may also be dismissed from the Zoom meeting.**

## **Part 2 - Exempt business**

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or "exempt" issues – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – are under consideration. It is important to ensure that there are no members of the public at remote locations able to hear or see the proceedings during such meetings.

Any Councillor in remote attendance who fails to disclose that there are in fact persons present, such as those who may be able to see and/or hear the meeting, who are not entitled could be in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Chairman will, at the appropriate time, ask the participant to leave the meeting.

It would be good practice to turn off smart speakers such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or smart music devices. These could inadvertently record phone or video conversations, which would not be appropriate during the consideration of confidential items.

## **7. Recording**

Full Council meetings will be recorded and made available to members, the press and members of the public.

## **8. Information**

The chat view box on the Zoom meeting will be disabled however it will provide additional information to attendees depending on the specific meeting.