

Agenda Item No. 6

TO: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

FROM: Monitoring Officer – Shahin Ismail

PRESENTING OFFICER(S): Monitoring Officer – Shahin Ismail
shahin.ismail@LGSSLaw.co.uk

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VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider a Virtual Meeting Protocol for the conduct of remote meetings to enable the Fire Authority's decision making process to continue.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Authority is asked to approve the Virtual Meeting Protocol attached at **Appendix 1**.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 23rd March 2020, the Prime Minister announced stringent new guidelines for 'lockdown' and 'social distancing' in response to the coronavirus pandemic.
- 3.2 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force on 4 April 2020. The regulations:-
- empower Fire Authorities to alter the frequency of meetings, move or cancel meetings without further notice.
 - enable Fire Authorities to postpone or dispense with the requirement to have an annual meeting and provide that where any appointment would normally be made at the annual meeting, such appointment continues until the next annual meeting or until such time as the authority may determine.
 - allow meetings to be held remotely, including via telephone conferencing, video conferencing, webcasting or live streaming.

- set out the conditions to be met for a councillor to be defined as participating remotely which, as a minimum, require members and public speakers to be heard and hear each other and other members of the public who are not speaking, to hear, although the regulations provide that, where practicable, the parties should also be able to see each other.
- override any existing standing orders or procedure rules which an authority may have relating to the conduct of meetings.
- enable Fire Authorities to make standing orders in relation to remote meetings.
- confirm that any requirement to be “present” includes remote attendance and therefore counts for purposes such as the six month rule on attendance.
- provide that any requirement to make committee agenda available for public inspection is met by posting them on the authority’s website.

3.3 The Regulations do override any Fire Authority Standing Orders or Procedure Rules to enable remote meetings to proceed, they do enable Fire Authorities to make standing orders governing remote meetings which may include provision for voting; member and public access to documents and remote access for members of the public and press to attend and participate in such meetings.

3.4 The Fire Authority is therefore invited to consider a Virtual Meeting Protocol, which has been prepared in consultation with the Chairman of the Fire Authority. This protocol will take precedence over other Standing Orders/Procedure Rules in relation to the governance of remote meetings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Document	Location	Contact Officer
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/contents/made	Hinchingbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Dawn Cave 01223 699178 dawn.cave@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY
VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) make provision for remote attendance at, and remote access to Council meetings held on or before 7 May 2021.
- 1.2 The Regulations enable the Fire Authority to hold meetings without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room. They allow for remote meetings through electronic and digital means at virtual locations using video and telephone conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming.
- 1.3 The “place” at which the meeting may be held may be at the Authority Headquarters or a public building, where the organiser of the meeting is located, or an electronic, digital or virtual location, a web address or a conference call telephone number.
- 1.4 In order for Members to be able to attend meetings of the Fire Authority remotely, they need not be physically present, provided they are able to hear and be heard (and where practicable, see and be seen by) other Members and members of the public attending remotely or in person.
- 1.5 The procedure rules in this protocol take precedence over the Fire Authority standing orders in relation to the governance of remote meetings.
- 1.6 In line with the Regulations, this protocol is designed to provide a guide to virtual formal committee meetings involving Members, officers and the public during the Covid-19 crisis. It has been agreed by the Chairman of the Fire Authority and will be kept under regular review.

2. MEETINGS OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

- 2.1 Meetings of Fire Authority will take place using the Zoom software platform. Democratic Services will prepare a detailed briefing note for the Chairman to manage the meeting electronically. Any confidential items will need to take place using the Microsoft Teams platform so Members are asked to consider whether it is really necessary to go into confidential session.

Public Questions

- 2.2 The Fire Authority will continue to take questions from the public as set out the Standing Orders. The member of the public asking the question will receive access details from the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting to access the Zoom meeting.

