



St Stephen in Brannel Parish Council

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Remote Meeting Policy¹

Introduction

St Stephen in Brannel Parish Council recognises the opportunities offered by The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 by meeting remotely (often referred to as virtually) in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate. This policy has been developed to assist the Chairman, Councillors, Officers and members of the public and press to understand how remote meetings differ from a physical meeting. The policy is to be used in conjunction with the aforementioned regulations that are currently in force for meetings up to and including 7th May 2021.

Agenda and Summons

Councillors are to be summonsed as per the regulations with the agenda being emailed to their individual Council email address. Associated reports and documents will be uploaded into the Council Shared Drive.

The agenda will be placed on the Council's website, the same as previously, however paper agendas will NOT be published on physical noticeboards.

Any person unable to access the Council's website is requested to contact the Clerk to request an electronic copy of the agenda be forwarded as appropriate. Due to remote working, paper copies will NOT be sent through the post.

Remote Meeting 'platform'

St Stephen in Brannel Parish Council will utilise Zoom to provide remote meetings. Zoom enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems. Members are to use their Council provided netbooks. All sections of the meeting open to the public and press will be recorded.

The Clerk will publish, via the agenda and summons to Councillors, the following information:

- Meeting link
- Audio dial-in details
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

Standing Orders

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a meeting room. The Chairman's interpretation on Standing Orders will be final. An amendment to Standing Orders will refer to matters not covered by the current Standing Orders or this policy.

¹ Adopted by Full Council at the meeting held on Wednesday 3rd June 2020 under minute number FPC82/20. Due for review in May 2021 or before if legislation dictates.

Specific Remote Meeting Arrangements

The Clerk will host the meeting and include administration officers as co-hosts.

On joining, participants will “enter” via the waiting room and be muted. The mute option for Councillors will be released once the Clerk has verified their identity. The Clerk will rename each Councillor and Officer so that their title and role is clear on their individual video screen. Each Councillor must join individually for transparency purposes.

Anyone joining by audio will have the telephone number that they are dialling in on temporarily displayed, until the Clerk is able to rename them. If this is a member of the public, they will be renamed as ‘MOP’ and the last 3 digits of their telephone number for identification purposes.

Anyone not wishing to show their surroundings is advised to install a background using Zoom settings.

Councillors and Officers must engage the “Participants” setting as soon as they join.

The Clerk will run an audio test and voting function test before the meeting starts.

All Officers attending the meeting will monitor background noise and, if necessary, Councillors microphones will be muted to stop interference with the meeting.

Where appropriate and possible, an Officer will screen share the agenda or relevant item for the purpose of transparency and to help guide the meeting. It is suggested that Members have the agenda visible on a secondary device to ensure full participation in the meeting.

During the meeting Councillors will raise their hand physically or virtually (using the reactions option) to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

If a Member has joined by audio, they can indicate that they wish to speak by pressing *9 on their phone. The Chairman will also ask if they wish to speak during each agenda item before a vote is taken.

Members and Officers must state their name before speaking to allow for all participants, no matter how they have joined the meeting, to know who is speaking each time.

During the public participation agenda item, where possible, members of the public will be required to ‘enable video’ in order for them to be visible to the Chairman and will raise their physical hand or virtual hand (using the reactions option) to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be re-muted. If the member of the public is joining by an audio connection, they must either raise their hand by pressing *9 or contact the Clerk (by email or telephone) to advise that they wish to speak before 5pm on the day of the meeting. Members of the public may only speak on matters within the agenda – any other queries should be emailed or telephoned through to the Clerk

Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of physical hands or verbally, (at the request of the Chairman) if using an audio connection.

In the event that the Clerk is unable to clearly see raised physical hands, the Chairman can request a show of virtual hands (using the reactions option). If this is not clear, the Chairman will request a vote through the 'yes' option (under Participants) or verbally (by roll call). The Clerk will clear all reactions before and after each vote takes place.

The Clerk or Chairman will summarise the vote before moving onto the next agenda item.

At the Chairman's discretion or at the request of an Officer, due to the number of attendees, members of the public will have their video disabled so the Clerk can see raised hands clearly.

Wet Signature

Any document requiring a wet signature will be emailed to the relevant individual so they can print the document and have it available at the meeting. If the individual does not have access to a printer, they must alert the Clerk so that a copy can be posted.

Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chairman will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

If the Chairman loses connectivity, the Vice Chairman will preside. If the Vice Chairman is not present, a temporary Vice Chairman will be voted in until the Chairman returns. This role will last for the duration of the meeting.

If the Clerk loses connectivity, the Administrator will deputise.

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 Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be texted to advise of the suspension.

Remote Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders, the adopted Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles apply with regard to conduct during remote meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Members are asked to be mindful of their surroundings and ideally locate themselves in a quiet private room away from interruptions.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chairman. This may result in an instruction being given to the appropriate officer to remove the offender from the Zoom meeting and not permitting them to re-join.

Declaration of Interests

A councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the waiting room by an Officer. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made the Councillor will be readmitted to the meeting

Public Participation

An officer will read any pre-submitted addresses from the press and public.

Confidential Matters

Members of the Public and Press will be asked to leave or removed from the meeting as per legislation and standing orders. If an individual refuses to leave, following instruction from the Chairman, the Clerk will remove the individual. The Clerk will then “lock” the meeting. Prior to any discussion, Councillors and Officers will be asked to individually declare that any discussion cannot be overheard – if this declaration cannot be made, the Member/Officer will be asked to leave the meeting. The Clerk will stop recording the meeting once the declarations have been made and the Chairman is satisfied that confidentiality can be adhered to. Officers will be provided and requested to wear headsets equipped with microphones. Where possible, the Chairman will refer Members to paperwork previously circulated meaning details will not be announced verbally. Should a discussion be required, Councillors are requested not to mention individuals’ names or personal details but refer to paperwork.

Recording

All public sessions of Zoom meetings will be recorded and made available to members, the press and members of the public should they request them. The recordings will be kept until the minutes have been adopted (normally the next meeting).

After the Meeting

Once the meeting is finished, the Chairman will formally close the meeting and the Clerk will end the session.

Minutes of the meeting will be written by an Officer in the normal way and should reflect where the meeting took place. Minutes can be agreed at the next meeting and the signing deferred until the next physical meeting.

Information

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/contents/made>