

FULL COUNCIL

1. Meeting Protocols:

Parish Council Member Roles/Responsibilities

- 1.1 Since its inception in 2017, West Swindon Parish Council has had Parish Councillors that are also serving as Swindon Borough Councillors. At the Full Council meetings there is a standing agenda item which enables updates from Swindon Borough Councillors. The Parish Council does not have an agreed protocol for how it interacts with Parish Councillors who have dual roles. Alongside this, it has been common practice to ask Parish Councillors questions that relate to their Swindon Borough Council roles and responsibilities and to also take questions about Swindon Borough Council services at Parish Council meetings. Over time, residents have been able to benefit from insight and information across a broad range of issues. It can also create a lack of distinction between the different roles and responsibilities and the difference between Parish Council services and those of Swindon Borough Council.
- 1.2 It is proposed that the Parish Council considers amendments to its Standing Orders to clarify how Swindon Borough Council business and information is dealt with at Parish Council meetings. For example, *Update from Swindon Borough Councillors* could be a standing item on all Committee agendas so that there is a distinct place for non Parish Councillor responses. Equally, the Chair of each Committee could ask for the question or issue to be answered outside of the meeting and an answer be provided directly to the resident.

Future Meeting Arrangements

- 1.3 On 2 April 2020, the government published **The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020**. These regulations came into force on 4 April 2020. These regulations allow local councils to hold meetings remotely that are required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021. This means that, without any further action from the government, all local authorities including local councils must return to face to face meetings from 7 May.
- 1.4 For general discussion, review and feedback, it is possible that the Parish Council could continue to hold virtual/remote meetings. For any decision making, the Parish Council would need to defer to its Standing Orders and comply with the relevant legislation.
- 1.5 It may help the council's business continuity to implement (or review) a scheme of delegation to comply with legal requirements whilst also ensuring that the

Council feels it is functioning in a safe way. For example, committees could continue as virtual meetings; only empowered to make Recommendations, with Full Council meetings being the face to face decision making meetings.

2. Key Considerations

2.1 From May 2021, as face-to-face council meetings resume there will still be the risk to attendees of COVID-19 exposure. Councils should conduct a risk assessment in advance of a face to face meeting which should give consideration to what the council can do to reduce risk to councillors, staff and public including:

- Providing hand sanitiser to those entering the meeting room and making sure hand sanitiser is readily available in the room itself
- Staggering arrival and exit times for staff, councillors and members of the public
- Placing seating at least 2-metres apart
- Ensuring everyone wears face masks
- Holding paperless meetings
- If papers are provided, people should be discouraged from sharing with others and asked to take the papers with them at the end of the meeting to minimise how many people handle the papers
- Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly
- Choosing a venue with good ventilation, including opening windows and doors where possible
- Choosing a large enough venue to allow distancing – this may mean choosing a different venue to what the council used before.
- The council (or venue owner/operator) will need to identify the venue's maximum capacity in their risk assessment, taking into account the need for social distancing. Consider how we will ensure this capacity is not exceeded and how we will manage the situation if more people wish to attend than capacity allows.
- If the venue has an NHS QR code to support test and trace then all attendees should register using that app, for those without access to the app they should register attendance in line with the venue's test and trace procedure.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Parish Council could book external venues for public meetings to ensure that distance can be maintained between attendees – this would rely on venues being open and available for that purpose. Costs for booking rooms would most likely be contained within existing budgets for Meetings and Publicity.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 That Council considers the most effective way to manage non Parish matters and information in public meetings
- 4.2 The Annual Parish Council meeting is proposed for 24 May 2021. This meeting sets the framework, policies and scheme of delegation for the municipal year ahead. It is recommended that Council discusses the options for responding to the end of the Regulations so that any changes can be addressed and proposals brought to the meeting on 24 May 2021.

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