

# DISS TOWN COUNCIL



## Virtual Meeting Policy

### 1. Introduction

Diss Town Council recognises the opportunities offered by meeting virtually in times that a physical meeting is not appropriate and has developed this policy to assist Chairmen, councillors and members of the public and press to understand how these meetings differ from a physical meeting and to assist people to engage in debate and decision making. The policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020'.

### 2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summoned as per regulations with the agenda and documents being placed on the Council's website. Agendas will not be published on physical noticeboards. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Town Clerk prior to the start of the meeting for the link. Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Council to request a copy of the agenda pack, which will be forwarded.

### 3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

Diss Town Council will utilise Zoom to provide video communications. Zoom 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 will publish via the summons the zoom meeting link, which incorporates the meeting ID.

### 4. Standing Orders

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

### 5. Specific Virtual Meeting Arrangements

#### a) Discussions

*This section applies if members are experiencing good connectivity. In the case of poor connectivity, see 5c.*

During the meeting, all persons other than members will be muted. During the public participation period, members of the public will be required to 'enable video' in order for them to be visible to the Chairman and will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be unmuted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address, the microphone will be muted.

During the meeting, members and officers will use the waving hand option on Zoom to indicate to the Chairman that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

All 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

The Chairman will ask each councillor for their vote once a motion has been put forward.

c) Poor connectivity

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

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

d) Attendance

If a member is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'dropouts' 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 Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date subject to the statutory days of notice. Members will be telephoned to advise 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.

**6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette**

Normal Standing Orders and the Council's Code of Conduct continue to apply during virtual meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience regarding the operation of technology.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chairman. For a member of the public or press this may result in them being dismissed from the Zoom meeting.

**7. 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.

**8. Public Participation**

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

**9. Confidential Matters**

Should the public or press be in attendance, the meeting will be suspended on conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda in order that the public and press can leave the meeting. Alternatively, members will be sent a new Zoom meeting link for discussion of the confidential item(s).

**10. Recording**

Zoom meetings will only be recorded at the request of the press and / or members of the public in accordance with the right to record, film and to broadcast meetings of Local Councils, committees and sub-committees established through the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

## **11. Security**

The meeting link will only be sent to members and officers. Members of the public and press wishing to attend the meeting must contact the Town Clerk prior to the start of the meeting for the link. The waiting room will be enabled, which allows the Clerk (host) to admit entry and participants will be unable to join before the host. Any removed participants will not be able to re-join the meeting.

The Clerk will lock the meeting once all members, staff, members of the public and press have joined the meeting. The chat function will be disabled for participants however the Clerk may use it to provide additional information to attendees depending on the specific meeting. If any documents need to be displayed, the Clerk will share her screen. If a member requires something displayed, they must submit it prior to the meeting. The file sharing facility in Chat will not be used.

For further information see The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>