

Licensing and Regulatory Sub-Committee Virtual Procedural Rules

Introduction

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government made [Regulations](#) (The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020) to ensure local authorities can conduct business during the current public health emergency and this legislation was passed on 4 April 2020. The Regulations will apply to local authority meetings (full council, executive, joint committee, committee or sub-committee) held before 7 May 2021 from 4 April 2020. Councils can make standing orders in respect of virtual meetings, and will not be constrained by any existing restrictions. The Licensing Act 2003 and the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearing) Regulations 2005 provide flexibility to Licensing Authorities in determining their own hearing procedures.

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Before the Hearing

Access to Information

The Council can hold and alter the frequency and occurrence of meetings without requirement for further notice.

The new 2020 Regulations make provision for local authority members and officers, and the public, to have access to documents without attending council buildings and it will be sufficient for local authorities to publish the documents on their website. This includes notices, agendas, reports, background papers and minutes. The Proper Officer will give the requisite notice to the public of the time of the meeting, and the agenda, together with details of how to join the meeting which will be available on the website.

The obligation under the old Regulations (Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012) to supply copies of such documents in response to requests made by members of the public and on behalf of newspapers is disapplied.

The requirement in England for 5 clear days' notice to be given of principal council meetings, including annual meetings, still applies however notice can now be given on the council's website. However, it should be noted that Licensing is not subject to this but is bound by the Licensing Act 2003 and there may be occasional times when these requirements cannot be met.

Time and Place of Meetings

Meetings can be held remotely, including by (but not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming even if particular members of the public cannot access them. This Council will use Microsoft Teams to hold virtual meetings and will invite external participants to virtual meetings, if any, via email or telephone. Where possible, virtual meetings will be webcast where the Hearing is held in public via a link published on the meeting webpage.

The Constitution states that when reasonably practical, a sub-committee meeting should be held at the Council facility which is closest to the premises or issue that is the subject of the meeting. However, this requirement cannot be met during this current period.

During the Hearing

It is a requirement for such hearings that:

- a) proper notice is given, with all papers served timeously on the authority and published online;
- b) the actual parties to the hearing are able to participate;
- c) any member of the public can see or hear, albeit not participate in, the hearing.

Although held in a virtual format, Hearings dealing with new licences or variations to existing licences will follow the standard procedure. Panel Members may ask questions of any party at any time. Questions are usually taken after each person has spoken. It is helpful to undertake a document check at the start of the Hearing.

In terms of issues that may arise during the Hearing the following rules apply:-

Quorum for Meetings

The rules for quorum will still apply. This is 3 Councillors for a licensing or regulatory sub-committee. It is also considered good practice to have a reserve member, in case of interests. The constitution states that if a quorum is not present within 10 minutes of the scheduled start of the meeting or such longer time as allowed by the Chairman, the business of the meeting will be adjourned. The Chairman may allow for flexibility around the start time of the meeting where there are any technical issues.

In the event of any apparent failure of the technology the Chairman should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate. The Chairman could adjourn for 10-15 minutes to allow the connection to be re-established. If an individual remote participation fails the Chairman may call a short adjournment. As the hearing must have 3 members present, the meeting will be reliant on the lost connection being re-established to ensure all members are present for the entire discussion in order to hear all of the facts and vote on the matter.

You can only have 3 members on the Licensing and Regulatory Sub-Committees (LSC) for each Hearing (as per Section 9 of the Licensing Act 2003 and the Constitution Terms of Reference for the LSC). The reserve member is only there in case an interest rises at the beginning of the Hearing or one of the 3 members identified as being on the LSC fails to turn up to the virtual meeting. It is only those 3 members who have been identified as being on the LSC for that Hearing who can ask questions of the other parties. A reserve member would not be able to participate if the technology fails for one of the members present as whilst they would be listening they will not have taken an active role nor been included in the process/asked to see if they have any questions etc.

Attendance at meetings and webcasting

Once everyone is present at the start of the Hearing the 'room can be locked' unless the Chairman/Democratic Services Officer believe that additional persons need to be included during the Hearing.

A roll call or introductions will be made at the start of the meeting to record those present. There is no requirement for councillors to sign their names on the attendance sheets when attending a

virtual meeting. The Democratic Services Officer will maintain a list of attendance throughout the meeting.

