

# **PIDLEY CUM FENTON PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Remote Meeting Protocol**

### **Introduction**

**PIDLEY CUM FENTON PARISH** Council (the Authority) will keep to our usual approach to meetings and abide by our Standing Orders as much as we can.

The Council should remember this is a usual Council meeting, discussions and voting will be managed to allow the meeting to run as smoothly as possible.

- The Parish Clerk will ensure the remoter meeting invitation includes the option of a telephone call in addition to video conferencing.
- All participants will be kept in a “Waiting room” prior to being let into the meeting
- All participants will be muted on arrival with video off
- If requested to vote on a matter each Councillor will be asked by the Chairman individually for the Clerk to record their vote.
- If the Council have members of the public attending then the Chairman will take some time at the beginning of the meeting to explain to them how the meeting will run and how and when they can speak. This will help manage their expectations.

### **How will the Clerk keep track of who is “present”?**

It may be the case that some individuals have technical issues that mean that they “leave” the meeting, for example their internet connection means that they are cut off. Some platforms are very clear on who is present. Some are less clear. If the Clerk is not sure or aware of anyone accidentally dropping out of the meeting the Chairman may wish to do a quick “roll call” before each item to ensure the Council are able to accurately minute who was present.

### **Council discussions**

1. The Chairman of the Council will chair the meeting.
2. All participants will ensure they remain muted through the meeting unless invited to speak by the Chairman, this helps keep background noise to a minimum which will improve everyone’s ability to hear the discussions.
3. The Parish Clerk will remove everyone’s videos other than the councillors to distinguish between councillors and members of the public.
4. If everyone is able to join by video then they should raise their hands when they wish to speak or vote. They could also use the “reaction” thumbs up emoji.
5. If some people cannot join by the video then raising hands will not be an option. It also will make it harder to keep track of who is speaking. In this scenario, the Chairman will ask people to state clearly when they would like to speak and also request their vote verbally.

The Chairman may read from a list of councillor’s names and ask them in turn if there is anything they wish to say or ask. This may take more time but allows for a more controlled approach.

6. The Chairman may ask everyone to state their name before they start speaking so that it is always clear who is speaking.

### **Voting**

- If everyone is able to join by video then they should raise their hands when they wish to speak or vote. They could also use the “reaction” thumbs up emoji.
- If some people cannot join by video then raising hands will not be an option. It also will make it harder to keep track of who is speaking. In this scenario, the Chairman will ask people to state clearly when they would like to speak and also request their vote verbally.
- If requested in advance of the meeting Councillors may vote in the “chat” function.
- The Chairman or Clerk will read back the votes of the council so that everyone is sure their vote has been recorded correctly.

Make sure every vote, whether visually or by telephone, is clear and unambiguous.

### **Behaviours and conduct**

It is worth remembering that the required standards of behaviour and discussion are the same whether in remote or face-to-face meetings. These are difficult times and people may be worried about their health or family members, they may be frustrated being isolated at home, and there may be challenges with using new technology particularly if there are technical difficulties. Everyone in the meeting will need to be respectful and compassionate towards one another, emotions may be higher than usual but that only makes it more important that everyone approaches the meeting with respect and in the spirit of the council’s code of conduct.

### **Declaring Interests**

The Council have considered how they will manage councillors “leaving” a meeting if they have an interest and do not wish to be part of the meeting, particularly if they consider there will be negative public perception if they remain.

In this instance the person declaring an interest will be placed back in the “waiting room” by the Clerk and will only be brought back into the meeting once the item has been discussed, concluded and all councillors are happy for them to return.

### **Closed (confidential) Session**

In this instance members of the public and press will be placed back into the “waiting room” by the clerk and will only be brought back into the meeting once the item has been discussed, concluded and all councillors are happy for them to return.

### **Public Participation**

Council meetings must still be advertised, and the public have a right to observe and the Chairman will allow public ability to speak and it is likely they will follow the rules of the meeting. If a member of the public wishes to speak they can type their question in the “chat” and the Clerk will read the question out. The councillors will respond and then check that this has been answered clearly. If it is something that needs to be discussed in more detail or researched this will be added as an agenda item for the next meeting.

If member of the public interaction for clarity on a question is required, then the Clerk will unmute them and add video for that question only.

The Clerk will ensure that all questions have been addressed before the public forum is closed.

## **After the Meeting**

Minute taking will be done as usual with the clerk seeking clarity at any point, should it be needed. The minutes will be agreed at the next meeting and signed by the Chairman if all are happy with them. The Clerk will provide the Chairman with a copy before the next meeting.