

COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM No. 3
3 MARCH 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Director of Law and Governance	
Contact Officer(s):	Pippa Turvey, Democratic and Constitutional Services Manager	Tel. 452460

AMENDMENT TO THE VIRTUAL MEETINGS PROTOCOL

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Director of Law & Governance	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree to amend the 'Virtual Meetings Protocol' as adopted by Council on 29 July 2020, to permit 'en bloc' voting, as per the wording set out in paragraph 2.4. 	

1. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose a revision to the meeting protocol for virtual meetings only, in relation to the voting process.

2. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 As set out in the Council's Standing Orders, voting at Full Council meetings will be undertaken by electronic vote.
- 2.2 Following the use of the voting system for a number of meetings, it became apparent that the lack of ability to track the vote live, along with previously experienced issues in casting electronic votes, was not acceptable to a number of members. Similarly, the process of undertaking a rollcall for each vote required was considered to take too much time within the confines of a time limited meeting.
- 2.3 Therefore, an alternative voting process is proposed. 'En bloc' voting is a mechanism where each political group indicates, on appropriate votes, which way their members wish to vote as a group. This would save a considerable amount of time in carrying out a verbal roll call and would be a way of helping virtual meetings run more efficiently. If any group members do not wish to vote with their group in this way then they can indicate this and their vote would be taken separately. 'En bloc' voting would follow this process:

Each group will nominate a representative Member to provide the group vote. At the start of the vote the Monitoring Officer/nominated officer will run through the political groups in size order and will:

- a. confirm the number of Members in the group present at the meeting,
- b. ask the representative to confirm the vote of the group,
- c. ask any Member dissenting from this position to raise their virtual hand, and
- d. (if any Member dissents) ask dissenting Members which way they wish to vote.

Following this, the names of any independent Members will be called in turn and they will be asked to indicate their vote.

However it should be noted that a roll call will still be required for budget agenda items where it is legally required to hold a recorded vote.

- 2.4 As such, it is proposed that the below paragraph be amended in the council's current Virtual Meetings Protocol:

“3.9 Voting at Full Council Meetings

Voting will be managed through the Mayor via the Democratic Services Officer hosting 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 raising their virtual hand clicking on the “raise your hand” icon. If nobody objects, the recommendation/motion will be taken as carried. If an item requires a ~~electronic vote~~, the ~~officer Mayor will, in order of political group size, confirm the number of group members present in the meeting at the time of the vote. ask all Members to turn their microphones on~~. The ~~officer Mayor~~ will then ask a representative from the group to confirm the vote of the group, and will ask any group member dissenting from this position to raise their virtual hand. Any dissenting group members will then be asked which way they wish to vote and, finally, the names of any independent Members will be called in turn and they will be asked to indicate their vote. ~~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. ”

- 2.5 Similar voting procedures have been adopted by authorities in Crawley, Brent, and Newark and Sherwood. This procedure should provide a balance between speed and transparency for those viewing the vote. It should also provide Members with confidence that their vote has been recorded as they intend.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Consultation has been undertaken with Group Leaders at the Group Leaders' meeting held on 10 February 2021.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial, legal, equalities or carbon impact implications arising from this report.

5. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 5.1 Peterborough City Council Constitution
Peterborough City Council Virtual Meetings Protocol

6. APPENDICES

- 6.1 None.