

Risinghurst and Sandhills Parish Council

Virtual Meeting Policy

Background:

From 4 April 2020 until May 2021, 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 meetings in order that Parish Council business can be maintained.

Use of Virtual Meetings

Risinghurst and Sandhills Parish Council prioritises meeting in person for all meetings of the full Parish Council. Virtual conference meetings will be used as required during emergencies, pandemics and other situations when a virtual meeting enables the usual business of the Parish Council to proceed, when it would otherwise stop, subject to relevant legislation. Continued use of virtual conference meetings may be used for committees and working groups, as agreed by a vote of the committee/group membership.

Virtual Meetings Format

The meeting will be a formal Parish Council meeting and will be held using the agenda and summons which the Clerk has published. It will be governed by the usual Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and associated policies. There will be a public participation session from 7.00pm prior to the start of the formal meeting, as usual. Once this session is closed, members of the public are welcome to observe, but should not participate in the debate, unless by consent of the Chairman.

Provider

A variety of different platforms including Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts or Zoom are available. The Parish Council has chosen to use the Zoom platform as a straightforward, secure, reliable platform that is widely used and can accommodate unlimited attendees to ensure public meetings are available. The Chairman will “host” the meeting using an account paid for by the Parish Council.

Virtual Meeting Protocol Accessibility

The link, room ID and password to the virtual meeting will be published on the agenda, which is displayed on Parish Council noticeboards and the website at www.risinghurstandsandhills-pc.gov.uk in order that the public are able to attend, just as they would be able to attend a meeting in the Risinghurst Community Centre. The meeting information can also be provided by contacting to the Parish Clerk. Attendees can also dial in to the meeting via telephone.

Security and Zoom-bombing

The Parish Council wishes all members of the community, and members of the press or wider public to be able to access the meetings. There have been incidents of unwanted interventions at virtual public meetings in which unidentified attendees have said or displayed offensive material not relevant to the agenda. Therefore, attendees are requested to display their name and are invited to be visible, just as they would be in a physical meeting.

If an attendee wishes to attend anonymously, they should contact the Parish Clerk at least 2 days before the meeting to arrange a display name. The Chairman will use his discretion in consultation with the Parish Clerk to refuse entry to attendees that have not pre-arranged their anonymity.

As the ‘host’, the Chairman will have the ability to mute or remove anyone deemed a nuisance.

Recordings:

Members of the public are entitled to attend and report on public meetings. If an attendee wishes/intends to record a zoom meeting, they should contact the Parish Clerk in advance so that everyone present can be notified that the proceedings are being recorded before the meeting starts.

Process

- a) Attendees will collect in the Zoom 'waiting room' prior to the meeting.
- b) All attendees will be set to 'mute' on entry to the meeting and only the Chairman of the meeting will remain unmuted. All other participants, if they wish to speak will be invited to unmute and then mute again once they have finished speaking. This helps to manage background noise and distortion. The Chairman will have the ability to mute anyone who forgets.
- c) All Councillor attendees will display their name, in order for the public to be able to identify them.
- d) Members of the public may introduce themselves during the public participation session and should notify the Chairman or Parish Clerk at least 2 days in advance if they wish to speak during the public participation session. Last minute requests are at the Chairman's discretion.
- e) As with meetings in the Risinghurst Community Centre, members of the public will be given the opportunity to speak during public participation, but will not be permitted, unless invited to do so by the Chairman, to speak at other times.
- f) Meeting participants may wish to protect their personal environment by choosing a virtual background in the Zoom Settings 'virtual background' or alternatively, should consider what can be seen behind them while on camera.
- g) In order to protect participants from malware, the 'chat', file sharing and screen sharing function may be disabled during the meeting. If necessary, the Chairman will display any documents required using the 'share screen' function.
- h) Anyone wanting to speak should raise their hand using 'raise hand' in the options or by physically waving, so that the Chairman or Parish Clerk can see them.
- i) If a Councillor has declared an interest in an item on the agenda, they will be placed in the waiting room for the duration of the agenda item. Once the item has been concluded, they will be re-admitted.
- j) Following a debate, the Chairman will summarise the discussion and a vote will be taken by raising the hand up until the Parish Clerk has counted those for/against/abstaining.

Relevant Legislation and Source Material:

- Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960
- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 section 5
- The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014
- "Virtual Meeting Procedure" by Jane Olds (Parish Clerk, SLCC branch officer)
<https://www.webowls.com/>

Adopted on 17/12/20