

## **PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL - VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to Council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021.
- 1.2 The Regulations enable the council to hold meetings without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room. They allow for remote meetings through electronic and digital means at virtual locations using video and telephone conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming.
- 1.3 The “place” at which the meeting may be held may be a council building, or where the organiser of the meeting is located, or an electronic, digital or virtual location, a web address or a conference call telephone number.
- 1.4 **In order for members to be able to attend meetings of the council remotely, they need not be physically present, provided they are able to hear and be heard (and where practicable, see and be seen) by other councillors and members of the public attending remotely or in person.**
- 1.5 The procedure rules in this protocol take precedence over council standing orders in relation to the governance of remote meetings.
- 1.6 In line with the Regulations, this protocol is designed to provide a guide to virtual formal committee meetings involving Members, officers and the public during the Covid-19 crisis. It has been agreed by all the council’s political group leaders and will be kept under regular review.

### **2. Decisions of Formal Meetings of the Council, Cabinet, and Committees**

- 2.1 A list of decisions to be taken at formal meetings of the Council, Cabinet and committees has been prepared for the next three months. The list does not include monitoring or information items, as these will be circulated to relevant committees via e-mail. The urgency status of each decision is marked as either high, medium or low. Only those decisions marked as high or medium will be taken to Council or committee during the next three months.

### **3. Virtual Meetings of Full Council, Cabinet and Committees**

- 3.1 Ordinary meetings of Full Council, Cabinet and Committees will take place using the Zoom software platform. Democratic Services will prepare a detailed briefing note for the Mayor/Leader/Chair to manage the meeting electronically. Any confidential items may need to take place using the Microsoft Teams platform for security reasons.

### ***Public Questions at Full Council***

- 3.2 The Council will continue to take questions from the public as set out in the Constitution. The member of the public asking the question will need to submit their question in writing as there will be no opportunity to ask the question in person. A copy of the question will be circulated electronically and published on the Council's website. The Mayor will read the question out. The relevant Member will respond to the question within the normal timeframe. The provision for a supplementary question will be removed.

### ***Petitions***

During the Covid-19 crisis it will not be possible to accept paper petitions. An electronic petition will be acceptable provided it meets the requirements as set out in the Constitution. The member of the public submitting the petition will be invited to submit a speech in writing as there will be no opportunity to present the petition in person. A copy of the petition will be circulated electronically and published on the Council's website. The provision to submit petitions containing at least 500 signatures (50 for Cabinet or Scrutiny) for debate will be suspended during the Covid-19 crisis.

### ***Members' Questions on Notice***

- 3.4 The Council will continue to take written questions to the Chairman of Council or any Chairman/woman of any committee provided the appropriate notice is given as set out in the Constitution. However, Members are asked consider that officers may have limited availability during this period to assist the Member with preparing responses to such questions.

### ***Members' Questions on Decisions of the Executive and Combined Authority Representatives***

- 3.5 The Council will not take questions verbally on the Executive and the Combined Authority Board Authority Decisions. Instead Members will receive a link to the decision summaries and/or minutes of these meetings with an invitation to contact the Council's representatives direct. This process will be managed through the Democratic Services team. All responses to questions will be circulated electronically and published on the Council's website.

### ***Motions***

- 3.6 Members will have the ability to submit motions to Council as set out in the Constitution. In order for the Motion to be accepted, the Member submitting the motion will need to provide the Monitoring Officer with evidence that it is time critical.

### ***Amendments***

- 3.7 Members are asked to consider carefully the need for amendments. Political groups are asked to contact the mover of a motion to see if their amendment can be treated as an alteration. If that is not the case, political groups are asked to consider voting against the motion rather than moving an amendment.

### ***Speaking at Virtual Full Council Meetings***

- 3.8 Speeches from Members should be kept to a minimum. Group Leaders may initially wish to identify two speakers per group (this does not include the mover and seconder of a motion). There will be no Points of Order or Personal Explanation. Members who wish to speak during a meeting will need to click on the “raise your hand” icon and then they will be invited to speak by the Mayor. Members are asked to state their name before making a comment.

### ***Voting at Full Council Meetings***

Voting will be managed through the Mayor via the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting. If an item requires an electronic vote, the Mayor will ask all Members to turn their microphones on. The Mayor will then read out the name of each Member in turn in alphabetical order and ask them how they wish to vote. Once a Member has given their vote then microphones should be muted again. The Democratic Services Officer minuting the meeting will record the outcome of the voting and announce it at the meeting. If an item does not appear to be contentious, the Mayor will ask Members whether any Member disagrees or wishes to abstain. This will be actioned by the Member clicking on the “raise your hand” icon. If nobody objects the motion will be taken as carried.

## **4. Other formal meetings of Council – Cabinet and Committees**

Other formal meetings of Council, including Cabinet and Committees will follow the same procedure as above where applicable. The process for debate may vary at the discretion of the Chairman.

## **5. Running a Virtual Meeting**

### **Joining a Virtual Meeting**

- 5.1 Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly (i.e. at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time) in order to resolve any issues with joining and avoid disrupting the meeting. The Chairman will remind councillors to mute their microphones when not speaking. This is done in order to reduce feedback and background noise. The Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting may perform this function as well.

### **Access to documents**

Democratic Services will publish the agenda and reports for committee meetings on the Council's website and will notify councillors by email. Printed copies will not be circulated and nor will they be available for inspection at the Council's offices.

### **Public Access**

- 5.3 The following wording will be added to the Council's website as well as to the meeting page for each committee meeting.

*Due to Government guidance on social-distancing and the Covid-19 virus it will not be possible to hold a physical meeting of the XXX on XXX. Arrangements are being made for the press and public to follow the decision-making via Zoom. Details of how to watch the meeting will be published at the foot of the meeting page under the 'meeting documents' heading.*

The requirement to ensure meetings are open to the public includes access by remote means, including video conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming. Where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means, the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.

### **Registering Attendance and Meeting Etiquette**

- 5.4 At the start of the meeting, the Chairman will carry out a roll call of all Members present. Confirmation will be given by each Member switching their video on and unmuting their microphone to confirm they are present.
- 5.5 All Members and officers except the Chairman are asked to keep their microphones on mute unless invited to speak. Any Member returning after a disconnection is asked not to interrupt when returning to announce their return.

### **Protocol for Members speaking at meetings**

- 5.6 Members who wish to speak during a meeting will need to click on the "raise your hand" icon. The Chairman may ask each person in turn if they have any points they wish to raise on a particular item before completing the discussion on that item. When referring to reports or making specific comments, Members should refer to the report and page number in the agenda document pack so that all Members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

### **Dealing with technical difficulties**

- 5.7 In the event that the Chairman or the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting identifies a failure of the remote participation facility, the Chairman will declare an adjournment while the fault is addressed. If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting is inquorate, the meeting will be abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened. If the meeting is quorate the

Chairman will decide if the meeting should continue, depending on the difficulties being experienced, or whether it should be adjourned until a later time or date.

- 5.8 The Zoom software platform has a facility for recording meetings. All virtual meetings will be recorded.