TOP TIPS FOR REMOTE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Preparation

1. **Choose a platform that works for your council.** See the [Local Governments Associations list](#) for a range of options. Many platforms offer the option for joining via video or telephone.

2. **Consider the equipment needed**. Not only may the platform itself have a cost, but you may want to purchase additional laptops or phones to enable everyone to take part. But bear in mind the requirement for remote meetings is for the short term and large investments are not advisable.

3. **Decide who will manage the IT.** Someone will need to be responsible for controlling video and telephone remote access, ensuring everyone can hear, and where possible, see the meeting, and ensure procedures are followed such as order of speaking, voting and exclusion of councillors and/or the public.

4. **Practice first!** Hold a dummy meeting to test the features of your chosen platform. We suggest you may want to practice:

   a. How members can access the meeting
   b. Taking a roll call and checking the quorum
   c. Muting and unmuting participants
   d. How you will vote (depending on how participants have joined)
   e. How the clerk will communicate with the chairman during the meeting i.e. to advise on a procedural matter
   f. How to remove an individual and bring them back, as you would if a member declared an interest.
   g. Managing any screen sharing function, and how to disable it to prevent it being used inappropriately.

   [Take a look at Northamptonshire CALC's mock remote meeting on YouTube.](#)

5. **Keep the agenda short**. It is much harder to stay focused in a remote meeting. We recommend keeping meetings to no more than 1 hour where possible and focused on a few urgent/important matters such as finance and planning.

6. **Ensure the details of the meeting are included in the meeting notice**. You are advised to display the web link and/or meeting ID and any passwords on the public notice.

7. **Think about how you may present reports**. Many of these platforms enable you to share content such as presentations, and participants often engage well when they have something to look at. You may wish to prepare presentation slides to show during the meeting. For example: finance reports.

8. **Be mindful to individuals behaviour**. Just because people can access the meeting remotely, does not mean they will engage in the meeting in the same way as before. And this can be for a variety of reasons from lack of confidence to simply stress under the current circumstances. It will help if your council has clear priorities, concise agendas and shared expectations for your remote meetings.

9. **Consider where you position yourself if you attend via video**. Make sure not to show the valuables in your home, or the entrances to your property, other people in your home, and do not sit with your back to a window as this will cast shadows over you.

10. **Ensure everyone knows how to rename themselves**. Having attendees named 'ipad' or a nickname will not assist you in knowing who is present. We also suggest that councillors use the 'Cllr' prefix and that the Chair and Clerk are identifiable.

11. **Have members join the meeting early**. This will avoid the inevitable camera adjustments and 'can you hear me?' repetitions which are likely to occur. Get this done before inviting the public in.

The start of the meeting

We would advise that the Chairman undertakes the following tasks at the beginning of each meetings:

1. Confirm that all present can hear the proceedings

2. Take a roll call to confirm the members present at the meeting

3. To confirm the meeting is quorate

4. Outline how the meeting will be run including protocols for wishing to speak, vote and viewing documents, before proceeding with the business on the agenda. This is for the benefit of councillors, the public and any guests attending.

During the meeting

The meeting will proceed largely as normal following your standing orders. Remembering that this is a public meeting, even though you are in your own homes. The chairman will chair the meeting in the usual way but needs to feel confident about managing peoples input on the platform chosen. Some suggestions would be:

1. **Individuals being muted until asked to speak**. This reduces background noise and helps everyone to hear the discussions.

2. **A process for indicating you would like to speak**. This could include raising your hand on the video or using a 'raise hand' feature on the platform.

3. **A process for involving telephone participants** where they can't visually indicate they wish to speak. The chairman could ask these participants in turn, or they could simply speak but this can be disruptive if not managed.

4. **Individuals stating their name before speaking** allows for all participants, not matter how they have joined the meeting, to know who is speaking each time.

5. **Keeping track of who is present throughout the meeting.** This may require a new roll call at certain points on the agenda in case someone has lost connection.

6. **A process for voting** especially if participants are joining the meeting in different forms. Options could include:
   a. Using chat features or voting buttons if the platform allows for it
   b. Show of hands using their webcams
   c. Confirming a consensus verbally

    d. A roll call with the number of votes for or against a motion, amendments and abstaining recording. The clerk/chair could read back the results to ensure accuracy

7. **Removing councillors with an interest.** The Code of Conduct still applies in a remote meeting. You will need to ensure councillors who have declared an interest are removed from the debate (where applicable). Depending on the chosen platform this could include:

    a. Moving them to a waiting area (if the platform allows) for the duration of the item
    b. Removing them completely and agreeing a time for their return
    c. Removing them completely from the meeting and using an alternative means such as a phone call or email to invite them back. This method is likely to take longer.

8. **Confidential sessions.** If the council moves to exclude the press and the public, it will need to ensure that that they are removed from the meeting. You may choose to use methods as described above or may wish to set up a separate meeting where meeting details kept separately.

   You will also need to make sure that any 'livestreaming' or recording is halted. Councillors should declare that there is no-one in their vicinity able to overhear the confidential session.

9. **Public Participation.** The meeting must still be advertised and open to the public and public participation should continue as before. We suggest you consider asking those who wish to speak at the meeting to contact the clerk in advance so they can be invited to speak at the appropriate time. All other members of the public can remain muted throughout. Remember that anyone disrupting the meeting can be removed as normal by resolution of the council.

After the meeting

Once the meeting is finished, the chair will close the meeting and the host will end the session.

1. **Minutes of the meeting** will be written by the clerk in the normal way and should reflect where the meeting took place. Minutes can be agreed at the next meeting and the signing deferred until the next face-to-face meeting.

2. **Recordings of the meeting.** Where the meeting has been recorded or streamed, the council may decide what to do with those recordings or videos. You may make Standing Orders requiring recordings of meetings to be deleted once minutes have been approved but this is not a statutory requirement.

3. **Reflect**. After your first few meetings, take some time to reflect how it went and how it could be improved for next time. Practice makes perfect!