

Briefing Note
Full Council Monday 12th April 2021
Returning to Face-To-Face Meetings

The letter from the minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government has been circulated to Cllrs, a further copy is attached to this briefing note, confirming that the Government will not be extending the regulations to permit remote meetings, this means from the 7th May 2021 Council meetings, including Committee meetings but excluding Working Party Meetings, will return to face-to-face.

The Parish Council's Annual Parish Council Meeting has been moved to 7pm on Tuesday 4th May 2021 which means this can continue as a remote meeting. As it stands at the moment the May Committee meetings will need to be face-to-face.

Face-to-face meetings are required to comply with COVID-Secure and social distancing regulations and be open to the public. The Beechfield Centre can accommodate 10 people socially distanced, therefore, Committee meetings, subject to public attendance, could be held in the Beechfield Centre, but Full Council meetings will have to be held elsewhere, we are currently pursuing the capacity and availability of the Fremington Parish Hall to facilitate meetings.

A court case is being pursued by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) that the existing regulations permit remote meetings, however, a decision is not expected on this until the end of April at the earliest.

The Parish Council needs to consider how it will protect and ensure the safety of Cllrs, members of the public and staff in attending meetings from the 7th May 2021, especially those that are vulnerable or shielding.

Some of the options available and being considered by other Councils are listed below for your consideration:

1. Delegate decisions to the Executive Officer – this would mean that Council and Committee meetings do not have to be legally convened and can be held remotely, Cllrs could debate and advise the officer of decisions in the same way you would at meetings, but all decisions would be made under delegated authority and then could not be challenged as unlawful.
2. Only Cllrs must be physically present at Council meetings, therefore the public and Officer(s) can attend via a remote link the cost of the equipment to facilitate is currently being pursued, this would reduce the number of people present and therefore the risk.
3. If the weather is dry, then meetings could be held outside, but this is obviously weather dependant and not reliable, it does not facilitate a secure platform for confidential matters.
4. Continue with remote meetings on the pretence that it is a pandemic, and the Council is protecting the health and safety of its members, staff and members of the public, several other town and parish councils are taking the stance that so many will continue with remote meetings it is unlikely that decisions will be

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challenged in a court of law and if they are the courts will not have time to deal with all of the cases – this is not a way forward that I would recommend and if the Council is inclined to proceed then I would suggest you ensure you consider all of the implications and build a strong evidence base for the decision.

Please note – whichever format the Council decides to proceed with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return cannot be delegated and must be agreed at a Council meeting, therefore, a physical Full Council meeting will have to be held in June to agree the AGAR ahead of the submission deadline.

I would not suggest making a decision at the April Meeting but instead asking questions and considering the options available ready to make a decision on the way forward at the May 2021 meeting.

V Woodhouse
April 2021



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Luke Hall MP

*Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local
Government*

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25 March 2021

Dear Colleague,

LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS

It is just over a year to the day since the Prime Minister asked us all to stay at home, and local authorities across England have risen magnificently to the challenges of this period. There has been a dramatic shift in your day-to-day operations, alongside new difficulties and demands, and I commend the efforts of all councillors and officers in supporting your communities and ensuring vital business continues during these unprecedented times.

As you will be aware, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 do not apply to meetings on or after 7 May 2021.

Extending the regulations to meetings beyond May 7 would require primary legislation. The Government has considered the case for legislation very carefully, including the significant impact it would have on the Government's legislative programme which is already under severe pressure in these unprecedented times. We are also mindful of the excellent progress that has been made on our vaccination programme and the announcement of the Government's roadmap for lifting Covid-19 restrictions. Given this context, the Government has concluded that it is not possible to bring forward emergency legislation on this issue at this time.

As outlined in the Government's Spring 2021 Covid-19 Response, our aim is for everyone aged 50 and over and people with underlying health conditions to have been offered a first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine by 15 April, and a second dose by mid-July. While local authorities have been able to hold meetings in person at any time during the pandemic with appropriate measures in place, the successful rollout of the vaccine and the reduction in cases of Covid-19 should result in a significant reduction in risk for local authority members meeting in person from May 7, as reflected in the Government's plan to ease Covid-19 restrictions over the coming months.

I recognise there may be concerns about holding face-to-face meetings. Ultimately it is for local authorities to apply the Covid-19 guidance to ensure meetings take place safely, but we have updated our guidance on the safe use of council buildings to highlight ways in which you can, if necessary, minimise the risk of face-to-face meetings, and we will work with

I am copying this letter to the Mayor of London, the chairs of the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils, as well as the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in respect of other authorities covered by the current meetings regulations, including fire and rescue authorities, police and crime panels, national park authorities, the Broads Authority, and conservation boards.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L Hall'.

LUKE HALL MP

Cc. Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary
Rt. Hon. George Eustice MP, Environment Secretary
Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London
Cllr. James Jamieson, LGA Chairman
Cllr. Sue Baxter, NALC Chairman