Voting

- 2.3 Voting will be managed by the Chairman supported by the Democratic Services Officer minuting the meeting. If an item requires a vote, the Chairman will ask all Members to turn their microphones on. The Democratic Services Officer will then read out the name of each Member in turn in alphabetical order and ask them how they wish to vote. Once a Member has given their vote then microphones should be muted again. The Democratic Services Officer minuting the meeting will record the outcome of the voting and announce it at the meeting. If an item does not appear to be contentious, the Chairman will ask Members whether any Member disagrees or wishes to abstain. This will be actioned by the Member clicking on the “raise your hand” icon. If nobody objects the motion will be taken as carried.

3. OTHER FORMAL MEETINGS OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

- 3.1 Other formal meetings of the Fire Authority will take place using the Zoom software platform. Democratic Services will prepare a detailed briefing note for the Chairman/woman to manage the meeting electronically. Any confidential items will need to take place using the Microsoft Teams platform so Chairs and Lead Members are asked to consider whether it is really necessary to go into confidential session.

Public Questions

- 3.2 Committees will continue to take questions from the public as set out in the Standing Orders. The member of the public asking the question will receive access details from the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting to access the Zoom meeting.

Voting

- 3.3 Voting will be managed through the Chairman/woman via the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting. If an item requires an electronic vote, the Chairman/woman will ask all Members to turn their microphones on. The Chairman/woman will then read out the name of each Member in turn in alphabetical order and ask them how they wish to vote. Once a Member has given their vote then microphones should be muted again. The Democratic Services Officer minuting the meeting will record the outcome of the voting and announce it at the meeting. If an item does not appear to be contentious, the Chairman/woman will ask Members whether any Member disagrees or wishes to abstain. This will be actioned by the Member clicking on the “raise your hand” icon. If nobody objects the motion will be taken as carried.

4. RUNNING A VIRTUAL MEETING

Councillors Joining a Virtual Meeting

- 4.1 Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly (i.e. at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time) in order to resolve any issues with joining and avoid disrupting the meeting. The Chairman/woman will remind councillors to mute their microphones when not speaking. This is done in order to reduce feedback and background noise. The Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting may perform this function as well.

4.2 Access to documents

Democratic Services will publish the agenda and reports for committee meetings on the County Council's website (a link will be available on the Fire Authority's website) and will notify councillors by email. Printed copies will not be circulated.

Public Access

- 4.3 The following wording will be added to the Fire Authority's website as well as to the meeting page for each committee meeting.

Due to Government guidance on social-distancing and the Covid-19 virus it will not be possible to hold a physical meeting of the XXX on XXX. Arrangements are being made for the press and public to follow the decision-making via Zoom. Details of how to watch the meeting will be published at the foot of the meeting page under the 'meeting documents' heading.

The requirement to ensure meetings are open to the public includes access by remote means, including video conferencing, live webcast and live interactive streaming. Where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means, the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.

Recording Meetings

- 4.4 The Zoom software platform has a facility for recording meetings. All virtual meetings will be recorded.

Registering Attendance and Meeting Etiquette

- 4.5 At the start of the meeting, the Chairman/woman will carry out a roll call of all Members present. Confirmation will be given by each Member switching their video on and unmuting their microphone to confirm they are present.
- 4.6 All Members and officers except the Chairman/woman are asked to keep their microphones on mute unless invited to speak. Any Member returning after a

disconnection is asked not to interrupt when returning to announce their return.

Protocol for councillors speaking at meetings

- 4.7 Members who wish to speak during a meeting will need to click on the “raise your hand” icon. The Chairman/woman may ask each person in turn if they have any points they wish to raise on a particular item before completing the discussion on that item. When referring to reports or making specific comments, councillors should refer to the report and page number in the agenda document pack so that all Members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

Dealing with technical difficulties

In the event that the Chairman/woman or the Democratic Services Officer hosting the meeting identifies a failure of the remote participation facility, the Chairman/woman will declare an adjournment while the fault is addressed.

If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting is inquorate, the meeting will be abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened. If the meeting is quorate, the Chairman will decide if this meeting should continue, depending on the difficulties being experienced, or whether it should be adjourned until a later time or date.