



## 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 currently in possession of a tablet/laptop provided by Lowestoft Town Council, have a dedicated @lowestofttowncouncil.gov.uk email address and are understood to have internet access from their home. Where reasonably practicable, Council equipment and email addresses are 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 has been developed during the COVID-19 2020 pandemic but is intended for use in all situations where formal meetings in-person are not possible. It will be reviewed by the Clerk, as needed in light of any developments, and will be presented for formal adoption and review by the Council when in-person meetings resume.

### 2. Current Legislation

2.1. There is no current legislation that provides for parish council virtual meetings. Local authorities are required to hold meetings to make decisions and the Local Government Act 1972 requires members to be physically present in order for a meeting to take place. However, as at 17 March 2020 the government has advised that all non-essential travel and contact with others should be avoided. Social distancing measures have been introduced.

2.2. The Government is currently considering bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person and permitting video meetings. However, where needed, Council video meetings are the best solution at a time when procedural law has not yet caught up with the overriding public safety imperative.

2.3 It is recognised that there will be disadvantages of this method of conducting business meetings but adherence to this protocol will enable the Council to have a form of meeting which complements delegation to the Clerk for urgent and necessary actions.

2.4 Whilst the current law states that Council meetings must be held in public there is no legislation that states public participation sessions have to be provided. How the public can be enabled to view virtual meetings is still under consideration. The public are given advance notice of meetings and can provide written or verbal statements or questions on matters relating to the agenda in advance of the meeting. 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.

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 participants using their dedicated Town Council email address will be enabled to join these meetings.

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



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- 3.3. Officers will ensure all video meetings are audio and/or video recorded.
- 3.4 Officers will ensure there are minutes or notes, as relevant, of all relevant video meetings.
- 3.5 At the beginning of meetings, checks may be made on video and audio functioning.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Where appropriate, the chair of the meeting will open the meeting with a provided statement covering key issues regarding recording and participation.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 In the interests of efficiency, avoid duplication, unnecessary, irrelevant, and lengthy comments; a time limit may be applied by the Chair.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 If a vote is required, members will cast their vote as directed by the Chair of the meeting.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct and declare disclosable pecuniary and local non-pecuniary interests.
- 3.14 For confidential items, do not participate unless you are sure that any members of the public, including family, are not present or within earshot.
- 3.15 Training on use of the relevant video conferencing platform will be given.
- 3.16 Please ensure that any background, and your conduct and dress, should be suitable for a business meeting. This includes, but is not limited to, refraining from consuming alcohol during the meeting. There may be facility to blur your background via some platforms.
- 3.17 Video conferencing is only undertaken by agreement between parties and not for day-to-day activities. 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](mailto:james.cox@lowestofttowncouncil.gov.uk). No officers will 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 from the relevant meeting, subject to 1) a warning being issued by the Chair and, in the event of continued problems, 2) a majority vote of the meeting.