

*To come into effect for the meeting of Full Council on 29th July 2020, onwards.

PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL - VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The [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 and where this protocol is silent, normal standing orders apply.
- 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 Reports to be submitted to formal meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees as usual, following consultation with Group Representatives/Group Leaders and Lead Officers to ensure available officer resource.

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/Chairman (references to Chairman in this document also include the Mayor and Leader) to manage the meeting electronically. Any confidential items will need to take place using a secure virtual platform and will not be livestreamed.
- 3.2 Guidance recommends that virtual meetings should not last longer than two hours where possible.

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Public Questions at Full Council

- 3.3 The Council will continue to take questions from the public as set out in the Constitution.

Petitions

- 3.4 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.

Members' Questions on Notice

- 3.5 The Council will continue to take written questions to the Chairman of Council or any Chairman of any committee provided the appropriate notice is given as set out in the Constitution. However, Members are asked to 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

- 3.6 The Council will take questions verbally on decisions of the Executive without notice as normal. Members are asked to take into consideration the virtual format of the meeting and whether their questions could be asked outside of the meeting. Half an hour will be allocated for questions on decisions of the Executive.

Members' Questions on Decisions of the Combined Authority Representatives

- 3.7 The Council will not take questions verbally on 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. Questions would need to be provided by midday on the Friday before the meeting. Answers would need to be provided by the end of the day on Monday before the meeting. All responses to questions will be circulated electronically and published on the Council's website, alongside the agenda prior to the meeting.

Motions

- 3.8 Members will have the ability to submit motions to Council as set out in the Constitution.

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Amendments

- 3.9 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.

Speaking at Virtual Full Council Meetings

- 3.10 Group Leaders may initially wish to identify two speakers per group (this does not include the mover and seconder of a motion). 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 (these will appear to the Chairman in the order in which they were raised). Members are asked to state their name before making a comment.

3.11 Points of Order, Personal Explanation, and Statements of Accuracy should be brought to the attention of the Mayor by Members turning on their microphone and indicating that they wish to raise a Point of Order, a Personal Explanation or a Statement of Accuracy. The Mayor will then invite the Member to explain what point they are raising and why and if accepted as valid the member may raise their point. The ruling of the Mayor on admissibility will be final,

Voting at Full Council Meetings

- 3.11 Voting will be managed through the Mayor via the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting. If an item requires an electronic vote, *this will be run via Zoom Webinar electronic voting where possible*. If not the Mayor will ask all Members to turn their microphones on in turn. The Head of Constitutional Services 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 Officers will confirm the result of the vote with a second officer and the Head of Constitutional Services will announce the result 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.

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5. Running a Virtual Meeting

Joining a Virtual Meeting

- 5.1 Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly (as advised by the Democratic Services Team) in order to resolve any issues with joining and avoid disrupting the meeting prior to the commencement of the livestream. 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

- 5.2 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 viewing link for the virtual meeting, for the public and press, will be provided online and on the agenda front page. The following wording will be added to the Council's website as well as to the meeting page for each committee meeting.

Arrangements are being made for the press and public to follow the decision-making via the Council's YouTube page. 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 or Democratic Services Officer 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.

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- 5.6 Should Members need to leave their seat momentarily during the meeting, please ensure that your microphone remains on mute and that you turn off your video camera temporarily and switch it back on when you return.

Meeting Chat Function

- 5.7 Guidance recommends that careful consideration be given to the use of the chat function in meetings and that his should be used in limited circumstances, including for clarification or questioning that may ordinarily be done by way of a note, resolving technical problems, or guidance on procedure from Democratic Services Officers. The chat should not be used for parallel substantive conversation about an issue under discussion, or for extraneous chitchat, or political comments.

The content of a meeting chat would be subject to a Freedom of Information request.

Protocol for Members speaking at meetings

- 5.8 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

- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 The Zoom software platform has a facility for recording meetings. All virtual meetings will be recorded.

Breaks

- 5.9 Chairmen will adjourn the meeting as appropriate to enable comfort breaks to be taken

Guillotine

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- 5.10 When **three hours** have elapsed after the commencement of any virtual Council meeting the Mayor shall interrupt the meeting and call for the vote immediately on the item under discussion. Any Member speaking must immediately cease doing so and mute themselves. The vote will be taken without further discussion. If there are other motions or recommendations on the agenda that have not been dealt with within the three hour period, they are deemed formally moved and seconded (together with any amendments). No speeches will be allowed on these items and the vote will be taken in the usual way. This rule will not apply to meetings of a quasi-judicial or regulatory nature.