



Ryde Town Council

VIRTUAL MEETING PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS POLICY

1. Introduction

- i. Owing to the Covid 19 Pandemic, all Town and Parish Councils have been given provision under The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the 2020 Regulations”) to hold legal virtual or remote meetings in order that Ryde Town Council business can be maintained.
- ii. Ryde Town Council has chosen to use the Zoom Video Conferencing platform to hold all its public meetings and to stream proceedings live on its YouTube Channel in order for the public to be able to observe.
- iii. All Councillors attending a meeting are expected to ensure that the following is observed:
 - Hear and be heard by the other Councillors in attendance.
 - Hear and be heard by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting.
 - A visual solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient. This also relates to members of the public entitled to attend the meeting also being heard.
- iv. The regulations are clear that a meeting is not limited to those present in the same place, but includes electronic, digital or virtual locations (internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers can all be utilised).

2. Advertising Formal Committee Meetings

The Clerk or relevant proper officer will host the meeting using the Town Council’s Zoom account. The meeting will be a formal Town Council meeting and will be held using the agenda and summons which the Clerk or relevant Proper Officer will publish in the usual manner. A link to the virtual meeting will be published on the agenda, displayed on the noticeboard and on the Town Council website in order that the public are able to access the meeting and observe on YouTube, just as they would be able to do so at a physical meeting.

3. Joining the meeting

Those invited to attend a meeting will be sent a Zoom invite and are encouraged to join promptly at least five minutes before the scheduled start time in order to avoid disrupting the meeting. Attendees will ‘assemble’ in the Zoom ‘waiting room’ prior to the meeting after which the Zoom host will admit those invited in.

4. Meeting Protocol

- i. Ryde Town Council is an organisation which always seeks to project a professional and responsible image and as such, all meetings will continue to be governed by the same Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and any related policies and Terms of Reference.
- ii. All attendees will be set to 'mute' on entry to the meeting and only the Chair of the relevant committee will remain unmuted. Should there be other participants wishing to speak, they will be invited to unmute by the Chair. As the 'Host', the Clerk or relevant Proper Officer will have the ability to mute or remove anyone deemed to be disruptive at the Chair's request.
- iii. Meeting participants may wish to protect their personal environment by choosing a simulated background in the Zoom Settings 'Virtual Background' or alternatively, ahead of the meeting, consider what can be seen behind them while on camera.
- iv. All Councillor attendees will display their name in order for the public to be able to identify them, just as they would at an in-person meeting.
- v. All Councillors and anyone attending a meeting via a virtual meeting invitation, must follow the same protocols as in standard physical meetings. During public meetings which are being streamed live on the internet, the consumption of food and alcoholic drinks should not be undertaken.

5. Meeting Etiquette

The following simple etiquette should be observed

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you cannot use video then please state your name.
- The only person to keep on their microphone throughout the meeting is the Chair.
- Avoid the consumption of food
- Avoid consumption alcoholic beverages

6. Attendance of Press and Public

- i. The Regulations clarify that a meeting being "open to the public" includes access to the meeting through remote means (video conferencing, live webcast, interactive streaming). Where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is deemed open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person.
- ii. On certain occasions remote attendance at Town Council meetings from members of the public is permitted as long as certain conditions are met.
 - Attendance remotely would be by invite only
 - They must only speak when invited to by the chair
 - That they keep to the matters that they have been invited to speak on
 - If asked to leave the meeting by the Chair, they must do so immediately
 - Observe the same protocols and etiquette as listed in paragraphs 4 and 5)

- iii. Members of the public that are not attending can still ask questions and/or make representations via written means such as email or post. A deadline of 12.00noon the previous working day before the meeting will be given to receive such questions and representations.
- iv. Should members of the public be invited to attend any meeting then they will be sent a Zoom invite via email. The invitation is for those being allowed to attend only, and anyone who is not invited but has access to the invitation will be removed immediately by the Host.

7. Declarations of Interest

If a Councillor has declared a pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda, they will be placed in the waiting room for the duration of that agenda item. Once the item has been concluded, they will be re-admitted by the Host.

8. The Meeting and Debate

For Councillors who wish to speak during the debate, they should either click on the “raise hand” icon or raise their own hand on screen and await to be asked to unmute and speak by the Chair. If a Councillor is using a telephone or cannot use their computer camera to be seen at the meeting, they should make the Chair aware verbally that they wish to speak. Once Councillors have spoken, they must mute themselves again to prevent unnecessary background feedback and noise.

9. Voting on Motions

- i. Within the Zoom facility, there is a straightforward mechanism to deal with voting. When the Chair asks the Council or Committee to vote, the Clerk or Proper Officer will call the name of each Councillor. Each member when their name is called should state whether they are for, against or wish to abstain.
- ii. Any councillor still has the right to request a named vote in line with the Town Councils Standing Orders

10. Disturbance from Members of the Public

In line with Standing Orders, if any member of the public interrupts a meeting the Chair will warn them accordingly. If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Chair will ask the Host to mute or remove them as a participant from the meeting.

11. Confidential Items

- i. There are times when Council meetings or part of a meeting cannot be open to the public such as when confidential, or “exempt” issues – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – are under consideration.
- ii. It is important to ensure that there are no members of the public at remote locations able to hear or see the proceedings during such instances. In order to ensure this is achieved, the Chair will, after the committee has agreed to go into confidential session, adjourn the meeting whilst the Host checks that all public and press have been removed and that the YouTube stream has been stopped.

- iii. All members of public and press must be made aware that they will be removed owing to confidential business which may compromise the Town Councils position should they be allowed to remain.
- iv. All councillors and officers must ensure that there are no other unauthorised persons with them. Should this be the case, they could be in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct if they fail to disclose that there are other persons present who may be able to see and/or hear the meeting if they are not entitled to do so.
- v. It would also be good practice to turn off any smart speakers in any attendees room such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or other such "smart" music devices. These could inadvertently record phone or video conversations, which may be picked up by an unknown source.

12. Online Threats (Malware)

In order to protect participants from Malware, the 'chat', file sharing and screen sharing function will be disabled during the meeting. If necessary, the Clerk or Host will display any documents required using the 'share screen' function.

13. After the Meeting

Participants should leave the meeting by clicking on the red "end meeting" button to hang up. The Chair or host can also end the meeting for all participants. Meeting minutes will be published on the Town Council's website in the usual manner. All YouTube streams will be removed from the YouTube Chanel once the meeting has concluded.

14. Addressing Technical Issues

- i. If any meeting participant identifies a failure of the remote participation facility, the Chair should declare an adjournment whilst the fault is addressed. If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting becomes inquorate through this fault, the meeting will be adjourned or abandoned until such time as it can be reconvened or rescheduled. If the meeting is quorate, then it can continue.
- ii. Those attending remotely who have lost connection to the meeting would be aware and accept that the meeting would continue, and a vote would be taken without their attendance. If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter or one which is time-limited and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Chair and Clerk shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted under delegated decision making as outlined in the Town Council Standing Orders. This would however be a last resort once no other means of taking such a decision is possible.
- iii. Should there be a loss of internet connection or any other technical complication for the Zoom Host, then the Host should contact the Chair by phone and explain what has happened. Each member of the committee should then be contacted by phone to explain the situation. If reconnection cannot be achieved within 15 minutes, then the meeting would be abandoned and rescheduled for another date.