

## **Guidance on remote meetings held during the Coronavirus national emergency**

**The following procedure shall be adopted in relation to the conduct of all meetings of the Council and its various committees and sub-committees (to include Cabinet meetings and any other relevant bodies) which are held pursuant to the powers contained within The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”). In accordance with the Regulations the Council’s Standing Orders, while still applying, are for meetings held pursuant to these Regulations to be interpreted in light of those Regulations and this guidance note and adjusted accordingly.**

### **A. System for conducting remote meetings**

1. Camden will conduct remote meetings using Microsoft Teams (‘Teams’) using the calls functionality.
2. The remote meeting will be conducted via a Teams call, using both the audio and video functionality so all participants<sup>1</sup> in a remote meeting should be capable of being heard and seen. All decision-makers must maintain as a legal minimum an audio connection to the meeting, but may mute themselves when they are not speaking. It will not impact the lawfulness or otherwise of the meeting should a committee member not be able to see the other participants for any part of the meeting, nor if they be cannot be seen by other participants and / or the public. All participants will, as far as able, try to join the meeting using the Teams app or web browser and not via dialling into the meeting.
3. Unless a meeting is dealing with confidential items, it will be streamed to the public so that they may listen and watch (should video be available) but the public will not be able to participate unless section C14 below applies; these are meetings held in public via a digital connection, but are not public meetings.
4. The Chair will be provided with advice on procedure and meeting management by a committee officer and, for some meetings, a lawyer and other relevant officers.
5. Meetings will be streamed live as well as recorded, stored and uploaded to the Council’s website. The Council will aim to do this within 48 hours of the meeting finishing.
6. Minutes will be taken and published in the usual manner.
7. In line with existing standing orders, the ruling of the Chair on a point of order and on the construction or application of this guidance, procedure rules and standing orders shall not be challenged during any meeting, including any decision of the Chair to ask for contributors to be muted.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants are defined as members of the committee; other councillors who seek to address the committee; officers advising the committee or presenting reports; any external partners / third-parties invited to address or advise the Committee; and deputees (including any member of the public with speaking rights).

## **B. Prior to the meeting**

1. Agendas will be published on the [website](#) and via the modern.gov app, but no hard copies will be made available. Unless a matter is urgent, five clear working days will elapse from the publication of the agenda to the holding of the meeting. Committee members will, as usual, receive an automated email when the agenda is published online containing a link to the agenda. They will also be provided with contact details to use in the event that their connection to the meeting is cut (see section C8).
3. Committee members will be asked to specifically confirm to the clerk whether they will be attending the meeting remotely or not, at least 24 hours before the meeting, in order to assist the Chair and clerk in managing the meeting.
4. Councillors who are not members of the Committee will be asked to confirm by the deputation deadline their wish to address the Committee and on which items. Participation of non-Committee members will, as usual, be at the discretion of the Chair.

## **C. At the meeting**

1. The committee officer will begin the remote meeting 15 minutes before the meeting start time to allow participants to join promptly and check their audio / video feeds are working.
2. At the beginning of the formal meeting, the Chair will confirm attendance by calling the name of each of those expected to be in attendance (section B2) and ask them to confirm that they are present, their role (voting member, guest member, advising officer or member of the public with speaking rights) and can hear proceedings. Any members who are acting as substitutes shall identify themselves as substitutes and say for whom they are substituting.
3. The usual rules as to numbers of members to create a quorum will apply, and presence in the meeting of a voting member or substitute will count towards the quorum.
4. The meeting will, as the first item of business on the agenda, note and agree the variations / interpretations of procedure rules as set out in this document. The meeting will then follow the published agenda as normal.
5. Any Member participating who declares an interest in any item of business which would normally require them to leave the room shall switch off their microphone and camera for the duration of the item so they cannot be heard or seen by the other participants. They should also refrain from sending any messages using the chat function during the item or do anything that may be reasonably perceived as trying to influence the debate. Any such action may be a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. The relevant Member will still be able to see and hear the discussion and at the end of the item may switch their camera and microphone back on. The committee officer may use their ability to remotely switch microphones on and off to assist in this process.

### Debate

6. Committee members will indicate their desire to speak by submitting their name using the "chat" function on Teams. This "chat" will not be minuted nor be a formal part or contribution to the meeting. All participants should refrain from using the chat for any

function other than indicating their wish to speak, indicating a loss of their audio feed (section C8) or to request a formal vote (section C21) and will be reminded about this at the outset of the meeting. Where a committee member has joined through dialling in, and therefore does not have access to the chat function, the Chair will at relevant points during items specifically invite those participants dialling-in to address the meeting or otherwise confirm they have no comments / questions.

7. When not speaking, participants will be asked to keep themselves muted. Officers may do this remotely to improve the audio quality of the meeting.

