

Berkhamsted Town Council
Emergency Amendments to Standing Orders and Policies
COVID-19 Pandemic

Contents

Sections 1-3 cover arrangements for remote meetings and the conduct and protocols for these meetings. Unless amended by following, standing orders, as last reviewed and agreed at Full Council on 16 March 2020, apply.

Section 4 records Full Council minute FC 45/20 (30 March 2020 meeting) which deals with revised arrangements for emergency decision making and administration during the pandemic. Unless amended by the following, standing orders, as last reviewed and agreed at Full Council on 16 March 2020, apply.

Section 5 records Full Council Minute FC 46/20 (30 March 2020 meeting) which sets out the grant awarding policy for community groups, organisations and charities offering community support during the pandemic and aftermath. A link to the grant application form for these groups is also included.

1. Legal authority to hold remote Council meetings

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force on 4 April 2020.

In summary, this means that:

- i. The holding of remote meetings (with conditions) is permitted;
- ii. Local Councils can decide the method they will use to facilitate the holding of remote meetings;
- iii. There is no requirement to hold an annual meeting.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has prepared a legal briefing note (L0120) on the matter and this is at attachment 1.

NALC has also produced a short publication entitled holding remote meetings and this is at attachment 2.

(Both these documents were originally circulated to town councillors and staff under cover of the Town Clerk's 6 April e-mail. The holding remote meetings documents has been updated since that time, and the revised version – which refers to security at meetings- is the one now attached.

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2. Arrangements for meetings and attending meetings

Arrangements for issuing the notice, summons and agenda for the meeting are unchanged. The agenda will be posted on the website although it is no longer necessary to place agenda during this interim period on notice boards. There is still a requirement to meet the necessary quorum and to submit apologies for absence. Members of the public can attend as can members of the press. Standing orders relating to chairing the meeting, voting, conduct of debate still apply. Minutes will be issued in the normal way.

Councillors, officers and members of the public (including the press) can no longer attend physical meetings. Until notified otherwise by HM Government meetings will be conducted via a remote videoing conference (currently Zoom).

In view of the current restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic members of the public will not have the opportunity to attend a physical meeting. In addition to the agenda, councillors will also receive an e-mail invitation to join the meeting via Zoom. Members of the public can also attend and, if they wish, speak for two minutes under the public participation session. As with a physical meeting, they will be asked to leave should any matters of a confidential nature be discussed, in accordance with Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

Each meeting will have a unique number and password and these log-in details will be made available to councillors on the day of the meeting. Anyone wishing to speak at this meeting should contact the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk. Residents can also e-mail comments which will be forwarded to councillors. Contact details are as follows:

For Town Planning Committee meetings contact:
deputyclerk@berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk;

Tel: 01442 800146

For Full Council and other committee meetings:
townclerk@berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk;

Tel: 01442 800152

Members of the public wishing to speak or comment will be asked to confirm their name, their address in Berkhamsted and details of any items on the agenda that they may wish to speak about. The cut off point for requests to speak is 12 noon on the day of the meeting. Members of the press wishing to attend will be asked for their contact details and e-mail address.

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3.1 Logging in and co-hosts

The officer acting as host should log in 15 minutes before the start of the meeting with the co-host and councillors logging in ten minutes prior to the meeting start time to allow for a prompt start. To facilitate the smooth running of a meeting and to allow for the officer to take accurate minutes, whenever possible there should always be a meeting co-host to help in the operation of the software controls. For example, admitting attendees (including any members of the press or public), muting and unmuting as required. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk will co-host for each other as required.

3.2 Starting the meeting and introducing guest speakers/members of the public

The Chair should introduce the meeting as a formal meeting of the council as they would at a physical meeting. Members of the press and public, including any guest speakers, should be kept in the Zoom 'waiting room' until the meeting has commenced. They will be sent a private chat message by the co-host to acknowledge their presence and to advise that they will be granted access once the meeting commences. As with physical meetings, members of the public will be given the opportunity to speak during public participation, but will not be permitted, unless invited to do so by the Chair, to speak at other times.

1.3 Attendance sheets

Councillors are unable to sign these sheets at virtual meetings. The officer running the meeting will complete a sheet reflecting attendees, apologies for absence and absence. The officer completing the sheet will sign and date it. This will then be placed in the folder of signed attendance sheets at the earliest opportunity.

