



CORNWALL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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Serving the parish and town councils of Cornwall

CALC BRIEFING FAQ 17 – UPDATES AND THE FUTURE OF LOCAL COUNCIL MEETINGS

January 27th, 2021

This quick bulletin is intended to give some updates on the best practice and legal requirements during lockdown. The latest restrictions will be reviewed on February 17th and we will update you once we know what, if anything, will change. In the meantime this FAQ will summarise key points and give a round-up of questions asked.

Agendas for Virtual Meetings

It is a legal requirement that the public notice includes how the public can access your meetings. You must either publish the Zoom/Teams link to the meeting or the link to where the meeting is being live streamed.

Attendance at Council meetings

The legislation requires that the public must be able to hear members at meetings. A number of councillors are experiencing difficulties in staying in meetings due to poor IT connections, but they are only able to cast their lawful vote if the public can hear and preferably see this. Clerks should not be asked to telephone members to receive their vote as this would not meet the regulations.

Use of the chat bar function during meetings

The chat bar function should not be used by members for discussion during meetings. Any discussion during meetings needs to place in the public domain. The same applies for members of the public joining the call. The Chairman may therefore wish to give the following reminders in their welcome briefing :

- That the chat bar should not be used during meetings
- That the council welcomes public participation at the item on the agenda but the chat function should not be used for public participation during the meeting.

The future of virtual meetings after May 2021

Whilst NALC continues to lobby Government to retain the ability to hold virtual meetings, it has this week indicated that it is not being considered at this time. Unless the legislation is changed this means that the ability to hold virtual meetings will cease and you will required to resume holding physical meetings.

We are working to develop some guidance in case this becomes the legal position but in the meantime are continuing to press for the extension of the virtual meeting legislation as a way of managing lockdown restrictions in the future.

We are therefore asking local councils to contact their MP and press for the need to retain the option for virtual meetings in the future to keep communities safe. I hope that you will support this move.

Annual Parish/Electors Meeting 2021

The annual meeting of electors must be held between March 1st and June 1st. Until May 7th, these meetings can be held virtually. After that date it is unclear whether the Virtual Meetings Regulations will remain in force and it is possible that a physical meeting would need to be held.

You are advised to consider whether you wish to hold a virtual meeting before the elections, or wish to wait until it can be held on the same night as your Annual Council meeting in which case this might need to be a physical meeting.

Elections 2021 Update

In Cornwall there will be elections for local councils, Cornwall Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner. There will also be a number of local parishes holding the public referendum for their Neighbourhood Plan. The Government has announced that for the moment elections will go ahead on May 6th, 2021, but that this position will be kept under review. There are suggestions that the elections could be delay until the autumn but local councils should plan on elections taking place in May and making arrangements for your Annual Council meeting within 14 days of Monday, May 10th, 2021.

CALC is working with Cornwall Council on briefings for holding Covid secure elections and will be issuing an elections pack at the start of next week. In the meantime if you have any questions please get in touch.

Internal Auditors

We have received a number of requests for internal auditors and would be interested to know who your council uses so that we can expand our list.

I am also exploring an internal audit option with Cornwall Council where the cost would be according to turnover with four bands :

Up to £5000	£5001 to £25,000	£25,001 to £100,000	Over £100,001
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At this time I do not have any understanding of the costs but if this is something that your council might be interested in, please register your interest (with no commitment!)

CALC Office

Thank you for your support for the CALC during 2020. I hope that we have managed to respond to all your questions and have kept you up to date on the changing world of Covid.

We are currently experiencing a large number of enquiries and are a staff member down following Chris' retirement before Christmas. We hope to get up to full strength again soon and in the meantime Isabelle and I will continue to respond to all of your questions and enquiries – it might just take a little longer! Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you think we have missed something or your question is urgent.

Many thanks

Sarah Mason
County Executive Officer