

FRODSHAM TOWN COUNCIL
Virtual Meeting Policy

February 2021

1. Introduction

Frodsham Town Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate. This Policy has developed to assist Chairmen, councillors and members of the public and press. It documents 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 that are currently enacted for meeting on and up to 7 May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda with documents being placed on the Council's website. No agendas will be published on physical noticeboards. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic version 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.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Frodsham Town 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 Town Clerk to the Council will publish via the summons:

- The zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were physically present in a venue.

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 5c.

When the meeting is initiated all members should be clearly identifiable by using the prefix “Cllr” in front of their full name. The Clerk will facilitate this.

The Clerk will state that the meeting is to be recorded. If anyone objects, then the meeting may not be recorded.

Members of the public will be encouraged to display an easily identified name, but may remain anonymous if they so wish. Members wishing to speak and address the committee must provide a full name in the zoom ID (no camera required).

The Clerk should enable The Chair or other nominated councillor as a co-host to enable efficient management of the meeting

During the meeting, all persons not speaking or addressing the chair will be muted. During the public participation period members of the public will be encouraged to ‘enable video’ if they wish, in order that they can be visible to the Chair. They will raise their hand or use the ‘raise hand’ function to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted and so they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address they should mute their microphone. If they do not, then The Clerk will mute their microphone.

During the meeting members and officers will be obliged to ‘enable video’ at all times. They must raise their hand or use the ‘raise hand’ function to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item. They should only unmute and speak when invited to do so by The Chair of the meeting. When they have finished speaking, they should reinstate the mute function.

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.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands or by full roll call by the Chair or Clerk of the meeting. There is no facility for proxy voting from

absent members or for members unable to dial into the meeting due to connectivity issues.

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available for some or all of members attending the Chair can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for councillor views on individual agenda items.

d. Attendance

If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be recorded. 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 Chair will suspend the meeting. It will reconvened at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.

e. Telephone attendance

Persons wishing to attend by telephone are advised to contact the Clerk in advance of the meeting in order that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to Conduct at Meetings. All attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

It is the duty of The Chair, supported by The Clerk to ensure this policy is followed and for Members to support this policy.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting or offensive will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. Where possible The Chair will endeavour to take a vote of members but in extreme circumstances may have to use their initiative to remove any offender to the Waiting Room.

7. 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.

8. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the Agenda non confidential items the meeting will be suspended for members to rejoin using the confidential zoom meeting link that will have been provided to members only.

9. Recording

Zoom meetings will be recorded unless someone objects and made available to members, the press and members of the public via the Town Council's website. Where possible meetings will be recorded via 'Matrix View' so that all members can be visible at all times

10. Information

The chat view box on the Zoom meeting will be disabled.

Policy adopted at Policy Process & Revenue Meeting held:

i For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>