



# MELKSHAM WITHOUT PARISH COUNCIL

## Virtual Meeting Policy

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 4 April 2020 the Government introduced the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which allows local councils to meet remotely. These regulations apply to meetings held before 7 May 2021.

In order to meet the regulations, the following conditions must be satisfied.

Members in remote attendance must be able:

- (a) To hear and where practicable see and be so heard and where practicable, be seen by the other members in attendance.
- (b) To hear and where practicable see and be so heard and where practicable, be seen by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting and
- (c) To be so heard and where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.

### 2. Technology

- 2.1 For the purposes of holding remote meetings, Melksham Without Parish Council will use the Zoom Conferencing Platform.
- 2.2 Guidance on how to use the video conferencing platform will be circulated to all members and Officers and will be publicly available on the Council's website.
- 2.3 Members or Officers will advise the Proper Officer of any technical

issues relating to access to these meetings.

### **3. Preparation for Meetings**

- 3.1 The meeting will be advertised on the Council's website and all members and Officers due to attend will be issued with a notice and agenda email. This will be within the usual timeframe for meeting notices.
- 3.2 Minutes will be taken in the usual way and displayed on the website. Minutes will be circulated after the meeting and signed once restrictions have been lifted.
- 3.3 Where a member is unable to attend a meeting, apologies will be submitted and received by the Proper Officer in the usual way.
- 3.4 The meetings will be open to the public and ways of accessing the meeting will be explained on the agenda (or on the meeting notice), who can access meetings using the link provided on the agenda.\*
- 3.5 ~~Members of the public will be asked to contact the Clerk 30 minutes prior to the meeting to obtain the password code for the meeting.\*~~
- 3.6 The same standards of behaviour are applied to remote meetings as to physical meetings. All members are bound by the Council's Code of Conduct.  
  
Members, Officers and members of the public are asked to be patient with those who are less experienced in such meetings.
- 3.7 Members and Officers in attendance at the meeting are reminded to check the background of their video range, in order to ensure confidentiality, data protection and Code of Conduct requirements are met.
- 3.8 It is possible that technical issues may arise. It may be necessary for the host to request clarification or ask for dialogue to be repeated to make sure everyone can be heard and that they have the correct information for the minutes.
- 3.8 Those in attendance are asked to physically raise their hands when they wish to speak.
- 3.9 Where a Councillor has an interest in a matter and would normally

leave a physical meeting, they will exit the meeting. They will either wait in the virtual 'waiting room' or leave completely and be advised by the Proper Officer when they can return to the meeting.

- 3.10 It may be necessary for members to prepare themselves for the meeting in a different way than usual. It may be necessary for them to familiarise themselves with the agenda and any reports beforehand making written notes where necessary.

#### **4. The Meeting**

- 4.1 The Proper Officer of the Council will set up and technically host the meeting. An email invitation, with an explanation of how to access the meeting will be sent to all members.
- 4.2 Councillors are asked to ensure they are in place with as little background noise as possible. Once checks have been carried out to ensure that everyone in attendance can be heard, all those in attendance are asked to 'mute' their microphones until such a time as they are ready to speak. This eliminates background and feedback, as well as ensures people are not talking over one another as there can sometimes be a time delay. Where this is not done, the host of the meeting may mute attendees.
- 4.3 Whilst the Proper Officer is hosting the meeting, it will be chaired in the usual manner. There is a possibility that there will be more input from the Proper Officer than is usual, given that it is possible that the Chair will not be able to use the computer video function and look at the agenda and/or supporting papers at the same time.
- 4.4 The meeting will be recorded in the normal way, but also via the video conferencing platform itself. This is to aid the writing of minutes in a situation where the minute taker is involved with technical aspects of the meeting as well as for openness and transparency.
- 4.5 Recordings of meetings are also available via Youtube for those who wish to view proceedings at their leisure and will be available removed from the platform once the minutes have been approved and uploaded to the Council's website.
- 4.6 If a vote is required, those attending will be asked to state their preference vocally when asked.

- 4.7 If you have difficulty hearing or being heard throughout the meeting, you are asked to advise the Property Officer via the text 'chat' function. Please be aware that this can be seen by everyone in attendance.

## **5. Public Participation**

- 5.1 The Notice will invite the public to attend and will include information of how to register to access meetings. ~~Members of the public will be asked to contact the Clerk 30 minutes prior to the meeting to obtain the password code for the meeting.\*~~ with agendas including a link to the meeting.
- 5.2 The usual public participation session will take place. Members of the public are reminded that the Council cannot make any decisions on matters that do not appear on the agenda. If members of the public have questions about matters not on the agenda, they are requested to contact the Council outside of the meeting.
- 5.3 The meeting host may remove anyone from the meeting who is being intentionally disruptive, using offensive language or incessantly interrupting the meeting proceedings.

## **6. Relation to other policies and procedures**

- 6.1 The Proper Officer will ensure that data protection requirements are followed when organising remote meetings.
- 6.2 Members of the Council and members of the public are asked to ensure that they do not breach the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and general confidentiality when they contribute to the meeting.

Approved and adopted by Full Council on 6 July 2020 (Min 006/20)

**\*On 3 August the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Issued a new briefing following an amendment to The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which came into effect on 1 August 2020 and relating to public's of the public attending meetings as follows:**

**'In NALC's view the effect of the amendment is that is not enough to give notice of a remote meeting and invite the press and public to make a request for the access information (eg the Zoom link). This information must be provided with the public notice when that notice is given. Councils should take account of social distancing requirements before deciding to put notices in physical spaces.'**

Amendment approved by Full Council on 21 September 2020 (Min 81/20)