

VIRTUAL MEETINGS AT EAST HERTS COUNCIL – PROTOCOL

Introduction

1. Meetings of the Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees may now be held by video conference. Conducting meetings in this way is permitted under new legislation where physical attendance at meetings is prevented by reason of Covid-19 restrictions. The following protocol sets out how the meetings will be conducted. Committee Chairmen will need to decide the most suitable approach for the options within this protocol.
2. The video conference platform to be used for East Herts Council meetings is Zoom. All Members of the Council have been asked to ensure that they are familiar with the way in which East Herts will be using that platform to ensure public meetings are compliant with legislation and with the Council's Constitution, and to reflect the formal nature of proceedings at which decisions are taken in public.

VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL

JOINING THE MEETING

Zoom Details

1. Members will have been sent the Zoom meeting ID and password at least two days before the meeting, by email and/or calendar invitation. Members should if possible join the meeting using both video and audio. However, the invitation will include UK telephone numbers to be

used by Members so that they can dial in to the meeting if they experience connectivity problems. ACTION: Democratic Services Officer (DSO).

2. All Members and Officers attending the meeting should be present 15 minutes before the scheduled start time, so as to ensure they are able to check that they can hear, and also ideally view, the proceedings. ACTION: all.
3. NB: the livestream will start 5 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting, so that the livestream can be checked. During this time the meeting participants should mute themselves, and will not be visible to the public, as a holding screen will be displayed, The chat function should not be used in case it displays messages on the livestream.

ZOOM DETAILS FOR COMMITTEES

4. The Zoom details for all committee meetings (other than for Development Management Committee (DMC) and Licensing Sub Committee) will be sent to all Members. They should not be forwarded or given to members of the public or press, who can observe by the livestream instead.
 - a. NB: Members who wish to attend a Committee of which they are not a member, should aim to attend promptly before the start of the meeting. Doing so will enable the Chairman to introduce them as a non-voting Member so the viewing public are clear. Please also see the note on page 4 of this protocol about display of names as "Observing" for non-Committee Members.

- b. NB: all Members attending as observers at a Committee meeting should also please be aware that arriving late and leaving early during the meeting is discouraged as it can lead to disruption to the smooth conduct of the virtual meeting and can be confusing for the public. Therefore the option for Members who simply wish to observe but who cannot arrive promptly before the meeting, or cannot stay throughout, is to do so by watching the livestream on the YouTube channel. However, watching the livestream will mean the observing Member cannot be recorded as a “guest in attendance”.

 - c. NB: For those who intend to comment at a meeting of which they are not a member, it will remain the case that prior consent of the Chairman would generally be required. In particular, regard should be had to the usual procedure rules for registration in advance of a meeting where a ward Member intends to make representations at Development Management Committee.
5. Members should please consult Democratic Services or the relevant legal officer for advice if they are not certain of the application of these rules.

BEFORE START OF MEETING

6. The host may make the Chairman co-host to enable him or her to see directly the requests to speak (by use of the “raise hand” function). ACTION: host.
7. The Officers and Chairman should check the attending Members’ ability to participate. Members will need to be asked to confirm whether they can hear and see the proceedings. ACTION: Chairman, DSO.

LACK OF AUDIO

8. Inability to participate by lack of audio - if a Member of the Committee does not appear to be able to hear the proceedings then, time permitting, steps should be taken to resolve that issue before the meeting starts. If this happens, the chat function in Zoom, or a WhatsApp message, text or email may be used to ask the Member to try to switch on their camera and mic. ACTION: host.
9. If the Member cannot join the meeting with audio at this point, but joins later, then they may do so but may only vote on an item for which they have heard the full debate. The point at which they join will need to be notified to the Democratic Services Officer to record in the minutes of the meeting. ACTION: host to inform DSO (by chat function), and both host and DSO to make a note of time of arrival and name of Member.

INABILITY TO VIEW THE PROCEEDINGS

10. If a Member cannot view the proceedings but can hear them, he or she will need to notify the Chairman prior to the start of the meeting. ACTION: Members.
11. Not being able to view the proceedings will not debar the Member from taking part in the meeting: in the case of a Member who can only participate by audio, then the host will unmute them for the duration of the proceedings so that they can indicate when they wish to speak. ACTION: host.