#### Interruptions to connections

8. If a Member's audio feed cuts out during the meeting they will:
  - a) If still connected to Teams, use the 'chat' function to advise immediately that they can no longer hear the other participants;
  - b) If they are unable to use the Teams 'chat' function, use the emergency contact details provided to alert the relevant officer (usually the committee officer) who will advise the Chair.
9. Where the Chair is notified of a committee member's audio feed failing they will immediately stop the meeting and call a short adjournment of up to 15 minutes to re-establish the connection. Where the connection is re-established, the Chair will ask relevant participants to repeat in summary any part of the discussion that is considered reasonably necessary to ensure committee members have been given the same information as each other.
10. If after the 15 minutes adjournment, the connection to the committee member cannot be re-established then the meeting will resume – so long as there is still a quorum – and the Member will be deemed as having left the meeting and will be unable to vote on the item. They may, if able, rejoin the meeting and participate on later items.
11. If the Chair is the member affected by the interrupted connection, the committee officer will adjourn the meeting in line with sections C9 – C10. Upon the resumption, if the Chair has been unable to rejoin the meeting, the Vice-Chair will assume the Chair. Where there is no Vice-Chair, the committee officer will conduct a vote for a committee member to temporarily assume the chair. The usual Chair may resume their role at the start of the next item if they have resumed their connection.
12. Where a loss of connection renders a meeting inquorate, the normal procedure rules on inquoracy will apply i.e. the meeting will stand adjourned for up to 15 minutes (or 30 minutes if the committee officer deems it likely that a quorum can be achieved in that time). If after this time, a quorum has not been found then the meeting will conclude and the business stand adjourned to the next meeting of the committee.
13. Where the Chair is advised that the public audio feed is not working to a satisfactory standard, then they shall adjourn the meeting as if it was inquorate under section C12 (unless the meeting is in private session).

#### Deputations and petitions

14. Procedure rules with regard to deputations and petitions apply. Should the Chair agree to hear a deputation, the depute will be issued with details on how to join the Teams meeting as a participant (which is separate to simply hearing / watching the meeting as an observer). Deputies will ordinarily require an email address to join the meeting.

15. Any person who would like to make a deputation, but cannot participate in the meeting due to technological barriers, may submit a written submission in lieu of a deputation.
16. Sections C9 – C10 will also apply to deputees, when the item under consideration is that on which they have asked to address the committee. The Chair may choose to move onto other items of business if considered appropriate, while the connection to the deputee is re-established.
17. Each deputation will be required to identify a single speaker for the purposes of section C16. Where the connection of another member of the deputation party is interrupted, the Chair will not ordinarily adjourn the meeting but will have the discretion to do so where considered appropriate.
18. At the point at which their deputation is to be heard, the committee officer will unmute the deputees' microphone so that they can address the meeting. Once the allotted time has expired they will be asked by the Chair to bring their remarks to a close and thereafter be muted. They may be asked to answer questions and will be muted and unmuted as appropriate.

#### Late papers

19. Late papers from deputees / third parties will not ordinarily be accepted, excepting that deputees may submit reasonable materials with their deputation requests. Officers may circulate late papers (including those supplied from third parties) where they consider it appropriate to do so, but will endeavour to do so no later than 48 hours before the meeting. Different rules for Planning and Licensing apply and are set out at sections D2 and E2 respectively.

#### Motions

20. Should any motions be moved, including amendments, they must be committed to writing and emailed to all committee members and the committee officer by the member moving the motion. The Chair will not allow consideration of the motion or amendment until and unless satisfied that all voting members have had sight of the document and until it has been seconded.

#### Voting

21. The Chair may, at their discretion, consider that there is an accord amongst committee members, and shall announce this to the meeting and not call for a formal vote. Should a committee member wish a formal vote to take place they should indicate this by way of the 'chat' function.
22. When the Chair elects to put a matter to the vote, they will ask the voting members of the committee to confirm that they were able to hear the item in full and to cast their vote on the recommendation(s) / motion. The chair will conduct a roll call in alphabetical order for each committee member to respond in turn.

#### Behaviour

23. The Chair will at their discretion be entitled to mute any contributors, including voting members, should they consider it appropriate. Should either a member or other participant become disruptive, the Chair will warn them and should that warning not

result in a change of behaviour which is acceptable to the Chair then they shall, at their absolute discretion, be entitled to terminate the individual's participation in the meeting.

#### **D. Planning Committee**

1. The above procedure rules shall apply unless superseded below. The Guidance Notes on Procedures for Planning Committee (which are published on every planning agenda) shall also apply but may be varied at the Chair's discretion and upon advice, in so far as is necessary and reasonable to in the context of a remote meeting.
2. As normal, an agenda will be published 5 clear working days before the meeting and a supplementary agenda will be published the working day before the meeting containing supplementary information, deputation requests and written submissions. Officers may submit late papers (including materials from third parties) after the supplementary agenda has been published where it is considered the information provided is material to the decision to be made; these will be published online and circulated via email to the Committee. The Chair will confirm these have been circulated at the start of the item and ensure committee members have been able to access them, to ensure all voting members have been provided with the same information and materials. A short adjournment may be called if needed to ensure committee members have read these. No other late / tabled papers will be permitted.
3. Given the quasi-judicial nature of the business, should the Chair be in any doubt as to whether a committee member was present for the whole of an item they will not allow that committee member to vote.

