

FAR COTTON AND DELAPRE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Report to: Council 25 February 2021

Report on public attendance and participation at council meetings

Recommendation:

- a) That meetings future meeting are held on zoom and that the code is published with the agenda for the public to join the meeting.
- b) That a “police and public session” is included on the agenda for future meetings.

Attachments: NONE

1.0 Background Information

The attendance of the press and public at council meetings is a cornerstone of local democracy and, this has already been recognised by this council. Access to meetings is essential if residents are to engage with their local council.

2.0 Legal framework

The attendance of the press and public at parish council meetings is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960. This gives the public the legal right to attend meetings and report thereon, save in a few circumstances where the business is considered confidential, as defined within the act.

This act has been amended to incorporate The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. These regulations came into force in April 2020 and allowed local councils to meet electronically.

The regulations also give the public the right to access meetings electronically, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.

3.0 Options for the public to attend and participate in council meetings:

3.1 Current situation

To date meetings of the community council have been supported by democratic services at NBC and meetings have been live streamed via Northampton Borough Council’s YouTube channel.

The public can view meetings but are not in attendance, unless a specific invitation has been extended or if a member of the public has requested to speak.

3.2 Future meetings

The current support from Northampton Borough Council will cease at the end of March and so it is important to consider how meetings will be managed moving forward.

There are 2 main options to be considered:

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| | <p>a) Live streaming (as currently)</p> <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible and can be viewed at a later date by those unable to attend the meeting. <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council would need a YouTube account or similar, some councils have found the technology difficult to manage and onerous for a small council. • Members of the public are only viewing the meeting and not “in the meeting” • Members of the public need to pre-register to speak. <p>b) Include zoom code on agenda and allow open access for all (Note all existing parishes in the Borough of Northampton currently do this)</p> <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible, no pre-registration is required. • Easy set-up, no other streaming services required. • The agenda can include a “police and public” session allowing residents to raise queries with the council without the need to pre-register. <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small number of councils have been subject to “zoom bombing” • Difficult to manage the meeting if there are a very large number of public attendees <p>4.0 Meetings from 7th May 2021</p> <p>It is of course important to note that the regulations allowing councils to meet remotely cease to be valid on May 7, 2021 and the government currently has no plans to extend these.</p> <p>The council must therefore consider and make arrangements for holding meetings in person if required. The clerk is therefore investigating space at local community centres and will update the meeting.</p> <p>5.0 Recommendation:</p> <p>a) that the zoom code is published with the agenda for all virtual meetings and that all public can attend the meeting.</p> <p>b) that future meetings include a “police and public session” with a suitable statement such as the one shown below:</p> <p><i>Members of the public are invited to address the Council. The session will last for a maximum of 15 minutes with any individual contribution lasting a maximum of 3 minutes. Representations shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate. Members of the public should address the chairman of the meeting, who may direct that a written or oral response be given.)</i></p> | |
| Implications: | | |
| Council objectives: | Legal and effective. | x |
| Equalities & Human Rights | There are no equalities and human rights issues | x |
| Crime and Disorder | Crime and disorder have been considered | X |
| Biodiversity | There are no bio-diversity implications | x |
| Financial | There are no financial implications at this stage | |
| | There will be financial implications | |
| | There is provision within the budget | |

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| | Decisions may give rise to additional expenditure | |
| | Decisions may have potential for income generation | |
| Legal | Power: Local Government Act 1972 | X |
| | Other considerations: None | |
| Risk Management | Material risks exist and these are currently being assessed. | X |
| | - Inherent risk score: | |
| | - Residual risk score: | |
| Person originating this report: Kate Houlihan: Town Clerk | | |
| Date: 16 February 2021 | | |