

Audit and Governance Committee



Date of meeting:	11 May 2020
Title of Report:	Remote meetings protocol
Lead Member:	Councillor Peter Smith (Deputy Leader)
Lead Strategic Director:	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
Author:	Linda Torney (Monitoring Officer)
Contact Email:	Linda.torney@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	It/
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To inform council of the temporary changes to the regulations regarding Local Authority meetings to allow meetings to take place remotely and recommend a draft protocol to apply to such meetings

Recommendations and Reasons

To adopt the draft protocol in Appendix One for the period until 7 May 2021 to provide a consistent approach to managing remote meetings.

Alternative options considered and rejected

To not have an agreed protocol.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The proposal laid out in this report support the prevention and spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and supports councillors to carry out their democratic role whilst complying with the social distancing requirements.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

None directly arising

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

The use of mobile technology to hold meetings supports the Council's plan to reduce its carbon footprint.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

The proposal supports the prevention and spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Linda Torney (Monitoring Officer)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 01/05/2020											
Cabinet Member approval: [electronic signature (or typed name and statement of 'approved by email/verbally')] Date approved: 01/05/2020											

Local Authority Meetings

The regulations on local authority meetings have been changed with effect from 4 April 2020 to allow Council meetings to be held remotely, using video or telephone conferring technology until 7 May 2021.

2.0 Key changes

2.1 Councillors, the public and press will be able to have access to council meetings remotely, without the need for a physical presence at the Council House.

2.2 The requirement for public meetings to be made accessible to the public remains, but it will be up to each local authority to decide how they conduct meetings, how voting procedures work and how to ensure that the public has access.

2.3 Existing rules about the quorum of councillors required to attend to make a meeting valid will remain, and virtual attendance will count as part of this.

2.4 As a minimum all participants will need to be able to be heard – but where possible arrangements should be made so that they can be seen and the public and press must be able to hear the meeting and where possible should be able to see it.

3.0 Will we need new standing orders?

3.1 The regulations specifically say that we don't need to change the Council's constitution to be able to arrange meetings this way; but we may want to change our standing orders or introduce new protocols to make it easier for people to participate in remote meetings.

3.2 Wherever possible the Council's existing constitutional requirements will continue to apply and so for example where a councillor has a pecuniary interest in an item of Council and would need to physically leave the meeting whilst that item of business is debated we will need to have a system to exclude the councillor from that item of business.

3.3 The arrangements for giving notice of meetings have been changed to allow notice to be given by publishing notices on the website. So there is no need to have a physical set of papers available at the main office of the council, for people to come in and inspect.

4.0 Meeting etiquette

4.1 Remote meetings by their nature will have a different culture from those held in person. Many people will find it hard to maintain focus for long periods of time and may be unfamiliar with the technology being used. It will therefore be helpful for councillors, to adopt a structured approach to meetings, to make sure that everyone is able to participate and to take breaks where appropriate. The Centre for public scrutiny recommends that participants in remote meetings should:

- Mute their microphone when they are not talking.
- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- Speak clearly (and please state their name).
- When referring to a specific page, mention the page number.
- Switch off their microphone after they have spoken.
- **The chat facility should not be used for private conversations** between councillors as this will become part of the formal record of the meeting
- Any camera (video-feed) should show a non-descript background or, where possible, a virtual background and members should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed

Appendix One