



Classification	Item No.
Open / Closed	

Meeting:	Standards Committee
Meeting date:	12 October 2020
Title of report:	Review of Virtual Meetings Protocol
Report by:	Interim Monitoring Officer
Decision Type:	Non Key Decision
Ward(s) to which report relates	N/a

Executive Summary:

As the onset of Covid 19 has resulted in many challenges, so has the introduction of virtual council meetings. This report provides information as to the current etiquette for virtual meetings in Bury and requests consideration of whether additional detail needs to be added to the current protocol.

It also asks the committee to endorse the protocol, agree that it is issued to members on its behalf as the standard of conduct expected during such meetings and that it becomes part of the Bury Constitution.

Recommendation(s)

That:

1. The Standards Committee approves the principle that Bury Council has a virtual meetings protocol.
2. The Bury Council Virtual Meetings Protocol at appendix 1 be amended in line with recommendations from the Committee,

3. The Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary amendments and issue the new Protocol to all elected members on behalf of the committee; Or
4. The Bury Council Virtual Meetings Protocol remain as currently drafted and the Monitoring Officer issue the Protocol to all elected members on behalf of the committee.
5. The Committee agrees that the Bury Council Virtual Meetings protocol be endorsed as being the appropriate standard of conduct for all elected members during such meetings and is recommended to Council to form part of the Bury Constitution.

Key considerations

Background

1. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has been felt throughout all aspects of life, not least the Council's functions and decision making, including its ability to hold face to face meetings of Council, Cabinet its committees and sub-committees. At the commencement of lockdown, all scheduled public meetings timetabled were postponed following guidance issued by Government. This impacted upon the majority of council Committee meetings scheduled to be held in the months of March, April and May 2020.
2. Under the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), meetings and therefore decisions of a local authority had to involve persons present at the same time and voting. Subsequent legislation has made provision for access to agendas, reports, minutes and the attendance of the press and public at meetings. The current Covid 19 pandemic has revealed that it is not always possible to physically attend meetings and ensure access hard copies of documents. The Government has therefore passed The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (Coronavirus Regulations) which came into force on 4 April 2020, to deal with those issues.
3. The regulations provide for flexibility as to when meetings take place and their frequency. However, more importantly the Regulations allow for persons attending meetings to be in different locations and for Members to be deemed to be in attendance at the meeting as long as they can hear and be heard by other Members and the public present; and where practicable, be seen by all present. A Virtual Meetings protocol was therefore introduced and is attached at appendix 1.
4. The protocol states that during meetings members must;
 - Remember you are visible at all times
 - Mute your microphone at all times when you are not speaking
 - Use the 'chat' facility if one is available to notify the Chair you wish to speak
 - Wait for the Chair to invite you to speak

- Do not talk over other people
 - If you have technical problems, leave the meeting and try to return. If you are unable to do so, try an alternative method and/or telephone/dial-in
5. Virtual meetings have now been taking place, largely successfully, since May 2020. However there have been issues raised around the etiquette in meetings and it was felt that it would be useful for the protocol to be reviewed and updated if required and for the Standards Committee to endorse the protocol, practically with regards to conduct of elected members during meetings.

The Proposal

The remit of the Standards Committee includes 'Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives.' The Committee is therefore asked to consider whether the current wording of the protocol needs clarifying, amending or changing in any way.

In addition, the Committee is asked to enforce the protocol as setting out the standard of behaviour it would expect during such virtual meetings.

Recommendation(s)

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3. The Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary amendments and issue the new Protocol to all elected members on behalf of the committee; Or
4. The Bury Council Virtual Meetings Protocol remain as currently drafted and the Monitoring Officer issue the Protocol to all elected members on behalf of the committee.
6. The Committee agrees that the Bury Council Virtual Meetings protocol be endorsed as being the appropriate standard of conduct for all elected members during such meetings and is recommended to Council to form part of the Bury Constitution.

Other alternative options considered

As set out within the recommendations.

Community impact / Contribution to the Bury 2030 Strategy

There is no direct community impact but will assist with correct governance and decision making.

Equality Impact and considerations:

24. *Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:*

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*
25. *The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.*
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Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
N/a	.

Consultation: N/a

Legal Implications:

Local authority decision making is always open to challenge and scrutiny. It is important that decisions are properly and appropriately made by elected members following the relevant code.

The Council is determined to provide excellent local government for the people of the Borough. It promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members and has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members, in line with its obligations under section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011. Members and co-opted Members must behave according to the highest standards of personal conduct in everything they do as a Member. In particular they must observe the 7 principles of public life as well as those matters set out in the Council's Code of Conduct.

This reports builds on those principles and the Code and deals with a new way of working, whilst ensuring Members are clear as to the standards expected of them.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications.

Report Author and Contact Details:

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Background papers:

Code of Conduct for Councillors and Other Voting Representatives

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning