



Lowestoft Town Council Video Meeting Protocol

1. Background

1.1 This protocol is intended to guide councillors, officers and any other participants, who are using video meetings.

1.2 All councillors and officers are provided with a tablet/laptop by Lowestoft Town Council, have a dedicated @lowestofttowncouncil.gov.uk email address and are understood to have internet access at home. Where reasonably practicable, Council equipment and email addresses should be used for Council communications.

1.3 The Council will use a mainstream and reputable video meeting platform such as Zoom or Skype and will have due regard to data protection and other relevant laws.

1.4 This protocol was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic but is intended for use in all video meetings held by or participated in by the Council. It will be reviewed by the Clerk as needed in light of any developments, and by the Council prior to being presented for formal adoption at its Annual Meeting.

2. Current Legislation

2.1. Where local authorities are required to hold formal meetings in public, the Local Government Act 1972 requires councillors to be physically present in order for a meeting to take place.

2.2. There was temporary flexibility permitting online meetings during part of the pandemic under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. However, this flexibility is no longer available and primary legislation is being considered.

2.3 Nevertheless, it is recognised that there are situations where the Council does not have to meet in person when use of Video Meetings remains valuable. It is also foreseeable that emergency situations will arise from time to time when Video Meetings will again be important. The advantages include not having to travel (which fits well with the Council's environmental commitments), and fitting in better with work-life balance including for councillors with mobility issues, childcare responsibilities etc. It is recognised that there are also disadvantages and adherence to this protocol is designed to ameliorate this.

2.4 Whilst the council has always facilitated such, there is no legislation that states public participation sessions have to be provided for as part of a council meeting whether in person or remotely. However, this Council is committed to enabling the public to view and participate in a public forum via video meeting portals for any formal online and in-person meetings where it is appropriate and practical to do so. . Regardless of the media platform used, the controls will be set by the meeting host (the Clerk to the Council). Formal Council meetings may be streamed via YouTube and it should be recognised that any members of the public observing these meetings may make recordings of such. The streaming will stop when confidential items of business are transacted. A public protocol on the observation of meetings will also be adopted. The public are given advance notice of meetings with the link to access the online platform of the meeting and can provide written or verbal statements or questions on matters relating to the agenda in advance of the meeting. A webinar facility for participation will also be provided where appropriate and reasonably practicable. Additionally non-confidential papers and minutes of meetings will be published on the website in advance or subsequent to meetings, as appropriate. Normal telephone and email contacts routes remain.



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2.5 It is recognised that officers and councillors may use video conferencing for other aspects of their Council activities e.g. meetings with stakeholders and discussions with the public. All Council users need to be mindful of the ease of video and audio recording and that images are personal data. Subject to appropriate consideration of data, information, safeguarding and other legal issues, video conferencing is a useful communication tool.

3. Detail

3.1 Video meeting groups will be set up for Full Council, Committees and some other groupings, where needed, and, in most circumstances, only those councillor and officer participants using their dedicated Town Council email address will be enabled to join these meetings.

3.2 Officers will create video meetings and will start them normally at least 5 minutes before the meeting.

3.3. Officers will ensure all video meetings are audio and/or video recorded.

3.4 The YouTube recordings of meetings will be stored by the Town Council for the civic year and be available for public viewing via the Town Council's YouTube channel.

3.5 Officers will ensure there are minutes or notes, as relevant, of all relevant video meetings.

3.6 At the beginning of meetings, checks may be made on video and audio functioning.

3.7 It is recognised that it will not always be possible to facilitate the participation of all intended participants at the meeting but all reasonable endeavours will be made, while prioritising the need to progress the business of the meeting.

3.8 Where appropriate, the Chair will open the meeting with a provided statement covering key issues regarding recording and participation.

3.9 To avoid background noise and enable orderly participation, all participants should mute their audio when not speaking, clearly indicate when they wish to speak (by whatever means is indicated by the Chair) and await the Chair's indication that they can speak.

3.10 In the interests of efficiency, participants should avoid duplication and unnecessary, irrelevant, and lengthy comments; a time limit may be applied by the Chair.

3.11 All users may opt to use the 'subtitle' function where platforms have this facility but should note that they are unlikely to provide a perfect translation of all spoken words.

3.12 If a vote is required, councillors will cast their vote as directed by the Chair of the meeting.

3.13 All supporting documents required for the video meeting will be uploaded to the members' area of the Town Council website or shared at the meeting.

3.14 Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct and at formal meetings of the council must declare disclosable pecuniary and other registerable interests.

3.15 For confidential items, councillors and staff must not participate unless they are sure that any members of the public, including family, are not present or within earshot.

3.16 Training on use of the relevant video conferencing platform will be given.

3.17 Conduct, visible backgrounds, and dress, must be appropriate for an in person meeting. This includes, but is not limited to, refraining from consuming alcohol and smoking during the meeting. There may be facility to blur your background via some platforms.

3.18 Video conferencing is only undertaken by agreement between parties and any non-meeting business, apologies for absence, requests for dispensations and other matters connected to meetings but not forming part of the meeting, should be undertaken through the usual email and telephone media.

4. Troubleshooting

4.1 Any questions regarding about video meetings should be emailed to james.cox@lowestofttowncouncil.gov.uk. During emergency situations, officers will not be able to meet in person with councillors to assist with operating issues.

4.2 Any participant not abiding with the above protocol and causing disruption during the meeting will be removed, subject to 1) a warning being issued by the Chair and, in the event of continued problems, 2) a majority vote of the meeting.

Revisions	
Date	Amendment
July 2021	Updated to reflect that regulations permitting online Council meetings during the pandemic have now ceased, but there are still circumstances in which video meetings remain valuable. Also updated to reflect that the webinar function enables members of the public to participate in the public forum section of meetings. Some wording rationalised.
May 2022	3.17 business meeting dress was replaced with appropriate in-person meeting and smoking was added to items to refrain from during meeting.
April 2023	Amended 3.14 to reflect the updated Code of Conduct