

In-person Council and Committee Meeting Protocol

Background

This protocol applies to in-person meetings held whilst restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic are in place. This protocol has been written to align to Government guidance and regulations and will be updated as these evolve.

General Principles

The Council will seek to hold its public meetings in ways that are lawful, transparent and safe for all who are involved.

Whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place, this means:

- Holding meetings in person when we are legally required to do so, or there is a clear necessity to do so.
- Holding meetings virtually in all other situations.

Practices when operating in-person meetings

Prior to the meeting, the room will have been set up by the Facilities Management staff and no furniture should subsequently be re-arranged. All desks and microphones will have been sanitised for your use. There will be a dedicated desk and microphone for public speaking and both will be sanitised between uses. Disposable masks will be available for anyone who doesn't have their own and hand sanitiser will be provided.

Government guidelines encourage all adults without COVID-19 symptoms to take regular rapid lateral flow tests in order to help prevent the spread of infection as restrictions ease. Tests can be obtained easily in the following ways:

- By going to a test centre. To find your nearest centre please visit <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rapidtesting>
- By collecting a free pack of tests from many pharmacies – more information about local collection points is available at <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>
- By ordering a free set of tests online at <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

Arriving at the meeting:

- Please arrive no more than 10 minutes before the start of the meeting (or, if you are only attending for part of the meeting, the time you have been advised by Officers).
- Please wear a facemask upon entry to the building and follow all instructions such as the one-way system and lift capacity. Where applicable, these are clearly indicated on signs throughout the building.
- Please maintain social distancing when inside the building.
- Please record your attendance via the track and trace function that will be available upon arrival at the meeting room.
- Please use hand sanitiser from the station or bring your own if you prefer.
- Please take a seat in the public seating area promptly and do not wander around.
- Once you are seated, you may remove your facemask.

In the meeting:

- If you are registered to speak at the meeting then please remain seated until the Chairman invites your contribution. Please wear your mask when moving between the seating area and the public speaking desk.
- Please bring a drink with you. You are welcome to bring hot or cold drinks but no drinks will be supplied in order to reduce handling and avoid congestion.

- If a meeting is due to last for a long period, there will be designated breaks which will be announced at the meeting. Please follow instructions from the Officers and endeavour to maintain social distancing. Please wear your mask whenever you move away from your seat.
- You are welcome to use the facilities at any time. Remember to put your mask back on to do so.

After the meeting

- Please put your mask back on as soon as you leave your seat.
- Please take all belongings and any rubbish with you.
- Please leave the meeting promptly in accordance with the instructions from Officers.

FAQs

Many of us have already been vaccinated. Do we really need some of the suggested restrictions and protocols?

As a Council, it is important that we support efforts to restrict the spread of the coronavirus. Even though many people have been vaccinated, they can still spread the disease and catch it.

When we run Committee meetings in person, we have to comply with the current guidance on holding meetings in the workplace. This requires us to keep attendees to only those who are necessary, have 2m social distancing between participants (or 1m+ with risk mitigation), and enact these types of protocols.

Why are we so restricted in the amount of people in committee meetings when indoor venues can now operate events with higher capacity?

The government has different guidance according to the type of events being held. The guidance related to holding workplace meetings recommends 2m distance between participants, or 1m+ with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable. This in turn restricts the capacity of venues.

What about public participation?

By law all meetings have to be “open to the public” and of course, we want to make our meetings as open and transparent as we can. We have to balance the requirement to be open to the public with government guidance and health and safety restrictions. We are therefore encouraging the public to register in advance, where possible, so that we have an idea of expected numbers, and to consider attending only for the specific item(s) of relevance to them rather than for the whole meeting.

Why are some meetings being held in person and some meetings virtually?

Our meetings work under different legal frameworks.

The High Court has decided that Council, and meetings of Council Committees (such as Planning Committee), must be held in a specific, geographic place and those attending the meeting must be physically present at that place. It has also ruled that any meetings which require public attendance must be in-person too. If we continued to meet virtually, any decisions we make could be legally challenged.

Meetings that do not make decisions and/or do not require public attendance can continue to operate virtually.

There is a specific exemption relating to premises hearings under the Licensing Act 2003: they can continue to meet virtually.