#### **E. Licensing Committee, Licensing (Sexual Entertainment Venues) Sub-Committee, Licensing Panels**

1. The above procedure rules shall apply unless superseded below. The Licensing procedures set out in the Constitution (which are published on every licensing agenda) shall also apply but may be varied at the Chair's discretion and upon advice, in so far as is necessary and reasonable in the context of a remote meeting.
2. As normal, an agenda will be published 5 clear working days before the meeting. Parties to a licensing hearing may submit further late materials no later than 7pm, two working days before the meeting is due to start. These will be published online and circulated to the committee members. At the start of the relevant item, after the officer's presentation, the Chair will confirm which late papers have been circulated and invite each group of parties (responsible authorities, interested parties, applicant; or applicant, interested parties, licence holder) to set out in up to 2 minutes why the papers should be accepted or not. The committee members will then decide whether to admit the papers – taking advice as needed from officers – and take any adjournment necessary to ensure all voting members have read them.
3. Licensing hearings do not take deputations. The applicant / licence holder / parties making representations instead declare their intention to address the Committee beforehand. They will be sent a notice of the hearing as normal and are required to return this by 7pm, 2 working days before the meeting. Where a party has not indicated their intention to speak by this time, they will be presumed to not be addressing the Committee. Reasonable attempts will be made to accommodate those submitting late notifications, but their participation will not be guaranteed.

4. In line with the above rules on deputations, it is stressed to applicants / licence holders/ parties making representations that they must identify a single speaker for the purposes of sections C16 – 17. This may be themselves or another nominated person. They may invite others to speak as part of their submissions, but the committee will not adjourn the meeting for a speaker who is not the identified single speaker for the party unless the Chair is persuaded that that the non-lead speaker has material information to impart to the committee.
5. Given the variety of licensing hearings, the working day before the relevant meeting is due to start, the clerk to the committee will send to all parties who have indicated their intention to speak a short note explaining the running order and any variations to the usual procedure.
6. Given the quasi-judicial nature of the business, should the Chair be in any doubt as to whether a committee member was present for the whole of an item they will not allow that committee member to vote.

#### **F. Confidential/Exempt Items**

1. Should the meeting have confidential or exempt items on the agenda, the Chair will move the usual motion to move into private session. This can be agreed by a general consensus of the voting members to the satisfaction of the Chair or by carrying out a roll call vote as outlined at C22.
2. The meeting shall then stand adjourned until the Chair is satisfied upon the advisement of the clerk, that the public live feed has paused and all participants not eligible to remain a part of the meeting have been removed as such. Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing), and/or recording the proceedings.
3. When resolving to move back into public session, the meeting shall again adjourn until the Chair is satisfied, upon the advisement of the clerk, that the public live feed has resumed and all eligible participants have had their audio / video feeds restored satisfactorily.

#### **G. Equalities**

1. It is recognised that that some persons who ordinarily would be able to participate in Council meetings in person will not be able to participate in remote meetings due to physical or other disability or because they lack the technological capability to do so. It is believed that this will only be a small minority of persons, but will likely disproportionately affect older persons and those of less financial means. We are aware that in terms of income those that fall within certain protected groups are statistically more likely to lack the means to have access to that equipment or the ability to use it. The Council is of the view that in passing the Regulations to permit remote meetings, the Government has both considered this impact and also set out the importance of holding council meetings during the coronavirus emergency. Therefore, having given its obligations under s149 Equality Act due regard it considers the public interest in public elected member decision resuming outweighs the impacts on any persons who may not be able to participate. It is also mindful of the current statutory prohibition on public gatherings when alternative means are available and it considers that the regulations allowing remote decision making is such an alternative which should be used.

2. Where there is the functionality to dial into a meeting instead of joining via the Internet, the Council will support this as far as possible in line with the procedures set out above.
3. As per C15, any party who cannot make a deputation for technical reasons will be permitted to submit a written submission in lieu of a deputation.
4. Teams has live captions functionality for remote meetings for the deaf / hard of hearing, which users can independently turn on; guidance on how to do so will be provided. The Council cannot accept any liability for the accuracy of these live captions.
5. The Council will consider any other requests for reasonable adjustments to be made in order to allow parties to be involved in remote Council meetings as far as circumstances at the time of the meeting allows.
6. In addition the Council will review and monitor the operation of its remote decision making and make adjustments when it considers it can further mitigate any adverse impact.

**ENDS**