

West Berkshire Council – Protocol for Remote Council Meetings

Introduction

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”) came into force on the 4 April 2020.

The Regulations remove the legal obligation to hold local authority meetings at a specified physical location, by permitting members and others attending the meeting to do so by way of ‘remote attendance’.

This Protocol applies to meetings of the Council or its Committees, etc, that would, but for the coronavirus pandemic and the Regulations, be held in public. It does not apply to informal meetings of West Berkshire Council Councillors (“Members”), task groups, advisory panels, etc (although the Chairman of the meeting, task group, advisory panel, etc, may choose to follow the Protocol for convenience).

Participants

For the purpose of this protocol, ‘Participant’ refers to

- a member of Council (“Member”) for a meeting of Council;
- a member of a Committee (including co-opted members) for a meeting of that Committee;
- a member of the Executive for a meeting of the Executive;
- any Member generally when remotely attending any meeting of a body they are not formally a member of, if they are permitted or invited to speak by virtue of the Council’s Constitution;
- an officer or professional adviser assisting proceedings.

Chairman of the meeting

The Chairman will manage the meeting and will be assisted by an officer acting as ‘Host’, who will help to control access to the meeting and monitor participants. (References in this document to the Chairman shall include the Leader of the Executive during meetings of the Executive.)

Protocol

- 1 Participants shall have a Zoom Profile **created for them by IT (?)** so that they are always readily identifiable to members of the public observing proceedings as a member of the Council/Executive/Committee as the case may be, or as a Member, or as an Officer.
- 2 Any Participant who joins a meeting by telephone will be identified by their title, name and a still photographic image where possible.
- 3 To ensure the smooth running of the meeting, Participants should join the Zoom waiting room 10 minutes before the start time of the meeting so that it can start promptly - all Participants will remain in the Zoom waiting room until they are admitted to the meeting by the Host.
- 4 Participants should make a note of their meeting ID, which can be found in two places: (a) at the bottom of the meeting invite, and (b) in the top left hand side of the Zoom screen (indicated by an “i” in a circle). This will be of assistance in the event that a Participant is experiencing technical difficulties, and requires support during a meeting. (The meeting invite will also contain a telephone number enabling a Participant to access the meeting via telephone of their internet connection drops out).

- 5 The meeting will be live streamed and recorded.
- 6 All microphones (except the Chairman's) will be muted on entry into the meeting and they shall remain muted unless a Participant is invited to speak by the Chairman. Participants will be invited to unmute their microphone to speak, and should mute this again immediately when they have finished speaking. Participants who fail to mute themselves will be muted by the Host.
- 7 Participants wishing to speak shall indicate this by using the 'Zoom Raised Hand' (available via the Participants field, in turn triggered by the Participants key at the base of the Zoom screen). The Host will make a note of Participants wishing to speak, and will provide the Chairman with details of those who have indicated a desire to do so, by reading a list of names at the appropriate points in the meeting.
- 8 If any of the Participants have entered the meeting via telephone rather than by way of the video facility, they will be asked by the Chairman whether they wish to speak. This will usually be after Participants who have joined using video, and indicated they wish to speak, have spoken.
- 9 The Chairman will invite Participants to speak in any order (this will not overrule the rules of debate at full Council). Participants should remain seated whilst speaking.
- 10 If any statutory officer (such as the Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer) or any Director indicates a desire to speak by using Zoom Raised Hand, the Host will notify the Chairman of this as soon as practicable (normally be at the conclusion of a Participant's speech).
- 11 Participants wishing to raise a point of order or personal explanation should signal this by unmuting their microphone, stating their name, and saying either, "Point of Order" or "Matter of Personal Explanation". The microphone should then be muted again until the Chairman invites them to address the meeting.
- 12 Voting will take place by way of a named vote. The Monitoring Officer or their representative will read the names of each Participant entitled to vote in respect of any item and the Participant will respond in one of three ways:
 - **"For"** To indicate that they support the proposal
 - **"Against"** To indicate that they oppose the proposal
 - **"Abstain"** To indicate that they do not wish to cast a vote either for or against a proposal.
- 13 If the Chairman considers that the meeting should be adjourned for any reason, s/he will advise the meeting of this fact and provide a time at which the meeting will resume.
- 14 If a meeting contains Items which are confidential then, following a resolution to exclude the press and public, the following steps will happen:
 - The Chairman (or one of the Supporting Officers) will explain that confidential items are to be discussed, and the meeting will therefore then close for members of the public.
 - The Host will be asked to:
 - LOCK the meeting to prevent further individuals attending; and
 - STOP live streaming and recording the meeting.
 - Before the meeting resumes, the Host will be asked to confirm that all attendees have left, and that the meeting is no longer being streamed or recorded.