

Online meetings

Online meetings can be set up on Teams, Skype, Zoom or other virtual platforms. Once one of these has been chosen, a package needs to be bought to facilitate this and others can join either by using the same platform or by phoning into the meeting. Area Offices can provide guidance on how to use the platforms to best effect.

Members of the public should be encouraged to attend Community Council meetings and should be provided with details of how to request to join the meeting. They should then be provided with an invitation or given the telephone number and meeting ID so that they can join. They should not be allowed to speak unless invited to do so by the Chair and should keep their microphones muted.

Community Councillors will be sent a meeting invitation and should confirm to the Chair/Secretary whether they will be attending the meeting. The first time a meeting is held online, it may be beneficial to have a test before the meeting starts to ensure everyone has access.

Meetings can be recorded, if those in attendance agree, for the benefit of those who are not able to attend. However, exempt/confidential items should not be recorded although a confidential note of these will be included in the minute.

Before the meeting you should:

- Download and save agenda papers for easy access
- Take a note of the telephone number and the meeting ID so that, if you are unable to join because of connection issues, you can phone into the meeting
- Let the Chair/Secretary know if you are unable to attend or if you will be late
- Let the Chair know if you have any issues with the previous minute so that this can be addressed at the appropriate time
- If you need to dial into the meeting you should provide your telephone number to the Chair/Secretary in advance so that you can be contacted if your attempt to dial in fails

During the meeting, you should:

- Be close to your broadband router or connect your computer directly to the router to ensure that you have a good connection
- Have your agenda papers open so that you can access them quickly
- Join the meeting in plenty of time to avoid a delay in the start time
- Make sure you have the telephone number and meeting ID to hand in case your connection fails and you need to phone into the meeting
- Keep your microphone muted unless you have been invited to speak by the Chair. Remember to unmute yourself when it is your turn to speak!

The Meeting Process:

- Attendance - the attendance will be taken by roll call but, if you are late and miss the roll call, you should let the Chair know when you come into the meeting by entering this into the chat facility.
- Participation - You should use the Meeting Chat facility or hands up feature in teams to alert the Chair that you wish to speak. This helps to avoid interruptions and people speaking at the same time. The Chair can then invite people to speak at the appropriate time. The Chair should ensure that anyone without access to the meeting chat/hands up facility is offered the opportunity to speak.
- Declarations of interest - The Chair will ask Community Councillors if they have any interests to declare and, if you have, you should provide the item number, why you are declaring an interest and whether you will take part in the item or leave the meeting. If you need to leave, the Chair/Secretary will remove you from the meeting at the appropriate time and will ask you to re-join once the item is finished. You should not come in until the item is completed.
- Voting - This will take place by roll call as usual.
- Exempt/Confidential items - When these items are to be discussed, you must ensure that you are in a private location and that no-one else is able to hear or view the proceedings from your computer/tablet/phone. If you are not able to be in a private setting, you will be required to leave the meeting.

Hybrid Meetings

Community Councils may choose to have hybrid meetings in which some people attend in person, while others are online. If this option is chosen, everyone should have the right to choose whether to attend in person or virtually.

Community Council members should let the Chair/Secretary know in advance whether they wish to attend in person or virtually. This will enable the appropriate arrangements to be made.

Hybrid meetings can be quite difficult, and the Chair should ensure where possible that everyone present at a hybrid meeting, whether in person or virtually, can participate on an equal footing.

Restrictions on physical distancing at venues should align with current government guidelines which may include the use of face masks, hand sanitiser and cleaning products. There may also be a need for new equipment such as a large screen which can be used to ensure that those in attendance are not crowded round a small device.

There may be necessity to limit in-person attendance where there are health and safety concerns for participants or if government guidelines specify the need for this.

Government guidelines may also specify the need to record everyone who is present for track and trace purposes.

Both hybrid and fully virtual meetings may be recorded, where everyone in attendance agrees, for the benefit of those who are unable to attend.

