



NORTH WALTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY

PLEASE NOTE: This is a draft policy until ratified by North Waltham Parish Council at its next meeting.

Introduction

North Waltham Parish 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 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 meetings on and up to 7 May 2021.

Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda and documents being emailed to their Parish Council email address. The agenda and documents will also be placed on the Council's website for access by councillors, the public and press. The agenda will be published on the parish council noticeboard, but this may not adhere to the statutory days of notice. Any person unable to access the Council's website can contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda and documents to be forwarded as appropriate. In cases that documents originate from a third party, electronic links will be provided where available.

Virtual Meeting 'platform'

North Waltham Parish Council will utilise Zoom to provide video communications. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Parish Council will send an invitation to the meeting to Parish Councillors via their Parish Council email, which will include:

- Link to the Zoom meeting
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

Virtual Meeting Policy

Approved: DRAFT-V2 12th May 2020

Members of the public and press and local Borough and County Councillors wishing to join the meeting should contact the Clerk to the Parish Council in advance of the meeting, so that the invitation can be forwarded to them.

Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a place. These are available to view at <https://www.northwaltham.net/parish-council/documents/>

Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity, please see below.

- During the meeting, all persons other than members will be muted. During the public participation period 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.
- During the meeting members and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item.
- All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and mute their own microphones, except when speaking, to negate interference with the meeting.

Voting

- All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.
- If a member is not visible, the Chairman can ask for his/her vote to be given verbally.

Poor connectivity

- 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 the members attending, the Chairman can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

Attendance

- If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'drop outs' 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 another time and date, subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.
- Members of the public and press are free to leave the meeting after the public participation session or to stay for the remainder of the meeting. Informing the Chairman of their intention to leave would be appreciated.

Telephone attendance

- 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.

Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at 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. For a member of the public or press this may result in them being dismissed from the Zoom meeting.

Declaration of Interests

A councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the waiting room. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made the councillor will be returned to the meeting

Public Participation

The Clerk will read any pre-submitted addresses from the press and public.

Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential Zoom meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

Recording

Zoom meetings will be recorded for the purposes of recording accurate minutes only. The recording will be deleted when the minutes have been approved and the minutes will be considered as the final record of the meeting.

Review

This policy will be reviewed after holding three virtual Parish Council meetings.

Should the need for virtual meetings continue beyond May 2021, this policy will be reviewed at that time in line with Government guidelines and regulations.

Approved at Parish Council meeting, minute reference

Signed

Date