

## Virtual Meeting Policy 2020

### 1. Policy Statement

Following the adoption of legislation around the Covid-19 legal responsibilities it has been possible for Councils to meet Virtually using various methods available on the internet. Esh Parish Council, as a responsible employer, has adopted the Emergency Legislation devolving the decision making to a minimum number of Councillors in association with the Clerk & RFO Officer. It is the intention to hold regular monthly meetings wherever possible. However, it is clear that a series of protocols for the order and conduct of those meetings needs to be drawn up.

### 2. Introduction and Application of the Remote Meetings Procedure Rules

This Protocol and accompanying Procedure Rules provide the means and guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of the Esh Parish Council, and its various Committees and or Sub-Committees, held under the provisions of the Regulations.

This Protocol and Procedure Rules should be read in conjunction with the Council's Standing Orders and Procedure Rules within the Constitution. The Regulations, made under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, apply notwithstanding any other legislation or current or pre-existing standing orders or any other rules of the Authority governing meetings, and remain valid until 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021. This means that, wherever there is a conflict, these Remote Meetings Procedure Rules take precedence in relation to any remote meeting.

The effect of the Regulations on the Council Constitution is to insert what are, in effect, mandatory standing orders for those councils that wish to hold meetings remotely, either wholly or partially. The standing orders exist only on a temporary basis, having effect between 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

It is, in your professional officer's view, the case that the Regulations, and therefore the standing orders, have an automatic amending effect on a council's existing rules and can be applied immediately in order to run Full Council or Sub Committee meetings remotely.

### 3. How will notice of Meetings and papers be provided?

The Parish Clerk will give the requisite notice to the public of the time of the meeting, and the agenda, together with details of how to engage with the meeting. This information will be available on the Council website and local Notice Board(s) wherever possible.

Councillors will be notified of a remote meeting by email, and all agenda papers will be made available in paper format to all Councillors, together with the agenda being placed on the Council website.

### 4. Management of Remote Meetings for Councillors

- Any Councillor participating in a meeting remotely, must, when they are speaking, be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all other Councillors in attendance, and the remote participant must, in turn, be able to hear those other councillors participating.
- The attendance of those Councillors at the meeting will be recorded by the Parish Clerk for the official record.
- The normal quorum requirements for meetings as set out in the Councils Standing Orders will also apply to a remote meeting.
- In the event of any apparent failure of the video, telephone or conferencing connection, the Chairman should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate: if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chairman, expected to be no more than ten or fifteen minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established.
- In the event of connection failure, the remote Councillor(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Councillor(s) before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with the item/s on the said agenda, as long as the meeting is still quorate.
- The Chairman will follow the rules set out in the Constitution when determining who may speak, as well as the order and priority of speakers and the content and length of speeches in the normal way.
- The Chairman will, at the beginning of the meeting, explain the protocol for Councillors, and any public participation, and the rules of debate. The Chairman's ruling during the debate will be final.

5. Councillors are asked to adhere to the following etiquette during remote attendance at a meeting:

- Councillors are asked to make themselves available no later than fifteen minutes before the official start to allow themselves and the Clerk the opportunity to establish and test the equipment
- Any Councillor not available during this start up time will not be admitted to the meeting as the software does not allow for individuals to join an existing meeting in operation
- Councillors need to be minded of what the camera (video-feed) will be showing and respect established etiquette as if they are meeting in a public hall
- All Councillors always need to have their microphone switched on during the meeting

- Councillors should sit in a quiet location with no background noise or interference during the meeting as the software used picks up all noises which may disrupt the meeting for everybody else
- Councillors will only be asked to speak once on each item and not interrupt and repeatedly come back on issues previously debated
- Considerations towards planning application must be made to items on the agenda. The agenda is sent 7 days before the meeting and if councillors have specific issues relating to design or content of a planning application they should notify the Clerk no later than 3 days before the meeting to allow the Clerk the opportunity to consult with the Planning Officer, the Highways Department or any other third party whose input will inform the debate.
- Invited Guests will be invited to speak at the request of the Chairman
- Only speak when invited to by the Chairman and only one person may speak at any one time
- Councillors are advised to familiarise themselves with all available material relating to planning applications before the meeting starts
- As each agenda item is reached, the Chairman will ask who wishes to speak and will then invite each Councillor in turn to do so. When the Chairman is satisfied that there has been enough debate and (if the rules of the meeting require) there is a proposer and seconder for the item being discussed, the Chairman will progress to a vote.
- Details of how individual councillors voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is called or if any Councillor(s) wishes for their name(s) to be recorded in some way
- The Chairman's ruling is final

