



Easterton Parish Council

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Virtual Parish Council Meeting Protocol

Legal Background

In accordance with the Local Government Act (LGA) 1972, Sch 12 paras 10 (2) (b) as amended by The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force to allow local authorities to conduct meetings remotely until 31st May 2021.

Protocol

During the need to run Parish Council meetings virtually due to COVID-19 Easterton Parish Council will undertake the following to ensure the correct conduct of business;

1. The Virtual Meeting process will be highlighted within the Agenda of the meeting, parishioners will be invited to attend via Zoom (our adopted virtual platform) by contacting the Parish Clerk clerk.easterton.pc@gmail.com who will then supply access details. Alternatively Parishioners will be invited to submit any questions/queries direct by email or by phone to the Parish Clerk.
2. Virtual Meeting set up; the Clerk/Nominated Councillor (Vice-Chair) will set up the diary of the Virtual meeting sending out the joining link and password prior to the meeting for Councillors and on the day of the meeting for Parishioners/guests. The Clerk will contact any new person wishing to join the meeting to ensure they know how to use zoom and if necessary will undertake a “trial” rehearsal to ensure they are comfortable with using the technology. Note there is no cost or software requirements to any Parishioner wishing to join a virtual meeting, only the need for a computer, laptop, iPad device or smartphone.
3. Virtual Meeting Conduct; Prior to the formal start of the meeting a person (usually the Chair/Vice Chair or Clerk) will check that all attendees can hear and be heard, can see (if video option available) and be seen. It is recommended that every effort should be made to allow Councillors and Clerk to be visually seen during the meeting.
4. Any Parishioner/press/visitor attending virtually will be asked to be “mute” until invited to speak by the Chair (usually item 3 on the agenda after, welcome, apologies and minutes). The Chair/Vice-Chair/ Clerk will explain the process to indicate asking to speak to Parishioners prior to the formal start of the meeting. This will be done usually by the raising of hand, or if audio only, replying verbally when invited if they want to speak. Parishioners will be restricted to 2 minutes maximum (as per adopted Standing Orders) and a maximum of 20 minutes is reserved for questions. If necessary a spokesperson should be nominated to speak about the same item should the 20 slot look to be exceeded.
5. Conduct of Councillors; every effort should be undertaken as would be observed during a “normal physical meeting” i.e. / appropriate dress, respecting manner (as Code of Conduct),

addressing all questions through the Chair, ensuring quiet background environment, not talking over others and voting by the chosen method for the meeting (using raising of hand, or verbally answering after being asked by the Chair/Clerk).

6. Etiquette during meeting; Councillors should introduce themselves the first time of speaking at the meeting. If anyone is only linked by audio then there is the need to identify who is speaking every time.
7. Voting at the virtual meeting; to be confirmed at the start of the meeting; choices are by hand (if all video), reaction system (icon associated with zoom) and then Chair reads out the results, or Chair asks each Councillor in turn for their vote.
8. Declaration of interest; If indicated at the start of the virtual meeting a pecuniary interest in an item to the Chair, the Chair/Clerk will then ask the Councillor to either temporarily LEAVE the zoom meeting, or move outside the room to not be able to see or hear the meeting. A Councillor will then be notified to return by a text from the Clerk/Vice-Chair.
9. The ability to use the “chat” mechanism associated with zoom to raise any questions to the Chair is highlighted for Councillors, to indicate if they have lost sound or picture, or want to raise anything to the Chair or Clerk.
10. Zoom has the ability to record and may be used especially at the questions section to aid the Clerk. However if recording is going to be undertaken the Chair/Clerk will raise this at the beginning of the meeting.
11. Disruption of Meeting; The implications of “loosing” internet access needs to be considered. If it is a temporarily loss (i.e. / a couple of minutes) the Chair needs to consider the implications as this would not normally be an issue. If a loss for longer and at a voting stage then the Clerk must advise if a quorum still present for the Chair to consider how to proceed. If the whole system fails then it may be necessary to re-arrange the meeting from when connection was lost but in most cases the meeting can resume when the Clerk/Vice-Chair confirms that all Councillors are online.
12. Minutes of the Virtual Meeting will be produced the same as of any normal Parish Council meeting.