1.4 Signing minutes

The approval of minutes of previous meetings will proceed as normal. Once the minutes have been approved as a correct record the Chair is then able to sign them as such. If a paper copy is not available at the remote meeting, the Chair will sign them physically at the earliest opportunity following which they will be placed, at the earliest opportunity, in the signed minute folder.

1.5 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest are made in the usual way. A councillor that has declared a prejudicial interest or disclosable pecuniary interest, as set out in the Town Councils Code of Conduct (Part 2 – Members' Interests), that requires them to leave the meeting, will be placed in the waiting room during discussion of the relevant agenda item. On conclusion of the item for which the declaration is made the councillor will be allowed to return to the meeting

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1.6 Speaking and voting

Attendees wishing to speak should raise their (physical) hand until the Chair confirms it is their turn. Members, (including the public) should mute their device if possible when they are not speaking to limit attendees speaking over each other.

If a counted vote is required on an item, then members should keep their hand raised until the officer verifies that all votes have been recorded.

1.7 Exclusion of press and public

As with physical meetings press and public must leave if the items that follow fall within the scope of Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. This requires members of the public and press be excluded for the remainder of the meeting, because it is likely that publicity would prejudice the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business or for other special reasons stated in the resolution, arising from the nature of the business or proceedings. Additionally, recording the proceedings is required to stop so doing so once a resolution to exclude members of the press and public has been made.

3. Changes to administration and decision making during the emergency as agreed at Full council on 30 March 2020

4.1 Minute FC 45/20 is set out below:

CORONAVIRUS

FC 45/20 Arrangements for meetings and Town Council administration and decision making during the COVID-19/Coronavirus Emergency

The arrangements were discussed thoroughly. It was then **RESOLVED** that for the period during which emergency measures are in place to limit the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, the following procedures are to be implemented:

- (i) A de minimis approach will be taken in the preparation of the agenda for Full Council, Standing Committees and Working Parties (if meetings go ahead);
- (ii) Such meeting will be conducted via e-mail or through remote meeting technology. It was noted that the anticipated

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- government regulations for remote meetings are awaited and advice has been received from NALC regarding meetings;
- (iii) No face to face meetings are to be scheduled;
 - (iv) Agenda will be posted on notice boards (if possible) and the website. Each agenda will invite members of the public to e-mail comments to the office for circulation to all councillors in advance of the meeting;
 - (v) Minutes will be prepared on the basis of councillor e-mail comments or remote discussions;
 - (vi) As per FP 18/20 (ii) arrangements are in place for staff home working as necessary. A new laptop has been ordered. In the light of advice given by the Prime Minister on 23 March 2020, the majority of working will be from home;
 - (vii) The Town Clerk will liaise with signatories to ensure that payments are made and is authorised by the Town Council to set up, if possible, payments by direct debit. During cheque signing PPE and social distancing will be employed;
 - (viii) Matters that require urgent decision and action will be discussed by the Town Clerk with the Town Mayor and Cllr A Armytage. Following such discussions, the appropriate and agreed action will be taken. All Councillors will be advised by e-mail;
 - (ix) Councillors noted that an indication had been given that the deadline for the submissions of the AGAR and accounts would be extended. However, the relevant regulations had still to be enacted. The External Auditors, PKF Littlejohn made the following statement in an e-mail to town and parish clerks dated 24 March:
*“...our instructions for the completion of the 2019/20 AGAR will not be issued until such time as there is more clarity over the implications for smaller authorities.
We are in close contact with SAAA and the National Audit Office (NAO) who in turn are in close contact with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)...”*
 - (x) At the time of setting the agenda advice from NALC, HAPTC and HM Government is coming through on a daily basis. Therefore, it is proposed that these measures be reviewed on receipt of future advice and any changes proposed agreed by the Town Clerk, the Town Mayor, Cllr A Armytage and circulated to councillors.

4. Grant awards in support of charities, groups and organisations offering community support during the crisis – changes to grant awarding policy for such circumstances agreed at Full Council on 30 March 2020.

