

Virtual/Remote Meetings at Southend on Sea Borough Council

Protocol – Guidance

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 Regulations”) enable meetings of local authorities to be held virtually/remotely for the period up until 7 May 2021. Paragraph 7.4 of the Regulations state:

7.4 Being able to hold all meetings flexibly, including annual meetings, executive meetings, and committee meetings, allows local authority business to continue while adhering to official public health guidance. It also allows the public the same flexibility to attend whilst adhering to the guidance. The Regulations provide for meetings to be held remotely. For the purposes of any statutory requirement, members of the local authority will be considered as attending a meeting if they can hear, and where practicable see, and be heard and, where practicable, be seen by other members and the public. This allows for meetings to be held by remote means including via telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webchat and live streaming.

This document sets out a protocol for remote meetings at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Preliminary Points

- When a meeting is held in Part 1, it will be webcast in sound and video. It is a practicable option and it will allow members of the public and the press to follow proceedings.
- Any Councillor or Officer who is concerned about privacy implications in respect of their home/family can take one or more of the following steps:
 - Blur the background or set a picture background on Microsoft Teams.
 - Stop the camera function on Microsoft Teams to protect a third party; or
 - Come into the Civic Centre to a private room and log on there.
- You can upload a photograph of yourself to appear on Microsoft Teams in place of the disc with your initials. However, you cannot upload anything else, including any photograph, picture, logo, slogan etc.
- Consider your local environment carefully before attending a virtual meeting.

Ensure nothing inappropriate can be seen in the background. As stated above, Microsoft Teams has a facility to blur the background or set a picture background.

Ensure you are well lit and not in silhouette against a bright background.

Body language and presentation come across strongly in the video format.

Sound quality is important too. Choose a quiet room. Try to ensure you are not likely to be disturbed by noise coming from other parts of your house or outside – e.g. pets, music, washing machines, traffic etc. which can become exaggerated by your microphone and cause a distraction in a video conference.

Try to ensure all other occupants of your house know you are in a meeting and don't make unexpected or unintended interruptions.

If you do not feel comfortable in participating in the meeting from home, arrangements can be made for a room to be available at the Civic Offices for your use.

- Smartphones or devices placed on your lap are not recommended. Involuntary movement of the camera is very distracting to your audience and will detract from what you are saying.
- We recommend that you use a Council-issued laptop/tablet/i-pad with a stand raising the camera close to eye-level.
- Place your device on a hard surface such as a desk or tabletop to keep the camera steady, the microphone unimpeded, and your head and shoulders in the frame at all times.

Joining a Microsoft Teams meeting

- Do not forward invites to a Microsoft Teams meeting. This should only be done by the meeting organiser. If you need to appoint a substitute, inform committeesection@southend.gov.uk and the invite will be forwarded by the Democratic Services Team.
- Open Microsoft Teams, click on the “Calendar” and click to “join” the appropriate meeting. Give yourself plenty of time. Allowing time for technical issues to be resolved, all participants should join the video conference at least 10 minutes before the official start of the meeting.
- Mute your microphone at all times unless you have been given leave to speak by the Chair of the meeting. You may find headphones help to block out distractions and focus your attention on the conference.
- Open the ‘Meeting Chat’ facility. This displays beside the conference call delegate tiles on laptops. Meeting Chat is the place where you attract the attention of the Chair if you wish to speak. The Meeting Chat facility must not be used for private conversations between councillors. The Meeting Chat facility forms part of public record of the meeting and is subject to Freedom of Information legislation.
- Download the public Mod.gov app on your own separate device for access to public agendas conveniently during a meeting if you require it. Agendas can also be accessed via the website. In the short-term hard copies of the Agendas and

reports will be provided to all Councillors and members on the Committee (or other body) unless they request otherwise.

- Where possible and appropriate, additional documents may be presented to the Committee (or other body) by the appropriate presenting officer.
- There shall be no use of the record function on the Microsoft Teams platform when the proceedings are in Part 2.

