Mid Devon District Council – Hybrid Meeting Protocol

1.   Introduction

Remote meetings via Zoom have been used during the Covid-19 pandemic in accordance with the temporary legislation. That legislation ceases to apply from 7 May 2021. However, Covid-19 legislation and guidance continues in place and this places specific requirements for meetings in relation to health and safety, risk assessments and related matters.

The Council has therefore put in place temporary arrangements which will enable meetings to take place in compliance with legislation, whilst providing alternative participation opportunities to maintain a Covid-19 safe environment. All are asked to remember that the Council's offices at Phoenix House are not just meeting rooms – they are the place of employment for many and there are implications beyond just how the meetings are held.

The arrangements set out in this Protocol will apply to meetings from 7 May 2021 to (and including) 30 June 2021, unless the Council decides to change, curtail or extend them. At the date of this Protocol, it is expected that arrangements may change later this year – because the Government may change the law, the Covid-19 pandemic may have further receded and/or the Council makes alternative arrangements.

2.   Hybrid arrangements – how will they work?

The primary objective is to ensure that meetings can continue as safely as possible and that the rights of Members and the Public are not diminished simply because the meeting is being held through a mix of online and face-to-face means. The Chairman will retain control and discretion over the conduct of the meeting and the Zoom host will provide administrative support to facilitate the meeting.

Please note that, exceptionally, meeting arrangements may change – in response to legislation, court decisions, or risk. This may include a meeting being postponed, or the hybrid arrangements changing or being withdrawn. We ask that you check the arrangements in advance of joining or attending the meeting.

(a)   Members (councillors) entitled to vote

All Members entitled to vote in a meeting must be present in the same room – if they are to be classed as 'present' (count towards the quorum) and to cast a vote. If a Member entitled to vote is not in the room, they may still participate via Zoom (see below), but they will not be present (quorum) nor be able to vote.

(b)   Other Members, Officers and the Public

The Council will use Zoom to enable all other Members, officers and the Public to attend and participate in meetings safely. Zoom will be enabled in all public meetings. Those attending the meeting physically will be able to see and hear Zoom participants via the existing large TV/monitor screens in the meeting rooms.

Those on Zoom will be able to hear Members in the room and see them – although this will be a whole room view and there will be no zooming in on individual members. It is essential therefore those Members present in the room use the microphones at all times and identify themselves before speaking.

There will be some Officers in the room – the Committee Administrator, the Zoom host and, at times, an additional support officer. There may also be a meeting room host to manage the safety of the meeting. All other Officers should use Zoom, unless they are specifically invited into the room by the Chairman of the meeting.

3.   Zoom

Zoom is the system the Council will be using for those attending Hybrid meetings remotely. It has functionality for audio, video, and screen sharing and you do not need to be a member of the Council or have a Zoom account to join a Zoom meeting.

4.   Access to documents

Member Services will publish the agenda and reports for committee meetings on the Council's website in line with usual practice. Paper copies of agendas will only be made available to those who have previously requested this and also the Chair of a meeting.

If any other Member wishes to have a paper copy, they must notify Member Services before the agenda is published, so they can arrange to post directly – it may take longer to organise printing, so as much notice as possible is appreciated.

The Public should continue to access agendas via the Council's website - and are encouraged to do so even after the offices at Phoenix House are open again.

5.   Setting up the Meeting for Zoom attendance

This will be done by Member Services. They will send a meeting request via Outlook which will appear in Members' Outlook calendar. Members and Officers will receive a URL link to click on to join the meeting. The Public will use the Zoom details on the front of the agenda. The telephone dial-in via Zoom will also be available.

6.   Public Access and Participation

(a)   Public Access:

Members of the Public will be able to use a web link and standard internet browser. This will be displayed on the front of the agenda. Members of the Public should attend a meeting via Zoom, unless there are exceptional circumstances justifying attendance in person.

If any member of the Public still wishes to attend in person, they must notify Member Services **at least 3 working days before the meeting.** Notifications must be sent by email to:

Committee@middevon.gov.uk

Day of meeting	Notice given by
Monday	Previous Wednesday
Tuesday	Previous Thursday
Wednesday	Previous Friday
Thursday	Monday
Friday	Tuesday

The meeting risk assessment may need to be updated. Member Services will liaise with the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and the Chairman of the meeting. A decision will be taken on whether attendance in person can be safely accommodated.

