

ALREWAS PARISH COUNCIL

Virtual Meeting Policy

1. Introduction

The 2020 Corona virus pandemic has led to changes in government requirements and legislation for public gatherings including council meetings. Alrewas Parish Council will hold meetings virtually in times where physical meetings are not appropriate. Virtual meetings, for example of working groups, may also be held after the Corona Virus pandemic has passed if it is convenient to do so. This policy is designed to assist the Chair, councillors, members of the public and press to operate the meeting effectively.

This policy is to be delivered within 'The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020' and will remain in place until the legislation changes but may be retained to facilitate flexible working after the crisis.

2. Publishing the agenda and providing documents

Councillors are to be summonsed, as per the regulation with the agenda and supporting documents being emailed to them in advance of the meeting, with a minimum of 3 clear days' notice.

No agendas will be published on physical noticeboards, they will be published on the Parish Council's website.

Any person unable to access the Council's website must contact the Clerk:
Email: clerk@alrewasparishcouncil.org to request an electronic copy of the agenda. In cases where documents originate from a third-party electronic links will be provided where available.

3. Virtual Meeting 'platform'

The Council will utilise Zoom to provide video communications.

In preparation for the meeting the Clerk will publish via the summons/agenda:

- The Zoom meeting link
- Meeting ID
- Meeting passcode

4. Standing Orders

Standing Orders have been amended with an appendix to take into account the current change in the legislation to allow for remote meetings of the Council. The Standing Orders and the appendix will be used in the same manner as normal to guide the meeting.

5. Virtual Meeting Arrangements

a. Discussions

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

In order to ensure that the meeting is conducted in an orderly and lawful manner, members of the public wishing to observe the Meeting MUST WITHOUT FAIL OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING RULES.

On Joining the Meeting:

1. MUTE your microphone (SWITCH OFF).
2. Enable video (if you have it).

During the Meeting.

1. DO NOT SWITCH ON YOUR MICROPHONE UNTIL REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE CHAIR.
2. DO NOT attempt to speak until the Chair asks you to speak 3. If you wish to speak be aware that you will be required to:
 1. Provide your full name and official title where appropriate, for example Cllr, District Councillor, County Councillor etc.
 2. Confirm whether you are a registered Elector of Alrewas Parish.
 3. If you are not a registered elector as in 3 (2) above, you will need to state the basis on which you are raising the issue.
 4. In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations embodied in the Data Protection Act 2018 ('the Act') members of the public when speaking MUST NOT provide information that either directly or indirectly identifies any individual.

During the meeting and after public participation has closed all persons other than Parish Councillors 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 Chair and will raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak. Their microphone will then be un-muted, and they can address the meeting. Following the conclusion of their address their microphone will be muted.

During the meeting Councillors and officers will raise their hand to indicate to the Chair that they wish to speak on an agenda item.

All Councillors attending the meeting will monitor their own background noise and mute their own microphones where required, except when speaking.

b. Voting

All voting will be undertaken by a show of hands, either physically via video link or by using the electronic 'raise hand' feature within Zoom

c. Poor connectivity

In the case of poor connectivity, the Chair will decide whether to continue with the meeting, or to reconvene at a later date and time subject to the statutory days of notice.

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

d. Attendance

If a Councillor is believed to have 'dropped out' this will be minuted. If 'drop outs' result in the meeting becoming inquorate, Councillors will endeavour to re-join for a period of 10 minutes. After 10 minutes if the meeting is still inquorate, the Chairman will suspend the meeting and reconvene at a later date and time subject to the statutory days of notice. Councillors will be telephoned to advise of the suspension of the meeting.

6. Virtual Meeting Etiquette

Normal Standing Orders apply regarding the Conduct at Meetings and all attendees are expected to be mindful of the difficulties people experience with operating technology.

Behaviour that is contrary to the intended outcomes of the meeting will be dealt with at the discretion of the Chair. 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 required to leave the Zoom meeting, for a period of time determined by the Chair and to re-join the meeting after this period. No other business will be conducted until the Councillor has re-joined the meeting, or a period of 5 minutes after the re-joining time (when it will be assumed that they have left the meeting).

8. Public Participation

The Clerk will read out any pre-submitted queries or questions from the press and public under Public Participation on the agenda.

Members of the public should be aware that any issues raised, either via email or at the remote meeting under Public Participation will not be commented on or debated by the Parish Council during the remote meeting. Each member of the public participating and wishing to speak will still be given the allotted 2 minutes with a total time for Public Participation being 15 minutes total. The Chair will indicate if the issue raised will be added to a future agenda or if it will be dealt with by the Clerk.

Members of the public and press are asked to contact the Clerk 48 hours prior to a remote meeting to raise any issues or questions they may have in advance.

9. Confidential Matters

Confidential matters will be dealt with through a separate Zoom meeting that is available to Parish Councillors only. On conclusion of the non-confidential matters on an agenda the meeting will be suspended for members to re-join using the confidential zoom meeting link that will have been provided to Councillors only.

10. Working groups and ad hoc meetings

APC will allow members of such groups and ad hoc meeting attendees to participate by Zoom if they wish and to hold such meetings virtually if attendees request this.

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

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

With thanks to Fradley and Streethay Parish Council.
Kathryn Powell, Parish Clerk, revised May 2021