Running the Meeting – Etiquette and the Chair’s Role

- Video conferencing depends on the observance of strict etiquette and the Chair’s direction. Participants are called to speak by the Chair. Points should be made quickly and then the Chair moves on to the next ‘caller’/participant.
- The Chair of a meeting should be mindful of the need to ensure fairness at all times when conducting meetings which are held remotely.
- All participants should keep their contributions short and succinct. The Chair of the meeting must maintain strict control. Where a degree of cross-chamber/party conversation may be tolerated in a conventional meeting, such behaviour in a video conference will render the meeting inaudible to all.
- Each Councillor should familiarise themselves with the order of the agenda and items before the meeting.
- Immediately prior to the commencement of the meeting the clerk will undertake a roll call of the Councillors attending the meeting in the order they appear on the Agenda (substitute Members will be taken in alphabetical order)
- The chair will run through the preliminaries (webcasting announcement, apologies etc.), - see draft script in the **Appendix** to this Protocol.
- The Chair will then invite the relevant officer to present each item in turn.
- At the conclusion of the officer presentation, the Chair will invite Councillors in turn to speak. Councillors may indicate if they wish to speak using the ‘Meeting Chat’ facility as described above.
- Councillors may only speak when invited to by the Chair.
- Only one person may speak at any one time.
- Any Councillor wishing to speak should specify their name before addressing the body concerned.
- When referring to a specific part of a report, councillors should mention the page/paragraph number so that all participants and members of the public have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

- Remember to unmute your microphone when you speak and mute it again when you finish.
- Documents may be shared on screen during presentations where possible and appropriate.
- Any Councillor leaving the meeting should make it clear that they are doing so.

Appendix - Chair's Opening Remarks

Good evening councillors and officers (and welcome members of the public) to this meeting of on

This meeting is being held 'virtually' in accordance with Part 2 of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 – and the Council's Supplementary Council Procedure Rules.

In summary, the Regulations were brought in as a response to the Coronavirus epidemic. They remove the requirement for councillors to be physically present in the room. They allow us to debate, participate and vote through remote video conferencing while observing the social distancing measures needed to restrict the spread of the virus.

Can I ask all councillors and officers to observe the following principles:

- Please mute your microphone at all times unless I have called upon you to speak.
- Remember to mute your microphone again when you have finished.
- Indicate at the start of the meeting, or at the commencement of each agenda item, if you wish to speak and through the MS Teams Meeting Chat facility if you wish to speak again. I will call Councillors and Officers to speak at my discretion and according to the demands of the agenda.
- Please do not use the Meeting Chat facility for any other purposes other than to attract the attention of the Chair if you wish to speak. The Meeting Chat facility must not be used for private conversations between councillors. The Meeting Chat facility forms part of public record of the meeting and is subject to Freedom of Information legislation.
- Councillors attending who are not on this body and want to speak are reminded of the procedures set out in section 6 of the Supplementary Procedure Rules.
- If you wish to leave or withdraw from the meeting, please clearly indicate to me, or in my absence the Vice-Chair, through the MS Teams Chat channel of your request and if it is to be a temporary or permanent absence. Out of courtesy, please wait until this has been acknowledged before you leave. No reason for your request has to be given unless your withdrawal is due to a Pecuniary or other non-pecuniary disqualifying interest. If it is to be for a disqualifying interest, the Clerk will contact you to invite you to return to the meeting when the item has concluded.
- In terms of voting, each councillor will be asked in turn, in accordance with the order as shown on the Agenda (and then for substitutes in alphabetical order). (For a small meeting (no more than nine Councillors), it may be appropriate for a matter to be determined by a consensus.)

While this formality may seem a little strange to Councillors used to open debate across the floor of the chamber, I hope everyone will understand the overall benefits for the conduct of virtual meetings if we all observe the discipline of this process.