

RUTLAND COUNTY COUNCIL - VIRTUAL MEETINGS PROTOCOL

1.0 Purpose of Virtual Meetings and making official recordings of Council Committees

- 1.1 The main purpose of Virtual Meetings is to enable the Council to continue to discharge its functions during the suspension of public gatherings/meetings during the Covid 19 crisis. Virtual meetings allow Council, Cabinet and Committees to transact business and fulfil their functions while ensuring that the Public continue to be able to access meetings.
- 1.2 The streaming and recording of virtual meetings does not replace the formal minutes of the meeting and the decisions made. The Council will continue to produce formal minutes and agenda as required.

2.0 Operating Procedure

- 2.1 The virtual meeting will commence at the beginning of a meeting when the person presiding opens the meeting. Under the new Regulations members who are in remote attendance must be able to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance.
- 2.2 At the start of any public committee the person presiding will ensure that the meeting complies with this rule by asking attending members of the meeting if they can hear and be heard during the virtual meeting.
- 2.3 Councillors are permitted to switch their camera off and speak using the audio facility only.
- 2.4 The virtual meeting will finish when the person presiding formally closes the meeting.
- 2.5 If a committee is required to meet in private a separate remote meeting will either be scheduled separately or other technological solution will be put in place to prevent unauthorised access.
- 2.6 Those attending should:
 - 2.6.1 remember that these meeting remain formal meetings in public and dress should be appropriate to the meeting
 - 2.6.2 Ensure that equipment used to access the meeting is fully charged or attached to a charger
 - 2.6.3 Ensure that lighting is sufficient to allow others to see the face clearly
 - 2.6.4 Ensure position of head is in centre of the screen

2.6.5 Use headsets to avoid feedback from excess volume

2.6.6 Ensure that background is plain with no distractions

3.0 Managing contributions from members during virtual meetings.

3.1. All microphones, at the start of the virtual meeting will be set to mute, apart from the person presiding and co-host. The person presiding will un-mute microphones during debate and deliberations either by inviting a member to contribute or in responding to a member 'raising their electronic hand' to indicate that they wish to speak.

3.2 During the meeting, the 'chat function' will be disabled – members will continue to be able to communicate via email during the remote meeting. Councillors are reminded that such emails may be required to be disclosed to the public.

3.3 No participants are permitted to join the meeting without the person presiding's knowledge or agreement.

4.0 The broadcast and recording of the virtual meeting.

4.1 The person presiding has absolute discretion to pause or adjourn meeting proceedings.

4.2 Should the virtual meeting/webcast be halted for a technical reason the following procedure will be applied:

4.3 The person presiding will be informed immediately, and the meeting will temporarily be adjourned.

4.4 The operator will also inform the Monitoring Officer

5.0 Managing members and member interests

5.1 Members in attendance wishing to leave the meeting before it finishes should notify the person presiding of the Committee before leaving the meeting. This will allow for formal minutes to record the time and agenda item at which point the member left the meeting.

5.2 For members declaring any interests the Councillor should both mute their microphone and turn off their camera for the duration of that item. The member should not communicate with any Councillor involved in the discussion relating to the item while it is under consideration.

5.3 Conduct of members in attendance. The person presiding has the right to remove virtual attendees from the meeting if their conduct falls short of the expected standards in public life.

6.0 Voting on items during committee

6.1 The recorded vote procedure will be used

7.0 Attendance

7.1 All virtual meetings will require to be quorate in accordance with the council's Constitution. For the avoidance of doubt, 'virtual' attendance will count toward the committee's quoracy and the councillor's attendance.

8.0 Interpretation of standing orders

8.1 Where the person presiding is required to interpret the Council's existing standing orders in light of the requirements of remote participation, he or she shall take advice from the Monitoring Officer prior to making a ruling. The person presiding's decision in all cases shall be final