

Diptford Parish Council

Virtual Meeting Policy

Adopted by Diptford Parish Council Tuesday 8th December 2020
Minute 2020/112

1. Introduction

Diptford Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times when a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist councillors and members of the public to understand 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' and that are currently enacted for meeting on and up to 7th May 2021.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors will be summoned by email, with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will be published on Council's physical noticeboards as far as is practicable. Any person unable to access the Council's website, may contact the Council and request that a paper copy of the agenda is posted to them.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

The Parish Council's chosen platform to provide video communications is Zoom, which enables video conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems. In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will make available, via the summons:

- The Zoom meeting link
- The meeting ID
- The meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

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

5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

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

During the meeting, all persons, other than councillors, will be audio-muted. During the public participation period, members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chair and should raise their hand to indicate if they wish to speak. If a member of the public is unable, due to poor connectivity, to enable their video they must send their identity and request to speak to the clerk using the chat function. Their microphone will then be unmuted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, their microphone will be muted.

During the meeting members and officers will physically raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and, if necessary, mute their own microphones except when speaking, to negate interference with the meeting.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of physical hands. For matters that the Chair deems to be of especial importance or contention, he will call a roll, by alphabetical sequence of members present., to cast their votes.

c. Poor Internet connectivity

In the case of poor Internet connectivity or in case of a power failure at any location, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available but audio remaining 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 minuted. 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 and reconvene at a later date and time, subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise of the suspension.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

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

Behaviour that is disruptive or contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. For a member of the public or press, this may result in them being dismissed from the virtual meeting.

7. Declaration of Interests

A councillor who has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting, will be placed in the virtual 'waiting room'. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made, the councillor will be returned to the meeting

8. Public Participation

The published agenda will include a link to the meeting and individuals can also contact the clerk for the link to be emailed to them directly. Invitations will not be issued once the meeting has commenced.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential agenda items will be dealt with by members of the public being placed in the virtual 'waiting room' for the duration of that item. At the conclusion of the item they may be brought back into the meeting if they have not previously left.

10. Recording

While recognising that a member of the public may decide to record the virtual meeting, the Council will not routinely record meetings. However, recordings may be made at the discretion of the Chair and made available to members, the press and members of the public.

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>