

Cold Norton Parish Council

Protocol for Parish Council Meetings Held Remotely

Introduction

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into effect on 4th April 2020 to enable Town and Parish Councils to lawfully conduct virtual meetings.

This protocol document provides the means and guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of Cold Norton Parish Council and is supplemental to the Standing Orders of the Council, which shall otherwise remain in full force and effect. Members can attend a meeting held remotely where it is required to be held before 7th May 2021, subject to the following conditions (summary):

Annual Parish Meeting

The requirement to hold an Annual Parish Meeting is removed between 1st March and 1st June.

Annual General Meeting

The requirement to hold an Annual Parish Council Meeting and the appointment of a Chairman in May 2020 is removed until May 2021 although the Parish Council may wish to appoint one earlier. Cold Norton is holding an AGM as the Chairman had resigned in March 2020.

Place of the Remote Meeting

The Regulations extend the definition of “place” as defined in Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 to include more than one location and to include electronic, digital or virtual locations. The member attending remotely must however, be heard and where possible seen by other Members, the Public and Press and can hear and preferably be seen by the other members. (A visual solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient). Regulation 13 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 has been modified to permit remote attendance by the Press and Public.

The Meeting System

Zoom or other suitable meeting host will be used to facilitate remote/virtual meetings to accommodate video, audio and screen sharing. The meeting link with meeting ID and password will be set up prior to the meeting and the Clerk shall send the meeting link including meeting code and password to Councillors to enable them to log into the meeting. The agenda and papers will be published on the Council’s web site and emailed to Members. The Clerk shall also affix information to the agenda to enable persons who wish to attend the meeting to log on. The Parish Council is fully committed to its legal obligation to allow Members of the Public to attend a Parish Council meeting. Members of the Public and Press who wish to attend must contact the Clerk to this effect by email: mariadyer30@yahoo.co.uk by 5.30pm prior to the meeting.

Meeting Procedures

Meetings will be set up by the Chairman of the meeting. This enables them to “host” the meeting which gives them more functionality than other participants, including the ability to mute and exclude disruptive participants from meetings.

Members are encouraged to join the meeting at least 5 minutes prior to the start of the meeting to avoid any unnecessary disruption.

Entry to each meeting shall be via a virtual waiting room where possible. In the event that a Councillor declares a disclosable pecuniary interest in an agenda item, whereby they shall absent themselves for the duration of that meeting item they shall be placed in the virtual waiting room, and only re-admitted to the meeting at the conclusion of that business. Where it is not possible to use a virtual waiting room any person with a disclosable pecuniary interest shall leave the meeting and await a communication from the Clerk before re-joining.

To prevent any background noise microphones must be muted unless a Member is speaking or a Member of the Public is invited to speak during the public session or at the discretion of the Chairman.

At the start of the meeting, the Clerk will check that all required attendees are present by viewing the participant list.

The Chairman, at the beginning of the meeting and if required during the meeting will explain the protocol for Councillors and Members of the Public participation and the rules of debate. The Chairman's ruling during the debate will be final.

The Chairman will ask Members of the Public if they wish to speak during Public Question Time. Once that part of the meeting is over the Public will be muted and not be able to interact, but will still be able to hear the Council.

Members who wish to speak on a particular item must raise their hand or use a virtual hand.

Voting will take place by the raising of hands or a virtual hand and recorded by the Clerk in the minutes which will be approved at the next meeting

The Code of Conduct will continue to be observed by all Members and any disorderly conduct or interruption by any participant to the meeting will result in a warning from the Chairman and if this persists removal from the meeting.

Private and Confidential Matters

For any confidential matters requiring discussion, there will be a separate Zoom meeting link and password. The Chairman will inform Members of the Public that the main meeting is ending, and will end the public meeting. The Clerk and all Council Members will then log into the confidential meeting using the separate Zoom Link and password provided.

Delegation

The approved scheme of delegation will remain in place until face to face meetings are permitted again.

After the Meeting

The Members and the Clerk will review how the meeting went and may make some changes if required.