

# SCHEME OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

## INTRODUCTION

**Virtual Meetings:** The Scheme of Public Participation shall apply to Virtual Meetings (referred to as “VMs”) of the Council and its Committees and Sub-Committees as follows:-

1. The public cannot physically “attend” a VM to listen to the debate, and the legal right to so attend has been changed<sup>1</sup> into a right to hear (and where practicable, see) Councillors attending the VM by remote attendance.
2. The aim of the Scheme, viz. enhancing the public’s ability to contribute to the democratic process, is the same as for any normal, non-virtual meeting.
3. The Scheme should operate fairly and effectively and to that end, the normal rules (as set out in paragraphs 2 to 6 inclusive of the Scheme) will apply to VMs **save as modified below**.
4. All references to “meetings” in the Scheme shall apply to VMs as modified below.

*The above text shall be added at the end of paragraph 1 of the Scheme.*

## Paragraph 2 (General Rules Applicable to all Schemes):

*The following text shall be added at the end of paragraph 2(b):-*

**Virtual Meetings:** Notwithstanding the above, owing to the need to make significant preparations for VMs in advance, **written notice must be given to the Proper Officer, for any type of public participation at a VM, by 15:00 hours on the second working day before the VM.**

Hence, for example, for VMs of the Planning Committee on Wednesdays:-

- (i) If there is no Bank Holiday on the Monday preceding the VM, written notice must be given by 15:00 hours on the Monday.
- (ii) If there is a Bank Holiday on the Monday preceding the VM, written notice must be given by 15:00 hours on the Friday preceding the VM.
- (iii) If the VM immediately follows the Easter Weekend, written notice must be given by 15:00 hours on Maundy Thursday.

## Paragraph 4 (Procedure for Speaking at Meetings of the Planning Committee):

*The following text shall be added at the end of paragraph 4:-*

**Virtual Meetings:** All references above to “speaking” shall be interpreted in accordance with the procedure below.

“Speakers” means persons giving written notice to speak at a VM as set out in paragraph 2(b) and being recorded by the Proper Officer either:-

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<sup>1</sup> By The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, S.I. 2020/392.

- (i) on a first-come, first-served basis as having the right to submit a speech in support of or against an item for decision, or
- (ii) as a duly-authorized representative of a Parish Council<sup>2</sup> or Community Forum affected and having the right to submit a speech on an item for decision.

The Chairman of the Planning Committee (or, in his absence, the Vice-Chairman) has discretion, for large or complex items or in exceptional circumstances, to permit more than one speaker in support of and against an item for decision, and/or to recognise more than one Parish Council or Community Forum as being affected. If he/she decides to do so, he/she shall immediately inform the Member Services Manager (Operational) or such other Officer(s) as the Proper Officer may have authorised under paragraph 6.

All speakers shall submit to the Proper Officer by email, **by 10:00 hours on the day of the VM**, a copy of their speech in written, legible English, able to be read within the maximum period of 3 minutes. This means it should be no longer than 400 words, on a single side of A4 paper, printed in 12-point non-italic sans-serif font.

Unless alternative arrangements for the speakers' participation are made, the Proper Officer will arrange for all speakers' speeches received as above to be read to the VM by a competent Officer for and on behalf of the speakers, at the normal times and in the normal order during the VM (subject to the Chairman's normal discretion).

An Officer reading any speech on behalf of any speaker shall have discretion to omit/edit out any inappropriate language, information or statements; nevertheless if any defamation, insult, personal or confidential information, etc. is contained in any speech received from any speaker and/or is read to the VM by an Officer, each speaker accepts by submitting their speech to be fully responsible for all consequences thereof and to indemnify the Officer and the Council accordingly.

#### Paragraph 5 (Summary of Rights):

*The following text shall be added after the section entitled "Comments":-*

For the avoidance of doubt, the above three sections (Petitions, Questions, Comments) do not apply to the Planning Committee.

#### Paragraph 6 (Administration of the Scheme):

*The first sentence shall be replaced by the following updated information:-*

The operation and administration of the Scheme is undertaken by the Proper Officer, the Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford. The Scheme is administered on his behalf by the Member Services Manager (Operational) and/or by such other Officer(s) as the Corporate Director may authorise in writing to do so. Email: [membersservices@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:membersservices@ashford.gov.uk) or ...

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Parish Council" includes Town Councils and Community Councils