



## **HORNSEA TOWN COUNCIL**

### **VIRTUAL MEETINGS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

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### **VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETINGS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

#### **1. Introduction**

- a) The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations permits local authorities to conduct and make lawful decisions at virtual meetings.
- b) Remote attendance at Council meetings is permitted as long as certain conditions are met. These include that councillors are able to hear and be heard by the other councillors in attendance. Also, being able to hear and be heard by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting. A visual

solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient. This also relates to members of the public attending the meeting also being heard.

- c) The regulations are clear that a meeting is not limited to those present in the same place, but includes electronic, digital or virtual locations (internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers).
- d) A summary of the Regulations is contained in the appendix of this protocol.

## **2. Zoom**

- a) Zoom is the virtual meeting application preferred by Hornsea Town Council for hosting remote and virtual meetings. Members of the public do not need to be a member of the Council to join a Zoom meeting.
- b) Public access to meetings is made available through the Zoom meeting being live-streamed via You Tube.

## **3. Setting up the Meeting**

- a) Meetings will be set up by the Clerk. This enables her to “host” the meeting which gives her more functionality than other participants, including the ability to mute and exclude disruptive participants from meetings under the direction of the meeting Chair.

## **4. Access to Agendas and Supporting Documents**

- a) The Clerk will publish the agenda for Council and Committee meetings on the Council’s website in the usual manner and will notify councillors by email or post in line with usual practice.
- b) An agenda will also be placed in the Town Council notice boards
- c) The You Tube link to view the meetings will be on the Town Council Website and, where possible, promoted on social media.

## **5. External Participants**

- a) Any external participants (e.g. external individuals previously invited by the Town Council to speak on an agenda issue or give a presentation will be sent the Zoom link via email to enable them to participate in the meeting.

## **6. Joining the Meeting**

- a) Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly at least three minutes before the scheduled start time in order to avoid disrupting the meeting.
- b) The Clerk will give access to the meeting from Zoom Waiting Room.

## **7. Starting the Meeting**

- a) At the start of the meeting the Clerk will check that all required attendees are present by viewing the participant list.
- b) The Chair will ask all councillors and any other meeting attendants to turn off all microphones unless they are speaking. This prevents background noise, coughing, etc., which is disruptive during the meeting.
- c) Councillors will need to turn their microphones on before speaking and turn it off after participating.

## **8. Public Forum/Participation**

- a) Members of the Public who wish to address the Town Council in the Public Forum will have to give at least 24 hours notice in writing (email or letter) and they will receive a Zoom link to the meeting to enable them to speak.
- b) Once they have done so they will be asked to leave the Zoom meeting and continue observing proceedings via the You Tube live-stream.
- c) Any member of the public attending the meeting via Zoom should use audio only until/unless they wish/are invited to address the council

## **9. The Meeting and Debate**

- a) For councillors who wish to speak in the debate, they should clearly raise a hand and wait to be asked to speak by the Chair.
- b) Once councillors have spoken they must mute themselves again to prevent unnecessary background noise.

## **10. Meeting Etiquette Reminder**

- a) Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- b) Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- c) The only persons to keep on their microphone throughout the meeting is the Chairman and the Clerk.
- d) Councillors should remember at all times that they are in a public meeting and should behave and dress appropriately, just as they would in a face-to-face meeting.
- e) Where possible, Councillors should access Zoom in a room on their own to avoid meeting interference from other people and household pets.

## **11. Voting**

- a) When Councillors are asked to cast their vote, they must raise their hands clearly and not put them down until the Chair asks them to, thereby ensuring their vote is counted.
- b) If, at any point in the future, a way of digitally voting is provided, this will be used by the Town Council where appropriate.

## **12. Digital Backgrounds**

- a) Councillors should not personalise their backgrounds with a digital image, as this can obscure raised hands when indicating to speak or voting, thus causing disruption to the meeting.

## **13. Confidential Business**

- a) 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.
- b) Any councillor in remote attendance could be in breach of the Council’s Code of Conduct if he/she fails to disclose that there are other persons present who may be able to see and/or hear the meeting if they are not entitled to do that.

- c) When confidential business is discussed, the live-stream via You Tube will be suspended for the duration.

**14. Other Devices**

- a) It is 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. In addition, words spoken in the meeting may inadvertently activate such devices, therefore causing disruption to the proceedings.

**15. Disturbance from Members of the Public**

- a) if any member of the public given prior agreed access to the meeting interrupts a proceeding the Chair will warn them accordingly.
- b) If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Clerk will mute them or remove them as a participant from the meeting.

**16. After the Meeting**

- a) Participants should leave the meeting by clicking on the red “end meeting” button to hang up.
- b) The Clerk can also end the meeting for all participants.

**17. Publication of Minutes**

- a) Meeting minutes will be published on the Council’s website in the usual manner.

**18. Recording of Meetings**

- a) Members of the public are entitled to record meetings that are live-streamed on Zoom, in line with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.
- b) Meetings that are recorded by the Council on Zoom are done so for the purpose assisting Officers in the production of minutes and will not be

otherwise broadcast or published by the Town Council, unless the Town Council ultimately resolves to do so.

**19. Technical Issues**

- a) In the event that any meeting participant identifies a failure of the remote participation facility, the Chair should declare a recess while the fault is addressed.
- b) If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting becomes inquorate through this fault, the meeting will be abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened. If the meeting is quorate, then it should continue.
- c) Those attending remotely should be aware and accept that the meeting would continue, and a vote would be taken without their attendance.
- d) 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 Chair and Clerk shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted.

**20. Disability**

- a) It is also important for authorities to ensure that the needs of any disabled members are taken into account when considering the practicality of a remotely attended meeting.

## **APPENDIX**

A Briefing on the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 come into force from 4 April 2020.

The regulations are made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020(1) and paragraph 36(1)(b) of Schedule 6 to the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011(2).

The Regulations apply to local authority meetings (and police and crime panel meetings) which are required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021.

In the Regulations, “the 1972 Act” means the Local Government Act 1972 and “local authority” includes a County Council (and numerous other bodies).

HORNSEA TOWN COUNCIL

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