(b)   Public Participation (speaking):

Public questions will continue in line with the Council's current arrangements as far as is practicable. However, to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that no member of the public is missed, all those who wish to speak must register **by 4pm on the day before the meeting**. They should email their full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk. If they wish to circulate their question in advance, that would be helpful.

At public question time, the Chair will ask each registered person to speak at the appropriate time. In the normal way, the public should state their full name, the agenda item they wish to speak to **before** they proceed with their question. Unless they have registered, a member of the public may not be called to speak, except at the discretion of the Chairman.

If a member of the public wishes to ask a question but cannot attend the meeting for whatever reason, there is nothing to prevent them from emailing members of the Committee with their question, views or concern in advance. However, if they do so, it would be helpful if a copy could be sent to Committee@middevon.gov.uk as well.

7.   Arrangements for any person attending meetings at Phoenix House

Anyone attending a meeting in person must observe the following requirements:

(a)   For non-voting members, officers and the Public – are there exceptional circumstances to justify attending? If so, please notify in advance and in paragraph 6 above. It is essential that the Council knows who is attending and how many will be in the room, so that the meeting risk assessment can be updated.

(b)   Do not attend if you: have any symptoms of Covid-19; are self-isolating (with or without a positive Covid-19 test); or are in a period of post-travel quarantine.

(c)   Wear a mask at all times except when invited to speak by the Chairman of the meeting. If you have a medical exemption for wearing a mask, please attend via Zoom unless you are a Member who must attend to vote.

(d)   Use the hand sanitiser which is available in the building.

(e)   Follow the directions for entering, moving around and exiting the building. Follow the instructions of any Officer present to manage the safety of the meeting and/or the Chairman.

(f)   Sign into the meeting if requested to do so – you may be asked to leave contact details

(g)   Enter and leave the building promptly – do not gather inside after the meeting has finished, or during any break in the meeting

(h)   Bring your own water/refreshments, as these will not be available for the time being.

(i)   Maintain social distancing throughout – this is 2 metres apart, or 1 metre with additional safeguards (e.g. face masks).

8.   Starting the Meeting

At the start of the meeting, the Member Services Officer will check all required attendees are present and that there is a quorum. If there is no quorum, the meeting will be adjourned. This applies if, during the meeting, it becomes inquorate for whatever reason.

The Chair will remind all Members, Officers and the Public attending via Zoom that **all microphones must be muted,** unless and until they are speaking. This prevents background noise, coughing etc. which is intrusive and disruptive during the meeting. The Hosting Officer will enforce this and will be able to turn off participant mics when they are not in use.

9.   Declaration of Interests

Members should declare their interests in the usual way. A Member with a disclosable pecuniary interest is required to the leave the room. If they are attending via Zoom, they will be moved to the waiting room for the duration of the item.

10.   The Meeting and Debate

(a)   For Members and Officers physically present

Each member should raise their hand to indicate a request to speak. When called, they must identify themselves for the recording and for the benefit of those attending via Zoom. The microphone must be used when speaking – standing will make it difficult for those on Zoom to hear and is discouraged, including at meetings of Full Council.

(b)   For any person attending via Zoom

The Council will not be using the Chat function. The Chairman will call speakers in accordance with the usual rules i.e. either at Public Question Time, or for Members and Officers, when they raise their Zoom hand to speak.

No decision or outcome will be invalidated by a failure of the Chair to call a member to speak – remote management of meetings is intensive and the Hybrid arrangements are likely to be more so. It is reasonable to expect that some requests will be inadvertently missed from time to time.

When referring to reports or making specific comments, Members and Officers should refer to the report and page number whenever possible. This will help all present or in attendance to have a clear understanding of what is being discussed.

11.   Voting

Voting for meetings in person is normally through a show of hands. The Member Services Officer will announce the numerical result of the vote for the benefit of those attending via Zoom.