DISPLAY OF NAMES

12. Before joining a meeting, it is the responsibility of each attendee to ensure that their name is shown correctly so that the Host knows who they are and can admit them. Titles should be shown (if a Chairman, Vice Chairman, the Leader or an Executive Member, or Officer). Changing one's name in Zoom is a task which each attendee can do (but the host may do so, if the attendee does not), by clicking on "More" and making the amendments: ACTION: each attendee.

DISPLAY OF NAMES FOR COMMITTEES

- a) Any Member who is not a Member of the committee should display their name preceded by the words "OBSERVING" so that it is clear to any members of the public watching the meeting on the livestream that such

Members are not able to vote at that meeting. ACTION: DSO to send chat message to ask any Member who has not yet displayed their name and title to do so.

CHAIRMAN MAY ASK HOST TO AMEND ANY NAMES NOT CORRECTLY DISPLAYED

13. The Chairman will remind all those present that if their names are incorrectly shown, the host may amend the names. For this purpose the host will be provided in advance with a list of Committee Members, Chairman and Vice Chairman for the Committee in question. However, as noted above, ideally each attendee will themselves ensure their name and title are displayed.

MUTE UNLESS SPEAKING

14. In order to minimise background noise, which can cause distracting feedback, all Members except the current speaker will be set to “mute”. After speaking each participant (including Chairmen) should mute themselves, otherwise the Zoom Host would need to do so. ACTION: each participant/Host.

START OF THE MEETING – LIVESTREAM AND RECORDING

15. The Host will check with the Chairman that all is ready for livestream, and will commence the livestream to the Council’s YouTube Channel, and start the recording. These two steps must be taken for all

meetings, whether or not such meetings would have been webcast.

16. The livestream will start 5 minutes before the meeting, to allow time to check it is operating. A holding card will be displayed on the livestream until the meeting starts.
17. During this pre-meeting check, Members should be prepared to remain muted. ACTION: host.

CHAIRMAN TO MAKE CLEAR THE PROCEDURES WILL FOLLOW PROCEDURE RULES

18. The proceedings of the meeting of the Council or committee will reflect, as far as possible, the same procedures as if the meeting were being held in the Council Chamber. This fact should be made clear at the outset. ACTION: Chairman

DURING THE MEETING

ROLL CALL

19. At the “Apologies for absence” item, the Chairman may ask the Democratic Services Officer to call out the name of each Member who is expected to be present. The DSO will confirm the number of Members who are attending. ACTION: Chairman and DSO.

LOST INTERNET CONNECTION

20. If a Member loses internet connection, they will be treated as if they have left the room, and the Chairman will pause the meeting to allow time for them to either reconnect or to dial in. (UK telephone numbers will be provided in the Zoom invitation. These numbers should be used where a Member can only dial in, and it is recommended that Members make sure they can access the telephone numbers in readiness in case needed.)

21. The host will use the chat function to notify the Democratic Services Officer of anyone losing connection or leaving the meeting, and of their return. The DSO will make the Chairman aware and minute the point of departure in the minutes, and point of return. ACTION: Host and DSO.

HOW TO REFER TO AGENDA PACK WHILST USING ZOOM

22. Members will need to refer to their agenda pack in one of the following three ways:
 - a. by accessing their agenda on the same device on which they are accessing the Zoom meeting, then toggling between screens (hold down ALT key whilst using the TAB key to move between screens);

 - b. by using one device for Zoom and another device to access the agenda pack either on ModGov private app or by downloading the pdf from the link in the agenda notification email. Members should prepare

their downloads before the meeting to avoid risk of overloading their internet connection whilst also using Zoom; and

- c. the host may share his or her screen, so will be able to show the meeting the agenda pack and any plans. This last option is the least preferred, as each Member will tend to wish to look at their own agenda pack and annotations. ACTION: host/Lead Officer.

SPEAKING

23. If a Member wishes to speak, they should gain the host's attention by using the "raise hand" function or, if that signifier is not noticed, by unmuting themselves and asking to speak. Members should lower their blue hand once they have spoken, otherwise the host should do so.
24. A Member will need to unmute himself or herself when speaking. (If a Member cannot unmute they may send a message via chat to the host of the meeting or Chairman that they need to be unmuted.). At the end of the debate on each item, the Chairman will ask any Member participating by telephone whether they wish to speak. ACTION: Chairman.