To be classified as a 'member in attendance' and attend a meeting remotely, the following conditions must be satisfied:

- a) councillors must be able to hear and (where practicable) see and be heard and (where practicable) be seen by other councillors in attendance at the meeting. This full requirement also extends to members of the public attending to exercise a right to speak at the meeting
- b) All other members of the public must as a minimum be able to hear (but if practicable be seen as well)

In practice this means that if councillors and speaking members of the public can be heard and hear each other and other members of the public not speaking can hear, this would fulfil the requirements of holding a virtual meeting.

Members of the press and public may only be excluded from a meeting in accordance with the Access to Information Rules.

The Regulations state that meetings being open to the public include access by remote means. Such access includes (but not limited to) video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming and where a meeting is accessible to the public through such remote means the meeting is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the meeting in person. For clarity, a meeting recorded and then posted online after the event would not satisfy this requirement.

The people on the Teams call who are present throughout the meeting are the Members 'round the table' and any officer supporting the meeting. The public gallery, where Members can sit and observe the meeting alongside members of the public, is the webcast version. It is important to keep numbers in the meeting (except for those allowed to be present as Members) to a minimum to enable the proper flow of the virtual meeting.

Conflicts of interest

Councillors should consider if they have an interest, and, if required, seek advice from the Monitoring Office, or their deputy, before the meeting starts. If a Councillor appointed to a licensing hearing considers that their interest is prejudicial they should notify Democratic Services as soon as possible so that an alternative councillor can be appointed to the licensing hearing. Where a councillor has an interest they must declare their interest and the nature of it at the start of the meeting. If the interest is 'personal' having declared a personal interest the councillor may continue to speak and vote on the item of business concerned. If the councillor has a prejudicial interest they will not be able to take part in the discussion or decision and must leave the meeting. A reserve councillor, if available, will then be called upon to serve on the hearing in their absence.

Minutes of meetings

The Minutes of meetings will be signed and kept by the Chairman until government guidance allows councillors and officers to return the signed copy to the office.

When can the Chairman be interrupted?

There are circumstances allowed for in the Constitution where the Chairman can be interrupted such as:-

- Technology is not working effectively
- Officer needs to provide advice
- Point of order or personal explanation

or any other area where the Constitution or Chairman allows.

Disturbance during proceedings

The Constitution states that if anyone interrupts proceedings the Chairman will warn the person concerned and if they continue to interrupt the Chairman will order their removal from the virtual meeting room. There may be circumstances where the person needs to be removed immediately for example if they are being inappropriate and the Chairman can do this by muting their microphone. If there is a general disturbance making orderly business impossible, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting for as long as they consider necessary.

Adjournments

People will remain on the call with mics muted and cameras off until the meeting starts again. The Chairman may also want to consider having a comfort (screen) break for longer meetings. If there is a problem with the technology the Chairman should adjourn the meeting. However, this does not stop a meeting going ahead because a person does not have access to the required technology in the first place. If technology fails for a wholly remote meeting, and the meeting is no longer open to the public, any decisions made could be challenged as unlawful which renders the whole meeting incapable of proceeding and therefore the Chairman should adjourn until the remote meeting can be restored within a reasonable period, or at a time and date fixed by the Chairman or until the next ordinary meeting. Any interested party eligible to speak who attends to exercise their right to speak and is unable to do so renders only their item incapable of proceeding unless they are happy to submit their comments through a written representation.

The Council will try and achieve the best possible outcome.

Deliberations and Exclusion of the Press and the Public

Under Regulation 14 of the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearings) Regulations 2005 the licensing authority may exclude the public from all or part of the hearing where it considers that the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in the Hearing or part of that Hearing taking place in public. In addition there may be information in the agenda pack pertaining to the hearing be exempt from publication or discussion in public under Schedule 12A of The Local Government Act 1972 as amended. In these circumstances the public will be excluded from part or the whole of the Hearing as appropriate.

At the conclusion of the Hearing, the Sub-Committee together with the Democratic Services Officer and Legal Advisor, will remain in a private virtual meeting in order to deliberate on the decision. Interested parties will then be notified of the outcome of the hearing in writing after the meeting in accordance with required timescales.

Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings.

The Sub-Committee may depart from this procedure (as varied/amended from time to time based on changes to law and practice) if it considers it necessary and/or equitable to do so.