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5.1 Minute FC 46/20 is set out below:

**Support for Local Initiatives during coronavirus crisis.
Berkhamsted Community Volunteering - Open Door; AgeUK
Dacorum, Berkhamsted District Chamber of Commerce and local
Facebook group**

(i) It was **noted** that in the last week the Town Clerk has been in discussion with AgeUK Dacorum about the partnership planning that has been taking place to enable volunteers to work together to provide low level needs for people, not just the elderly, affected by self-isolation. Work is still in its early days, but the group is beginning to merge together with members from Open Door, the Berkhamsted Community Facebook Group, Age UK Dacorum and BDCC. A number of people are volunteering but all have to go through a DBS check. A lot of food has been delivered to Open Door for the food bank and the teams are deliberating over what should go into a package. There is also been very good cross communication and people identified who will be allocated a qualified volunteer. There is still a lot of work to be done and a number of unknowns remain, most critically, the total number who will require help;

(ii) The following is an estimate of costs prepared by the group:

Items	£
Gloves, PPE, sanitisers ad cleaning	1,000
DBS applications	2,300
needed	assuming 100
ID Cards and badges	500
Freezer for Food Bank at Open Door	500
Printing Stationery and IT	1,000
Insurance	700
Storage containers	300
Incidental Expenses	700
Total	7,000
Contingency 20%	1,400
Overall Total	8,400

(iii) It was **noted** that Cllr Ian Reay (HCC) has already indicated that he would be willing to contribute £7,000 from his locality budget;

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- (iv) Following a discussion, it was **RESOLVED** that the Town Council should fund the 20% contingency to be made available as soon as possible (£1,400);
- (v) Councillors then **considered the motion** that the Town Council should, in addition, create a budget of £3,600 that the group can ask to draw from in the future as the situation regarding demand crystallises. Request for funding from this budget would be approved by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Town Mayor and Cllr A Armytage.

Cllr P White put forward an amendment to the above motion and proposed that the Town Council should also create an additional £15,000 budget, to be funded from its reserves, as a provision to support the foodbank project. The funds shall be to fill any short-fall between donations received and demand from local residents, i.e. shall be used to purchase essential food items when donations are insufficient. The funds could be released upon approval by the F&P Committee or Full Council subject to receipt of an operational plan, including potential demand and proposals to meet it, safeguarding procedures and financial oversight procedures. The budget should be released in tranches, as decided by the F & P Committee or Full Council.

During discussion Councillors were very supportive of offering help and the above proposals were carefully considered. The types of foodbank service available were discussed. The organisers had advised the Town Clerk that the criteria for foodbanks generally is that they supply people who cannot afford food. However, there will be older and vulnerable people who do not meet this criteria who will increasingly run out of cash and food. The food bank referred to in (i) and (ii) is to be used for emergencies when a client is unable to access food or daily essentials. This will provide food to ensure older and vulnerable people are not left without food. In parallel a volunteer shopper service is being set up. Councillors also expressed support for earmarking additional funds that could then be requested by community support groups during the crisis, for various activities including food bank provision.

Following a vote (8 for with one abstention) the following was **RESOLVED:**

- As already resolved under FC 46/20 (iv) above the Town Council should fund the 20% contingency to be made available as soon as possible (£1,400) to the local volunteering group via Age UK Dacorum;

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- As set out in FC 46/20 (v) the Town Council should, in addition, create a budget of £3,600 that the group, via Age UK Dacorum, can ask to draw from in the future as the situation regarding demand and services crystallises. Request for funding from this budget would be approved by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Town Mayor and Cllr A Armytage.
- As a **separate initiative** to the above, a £15,000 earmarked reserves fund will be created. Funding from this reserve could be made available to volunteering organisations, groups or charities serving the people of Berkhamsted to mitigate the impact of the the current crisis (including its aftermath). £15,000 is the total amount and would cover a number of separate applications. Such applications should be made to the Town Clerk and should include details of the service (s) offered, safeguarding measures, other funding applied for, project plan and financial controls. On receipt of an application the Town Clerk would contact all members of the F&P Committee for consideration and authorisation of such applications.

Action Town Clerk/Cllrs A Armytage and G Stevens/ F & P Members

NB A separate grant application form is now available for applications made under the above procedures and this is on the Town Council's website:

[Click here](#)

JM 20-05-20