



# **NETHER STOWEY PARISH COUNCIL**

## **VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL**

**Adopted by the Council**

**on**

**11 May 2020**

**(Minute no 5526)**

*TEXT BASED ON SALC MODEL DOCUMENT*

## **NETHER STOWEY PARISH COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. On 4th April 2020 the government introduced The Local Authorities(Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 to allow local councils to meet remotely. This protocol sets out how Nether Stowey Parish Council will continue to operate during the pandemic.
- 1.2. Nether Stowey Parish Council is operating on the Zoom or similar platform which supports group conference and/or video calling.
- 1.3. The Council shall consider whether a paid-for subscription, with additional facilities, are necessary. If so resolved, the Clerk will arrange and pay for it by NSPC debit card and inform all Councillors of how to access the platform. .
- 1.4. Councillors have been asked to contact the Clerk if they have any technical issues in relation to access, such as the need for headphones, microphones or webcam.

### **2. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- 2.1. The Clerk will arrange meetings and provide the link to the meeting.
- 2.2. The meeting will be advertised in the normal manner (including, if the situation permits, on the public noticeboard) and an agenda will be issued within the normal time frames.
- 2.3. The public are invited to observe the meeting. If they have a question to raise they have been asked to submit it in advance of the meeting.
- 2.4. The normal required standards of behaviour and discussion must be applied in the same manner of a face to face meeting. Please also be patient with those who are less experienced in this platform. Please also respect confidentiality and do not breach the code of conduct, and do not make enquiries about private matters, health, home etc.
- 2.5. Apologies need to be given in the normal manner. Councillors will be asked to inform the Chairman of any Declaration of Interest relevant to the business on the agenda.
- 2.6. If a councillor is deemed to have an interest in a matter and would normally leave a physical meeting, then they will be removed to the waiting room temporarily. The meeting host shall enable their return at the end of that item of business
- 2.7. Minutes will be taken from the meetings and displayed on the website in the normal manner. Minutes will be circulated after the meeting and signed when the council finally meets face to face.

- 2.8. There might be technical issues during the meeting and the Clerk might have to ask for clarification, for dialogue to be repeated in order to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard.
- 2.9. In the event that communication link is lost by an individual, the
- 2.10. In the event of any apparent failure of the connection, the Chair should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate:
  - if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue, those who dropped out should attempt to reconnect or rejoin the meeting in another way. The minutes shall show Councillors as having “left” and “rejoined” the meeting
  - if there is a more general failure or no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period of ten minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established. If this is not possible the meeting shall be considered to have been adjourned and a further meeting shall be arranged.

### **3. PROCESS TO HOST MEETINGS FOR COUNCILLORS**

- 3.1. The Clerk will host the meeting and set up the meeting parameters. An email invitation will be sent to Councillors from the Clerk. They should click on the link and enter the meeting ID number and the password.
- 3.2. Before entering the meeting please ensure that you are in a private place where there is little background interference/noise/people. It is difficult to hear on occasions and some might wish to use a headset with a microphone. If you are using a mobile device, please do not wander about as this can be distracting for other participants.
- 3.3. Councillors are asked to use “Cllr (Smith)” as their sign-in name for the benefit of members of the public.
- 3.4. On entering the meeting, you will be placed in a waiting room. The Clerk allows access and you will join with your microphone muted. When the Clerk has seen you and can verify you, you will be unmuted.
- 3.5. A check will be done to establish that you can be heard, but then all Councillors other than the Chairman and the Clerk will be muted. The “hosting” facility may then be transferred to the Chairman for the duration of the meeting. If the Chairman invites someone to speak they can be unmuted. Please do not interrupt others. If you wish to speak during the meeting, please raise your hand for the attention of the Clerk. When you speak please state your name as you speak for the benefit of those who might not be able to see you.
- 3.6. The meeting will still be chaired in the normal manner. The Clerk might have a greater input to guide the meeting to the next item, as some will not have access to an agenda for the duration of the meeting (if they do not have a printer).
- 3.7. If there is to be a vote, please raise your hand until asked to put your hand down. If you do not have a video facility you will be asked to confirm your vote – please state clearly if you are voting in favour or against or abstaining.

- 3.8. If you struggle with hearing during the meeting, please use the chat box to type a message which will be seen by the Clerk and/or Chairman.
- 3.9. If people speak over others or if there is a time delay and matters are not heard the Clerk will ask for people to repeat, and to speak in turn. All Councillors will be given the phone number of the Clerk and can call or send a message during the meeting if they are experiencing difficulties.

#### **4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- 4.1. The public are invited to observe the meeting. If they have a question to raise they have been asked to submit it in advance of the meeting. Such representations will be read out by the Clerk. A question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The Chairman may direct that a written or oral response be given at a later date.
- 4.2. When the agenda is produced it will include a link to the meeting and details of how to submit a question.
- 4.3. On arrival at the meeting they will be held in a waiting room. Members of the public will be muted by default and the Chairman will only unmute individuals who are invited to speak.
- 4.4. Where the Chairman allows members of the public to speak in a public session, public participation shall not exceed 10 minutes in total and a member of the public shall not speak for more than three minutes and may speak once only unless directed by the Chairman of the meeting.
- 4.5. Other than during any public session as in 4.4 above, members of the public will remain muted throughout. Any person obstructing the meeting or otherwise behaving improperly or offensively shall be asked to stop or removed to the waiting room for part or all of the remainder of the meeting.
- 4.6. Where the Council resolves to exclude the public from part or all of a meeting, the Chairman will make a statement to explain reasons for the public's exclusion. Where possible this part of the meeting will be held last at the end of the meeting on conclusion of the public business. All members of the public will be removed to the waiting room and will be reconnected if there is further public business to transact.