SPEAKING – AT COMMITTEES

25. It is the Chairman's decision, which should be made clear at the start of the meeting, whether a Member

should indicate a wish to speak by (A) raising their physical hand and keeping it raised until they are called to speak, OR (b) using the “raise hand” button in Zoom. A main consideration is whether all Members can be seen on the screen simultaneously.

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

26. If a Member has declared a DPI and is therefore required to leave the meeting during the consideration of the item in respect of which he or she has made the disclosure, they will be placed in a break out room. ACTION: host. It is the responsibility of the Member in question to prompt this to happen, for the item in question, by reminding the Chairman at the start of such item. ACTION: Members making a declaration of a DPI. The Democratic Services Officer will remind the host to re-admit the Member at the conclusion of the item in question. ACTION: DSO.

VOTING

27. Where a vote would normally be taken by show of hands, the procedure for Council meetings will be as follows. The Chairman will ask Members to confirm verbally how they vote. For a “show of hands” vote, Members will use the voting buttons (green tick, etc) in Zoom to indicate how they vote. The Chairman will state whether the vote is carried, in order to inform the observing public of the result. If the result is close, then the Chairman may ask the DSO to go through the roll

call to ask each Member in turn how they vote. This vote will not be a formal recorded vote (unless a recorded vote has been asked for). If it becomes clear that the vote is carried, the Chairman may declare that this is the case before completing the roll call of votes.
ACTION: Chairman and Democratic Services Officer.

VOTING – APPLICATION TO COMMITTEES

28. The Chairman may ask that Members of a Committee should show their support for/against/abstention from a vote by asking them to physically raise their hand, and to keep it up until counted. This option is suited to committees where all can easily be seen on the screen.

PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY

29. Public accessibility is by livestreaming the meeting – the Chairman will announce at the start of the meeting that it will be live streamed. The host will enable live streaming using the link to the Council’s YouTube channel. For meetings which are usually also webcast, the archive recording will also be uploaded to the meeting page. **ACTION:** host to conduct live stream and record during meeting. After the meeting, Democratic Services to upload to meeting page via Public-i.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

YOUTUBE LINK ON WEBSITE FOR THE PUBLIC

30. Members of the public will be able to view and listen to the meetings by going to the East Herts YouTube channel either at:
 - a. the [YouTube website page for East Herts](#) or
 - b. from the [East Herts website landing page for live and archive recordings](#)

31. The Zoom meeting ID and password will be sent only to Members and Officers, and to guests of the Chairman or public speakers who have registered their intention to speak at a meeting. The details should not be shared more widely with the public. Guests must be advised before joining a meeting that their names must be displayed on their Zoom profile so that the host is confident that they may be admitted to the meeting.

32. Public speakers may generally only remain in the meeting for the duration of the item on which they are making representations.

33. Unless the member of the public is a guest of the Chairman and has been invited to stay for the whole meeting, the host will remove a member of the public who has asked their question and supplementary question at the end of the item on public questions.

34. The advice which should be given to public speakers before attending a meeting is that they may continue to observe the rest of the meeting on the livestream if they wish.
35. A petition would be presented by the lead petitioner, in a similar manner as above.

GENERAL PRESENTATION POINTS FOR ALL

36. Members and officers are reminded that the dress code for a virtual meeting should be 'business as usual'.
37. Backgrounds of those visible on screen should be as neutral as possible with adequate lighting. No novelty backgrounds should be used.
38. Use of the chat function should be limited to messages sent between the meeting administrator, the Chairman and Vice Chairman, and the Democratic Services Officer. Chat should not generally be used by a Member. An important reason for avoiding use of chat between Members is to give the public confidence that the meeting is formal and that decision-making is being conducted in an open and transparent manner. The meeting should function in exactly the same way as it would in the Council Chamber.

39. The “react” tool should not be used for indicating voting intentions, as it does not remain on screen for a sufficiently long time to be counted.

40. Members should ensure they have taken a note of the Zoom details before the meeting, including the telephone numbers in case of internet connectivity problems during a meeting, so that they could if necessary dial in. The Zoom details are sent in a calendar invitation and are also included in the weekly Members’ Information Bulletin.