



# **OAKHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

## **VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY**

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## OTC Virtual Meeting Policy

1. Oakham Town Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times when a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairs, Councillors and members of the public and press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting and to assist people to engage in debate and decision making. The policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' which are currently enacted for meetings on and up to 7th May 2021.
2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents: Councillors will be summonsed as per regulations, with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will be published on the Council's physical noticeboards as far as is practicable. Any person unable to access the Council's website may contact the Council and request that a paper copy of the agenda is posted to them.
3. Virtual Meeting 'platform': The Council's chosen platform to provide video communications is ZOOM, which enables video and audio conferencing for persons using mobile devices, desktops, and fixed room systems.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk to the Council will make available, via the summons:

The ZOOM meeting link •  
The meeting ID •  
The meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders: Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were physically present.
5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements:
  - (a) Discussions: This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity see 5c.

During the meeting, all persons (public & press), other than councillors, will be muted.

Members of the public will be muted at the start of the meeting, but before this they will be asked if any of them wish to make a deputation. In the event of an affirmative response then any such individuals will be unmuted at the appropriate point of the meeting and invited to speak, in line with normal Standing Orders. Following the conclusion of their address, their microphone will be muted once more.

During the meeting members and officers will physically raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item, or make it known they wish to speak if they do not have video capability. The Chairman will control that only one person is speaking at any one time, inviting members to speak as per normal Standing Orders (once on an item).

All members attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and, if necessary, mute their own microphones except when speaking, to negate interference with the meeting.

Councillors should be mindful of what their videos capture, and family members and pets should not be in camera shot or be able to hear confidential matters.

- (b) Voting: All voting will be undertaken by a physical show of hands, hands being raised and held until the count is confirmed. If unclear the Clerk will ask by name for clarification.

For matters that the Chair deems to be of special importance or contention, a roll will be taken in alphabetical sequence of members present to enable them to cast their votes.

The Clerk will call each Councillor's name and they will indicate for, against or abstention.

- (c) In the case of poor Internet connectivity or in case of a power failure at any location, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available but audio remaining for some or all of members attending, the Chair can choose to continue, but to operate a roll call for councillors' views on individual agenda items.

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 Chair will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date and time, subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise them of the suspension.

- (d) Persons wishing to attend by telephone are requested to inform the Clerk in advance.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette: Normal Standing Orders apply with regard to conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with regard to the operation of technology. Behaviour that is disruptive or contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. For a member of the public or press, this may result in them being dismissed from the virtual meeting.
7. Declaration of Interests: A councillor who has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be required to mute and not take part, turning off or covering their camera for the duration of the item.
8. Public Participation: The published agenda will either include a link to the meeting or a note that members of the public who wish to attend the meeting should contact the Clerk for an invitation. Invitations will not be issued once the meeting has commenced.
9. Confidential Matters: Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate WebEx meeting that is available to members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda, the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential meeting link that will have been provided to members only.
10. Recording: While recognising that a member of the public may decide to record the virtual meeting, the Council will not routinely record such meetings. However, recordings may be made at the discretion of the Chair and made available to members, the press and members of the public. For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020
11. All meetings of the full Council, including Committees and working groups to be used and hosted via Council's Zoom account

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