

# HIXON PARISH COUNCIL

## POLICY & PROCEDURE: VIRTUAL PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Version 1.0

REF HPC PZ1

Published Date 16.06.2020

Review Date May 2021

### **A. The Policy**

Hixon Parish Council (HPC) recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually when physical meetings are deemed to be impractical.

HPC has developed this policy to assist the Chair; Councillors; members of the public and the press to understand how these meetings may differ from physical meetings, and to assist people to engage in debate and decision making.

This policy has been implemented under 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' and is currently enacted for meetings until the Council is advised to resume physical meetings.

### **B. The Procedure.**

#### **1. Publishing the agenda and providing documents**

Councillors will to be summonsed as per regulation with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website and noticeboards in the Parish. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council and request an electronic copy of the agenda and documents to be forwarded as appropriate. In cases where documents originate from third parties, electronic links will be provided where possible.

#### **2. Virtual Meeting 'platform'**

Hixon Parish Council will utilise 'Virtual digital conferencing functionality' to provide video communications. Virtual meetings 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 and/or Chair will publish via the summons:

- The virtual conferencing meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

#### **3. Standing Orders**

Standing Orders will be used to guide the meeting in a similar way as if persons were present in a physical place.

#### **4. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements**

##### **a. Discussions**

During the meeting all persons other than members of HPC will be muted.

If the Agenda allows for a public participation period members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chair and will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be

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unmuted and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address the microphone will be muted.

During the meeting Council members and officers will raise their hand (electronically or physically) to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

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

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands.

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting or to reconvene.

In the case of video not being available for some or all of Council members attending the Chair can choose to continue but to operate on a roll call for Councillor Views on individual agenda items.

d. Attendance

If a Council 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 time and date subject to the statutory days of notice. Council members will be contacted to advice of the suspension.

e. Telephone attendance

Persons wishing to attend by telephone are advised to contact the Clerk in advance in order that processes can be put in place to enable appropriate engagement.

### 5. **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 may experience with regard to the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is 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.

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### **6. Declaration of Interests**

A Councillor that has declared an interest that requires them to leave the meeting will be placed in the waiting room. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made the councillor will be returned to the meeting

### **7. Public Participation**

The ID for the meeting will be posted on HPC's website and notices boards. Any member of the public / press wishing to enter the meeting should contact the Clerk for the password.

The Clerk will read any pre-submitted addresses from the press and public.

### **8. Confidential Matters**

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate virtual meeting that will be available to Council members only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda the meeting will be suspended for Council members to re-join using the confidential virtual meeting link that will have been provided to Council members only.

### **9. Recording**

Virtual conference meetings may be recorded, subject to the agreement of a majority of those Councillors taking part. The vote to be taken before the meeting begins and after the Chair has read out a statement informing "it is the intention of this Council that the meeting is recorded for the purposes of a true record." The recording may be made available to absent Councillors and members of public and press via the website. Anyone intending to record the meeting by other means to advise the Council before the Chair calls the meeting to order.

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Adapted by Brendan McKeown on behalf of Hixon Parish Council.

**Chair Brendan McKeown**

**Date 16 June 2020**