12.   Meeting Etiquette Reminder for Zoom attendees

- Mute your microphone – you will still be able to hear what is being said.
- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- Speak clearly and please state your name each time you speak
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

13.   Part 2 Reports and Debate

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or "exempt" issues – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – are under consideration.

If there are members of the public and press attending the meeting, then the Member Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, remove them to a waiting room for the duration of that item. They can then be invited back in when the business returns to Part 1.

Please turn off smart speakers such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or smart music devices. These could inadvertently record phone or video conversations, which would not be appropriate during the consideration of confidential items.

14. Interpretation of standing orders

Where the Chairman is required to interpret the Council's Constitution and procedural rules and how they apply to remote attendance, they may take advice from the Member Services Officer or Monitoring Officer prior to making a ruling. However, the Chair's decision shall be final.

15. Disorderly Conduct by Members

If a Member behaves in the manner as outlined in the Constitution (persistently ignoring or disobeying the ruling of the Chair or behaving irregularly, improperly or offensively or deliberately obstructs the business of the meeting), any other Member may move 'That the member named be not further heard' which, if seconded, must be put to the vote without discussion.

If the same behaviour persists and a Motion is approved 'that the member named do leave the meeting', then (if attending via Zoom) they will be removed as a participant by the Member Services Officer.

16. Disturbance from Members of the Public

If any member of the public interrupts a meeting the Chairman will warn them accordingly. If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Chairman may ask the Member Services Officer to remove them as a participant from the meeting.

17. Technical issues – meeting management

If the Chairman, the Hosting Officer or the Member Services Officer identifies a problem with the systems from the Council's side, the Chairman should either declare a recess while the fault is addressed or, if the fault is minor (e.g. unable to bring up a presentation), it may be appropriate to move onto the next item of business in order to progress through the agenda. If it is not possible to address the fault, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as it can be reconvened.

If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Chief Executive, Leader and relevant Cabinet Member, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted by the Council's constitution.

Where any Member, Officer or the Public experience their own technical problems during the course of a meeting e.g. through internet connectivity or otherwise, the meeting will not be automatically suspended or adjourned.

18. Technical issues – Individual Responsibility (Members and Officers)

Many members, officers and the Public live in places where broadband speeds are poor, but technical issues can arise at any time for a number of reasons. The following guidelines, if followed, should help reduce disruption.

- Join <u>public</u> Zoom meetings by telephone if there is a problem with the internet. <u>Before</u> all meetings, note down or take a photograph of the front page of the agenda which has the necessary telephone numbers. Annex 1 to this protocol contains a brief step-by-step guide to what to expect

- Consider an alternative location from which to join the meeting, but staying safe and keeping confidential information secure. For officers, this may mean considering whether to come into the office, subject to this being safe and practicable (childcare etc.)

- Have to hand the telephone number of someone attending the meeting – and contact them if necessary to explain the problem in connecting

- Officers should have an 'understudy' or deputy briefed and on standby to attend and present as needed (and their telephone numbers to hand)

Phone only access to zoom meetings

(Before you start **make sure you know the Meeting ID and the Meeting Password**) – Both of these are available on the agenda for the meeting

Call the toll free number either on the meeting agenda or on the Outlook appointment (this will start with 0800 --- ----)

(Ensure your phone is on 'speaker' if you can)

A message will sound saying *"Welcome to Zoom, enter your meeting ID followed by the hash button"*

- **Enter Meeting ID followed by #**

Wait for next message which will say *"If you are a participant, please press hash to continue"*

- **Press #**

Wait for next message which will say *"Enter Meeting Password followed by hash"*

- **Enter 6 digit Meeting Password followed by #**

Wait for the following two messages:

"You are currently being held in a waiting room, the Host will release you from 'hold' in a minute"

Wait……

"You have now entered the meeting"

Important notes for participating in meetings

Press ***6** to toggle between **'mute' and 'unmute'** (you should always ensure you are muted until you are called upon to speak)

If you wish to speak you can **'raise your hand'** by pressing ***9**. Wait for the Chairman to call you to speak. The Host will lower your hand after you have spoken. Make sure you mute yourself afterwards.