

# Hoxne Parish Council

## Video Meeting Protocol

### 1. Background

This protocol is intended to guide councillors and officers and any other participants, using video meetings. The Council is currently using Zoom as its preferred method of video communication. This protocol has been developed during the COVID-19 2020 pandemic. 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

The Local Government Act 1972 requires members to be physically present in order for a meeting to take place. On 17 March 2020 the government advised that all non-essential travel and contact with others should be avoided and social distancing measures were introduced. On 4 April 2020 the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England And Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force and made virtual meetings permissible until 31 May 2021.

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.

Whilst the current law states that Council meetings must be operated in such a way that the public can observe the meeting, there is no legislation that states public participation sessions have to be provided for. 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.

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

Video meeting groups will be set up for Full Council, Committees and Working Groups. Working Groups do not need to enable to public to observe.

The Clerk will call video meetings up to 5 minutes before the meeting.

The Clerk will ensure all video meetings are audio and video recorded.

The Clerk will ensure there are minutes or notes, as relevant, of all video meetings.

At the beginning of meetings, a check will be made of the functioning of video and audio for all Councillor participants.

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.

The Chairman of the meeting will open the meeting with a provided statement covering key issues regarding recording and participation.

To avoid background noise and enable orderly participation, all participants should mute their audio when not speaking, clearly raise and show their hand when they wish to speak and await the Chairman's indication that they can speak

In the interests of efficiency, avoid duplication, unnecessary, irrelevant, or lengthy comments; a time limit may be applied by the Chairman.

If a vote is required, members will cast their vote as directed by the Chair of the meeting which will be by show of hands or through an electronic poll.

For confidential items, do not participate unless you are sure that any members of the public, including family, are not present or within earshot.

Training on use of the relevant video conferencing platform will be given if requested.

Please ensure that any background, your conduct and dress is suitable for a business meeting. There is facility to blur your background.

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**

Any councillor 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.