

Parish Meetings during Covid

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”) came in to force on 4 April. Broadly speaking, the 2020 Regulations enable local councils to hold remote meetings (including by video and telephone conferencing) for a specified period until May next year. They also remove the requirement to hold an annual meeting. The 2020 Regulations apply to local council meetings, committee and sub-committee meetings in England.

The COVID-19/ Coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented in peacetime Government measures in response to the crisis (e.g. prohibitions on gatherings, social distancing, self-isolation and shielding of those deemed to be the most vulnerable) have meant that the requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person with all members present in one place cannot be met. The statutory requirements for meetings are mainly contained in the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) and the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (“the 1960 Act”).

In recognition of the problem of holding and attending meetings, and further to the lobbying of NALC and others, the Government included s.78 in the Coronavirus Act 2020. This section gave the Secretary of State the power to make Regulations to make provisions for the holding of meetings. The 2020 Regulations set out those provisions.

The key provisions for Local Councils are as follows;

- We are now permitted to meet remotely, subject to conditions.
- All parish council meetings will be available to the public to join.
- The requirement to hold an Annual parish council meeting has been deferred for this year.
- Due to the cancellation of an annual meeting, all appointments that would normally be made or be required to be made, will continue until next year’s annual meeting.
- Agendas will no longer be published on the notice boards; they will continue to be published on the Website.

We will all be finding our way through this new way of conducting business and we will be running full Council meeting on 19th May 2020. There will likely be kinks, we ask you to bear with us.

We must also bear in mind, that whilst we now have a way of working going forward, most services, other than those deemed essential are closed. This means that we must be realistic about what business can be resolved and actioned at this time.

If you would like to make comments on any items on the agenda, without attending remotely, then as always, we will accept written submissions but, for at least the first meeting, we ask that you submit written submissions **only**. This will be reviewed in time for the next meeting.

We will be using the Zoom platform and meeting invites will be included for subsequent meetings.