



## **SUPPLEMENT TO STANDING ORDERS - REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURE RULES**

The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 “The Regulations” which came into operation with effect from 25th June makes provision for remote attendance at council and committee meetings by members of a council and requires a council to make standing orders regarding the decision to hold a meeting remotely, the conduct of and access by the public.

This supplement should be read in conjunction with Standing Orders 2(a) and 2(b) which give effect to that.

### [Introduction and Application of the Remote Meetings Procedure Rules](#)

This Protocol and Procedure Rules sets out the basis upon which any remote meeting of the Council, and its various Committees, will be held.

This Protocol and Procedure Rules should be read in conjunction with the Council’s Standing Orders. The Regulations make modifications to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The effect of the Regulations on the Authority’s Constitution is to insert what are, in effect, mandatory Standing Orders if the Council wishes to hold meetings remotely, either wholly or partially.

A reference in any enactment of a council or committee meeting is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and a reference to a “place” where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital, or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

#### [1. Public Access](#)

- 1.1 All meetings will be held in a hybrid format.
- 1.2 The public can access all meetings in-person.
- 1.3 In addition, these meetings will be streamed live, and can be accessed through the Council’s website. Those details will be published on the Council’s website and on social media.
- 1.4 It is important to note that the public accessing the meeting by remote means, as described here, is different from the public attending to exercise a right to speak. A technological failure removing the ability for the public to access the meeting by remote means does not render the whole or part of a meeting incapable of proceeding. A member of the public who attends to exercise their



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right to speak and is unable to do so renders only their item incapable of proceeding (This is set out paragraph 3 below).

- 1.5 All documents for the meetings will be uploaded through the software as per normal procedures.
- 1.6 These will be available to the public via the Council's website.
- 1.7 Access to meetings and documents will be limited for "exempt" issues as set out in paragraph 6.1.

### 2. Management of Remote Meetings for Members

- 2.1 Democratic Services will give the requisite notice of the time of the meeting, and the agenda, together with details of how to join the meeting.
- 2.2 Members will be notified of a remote meeting by email and all agenda papers will be available on the Council's website and the Modern.Gov app.
- 2.3 Remote access to meetings will be via Microsoft Teams. The meetings will be facilitated by officers from Democratic Services and Digital Services.
- 2.4 If this is not possible, attendance may be through an audio link or by electronic means.
- 2.5 Any Member participating in a meeting remotely, must when they are speaking, be able to be heard (and be seen where practicable) by all other Members in attendance, and the remote participant must, in turn, be able to hear (and see where practicable) those other Members participating.
- 2.6 In addition, a remote participant must be able to be heard by, and in turn hear any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting and who exercise a right to speak at the meeting.
- 2.7 The Chairperson will normally confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of a Committee meeting that they can see and hear all participating members (this is unlikely to be practical for a meeting of full Council). Any Member participating remotely should also confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of the meeting that they can see and hear the proceedings and the other participants.
- 2.8 The attendance of those members at the meeting will be recorded by the Democratic Services Officer.



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- 2.9 The normal quorum requirements for meetings as set out in the Council's Standing Orders will also apply to a remote meeting.
- 2.10 In the event of any apparent failure of the video, telephone or conferencing connection, the Chairperson should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate:
- if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or
  - if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chairperson, expected to be no more than fifteen minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established.
- 2.11 Should any aspect of a Member's remote participation fail, the Chairperson may call a short adjournment of up to five minutes or so to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established, either by video technology or telephone in the alternative. If the connection is not restored within that time, the meeting should continue to deal with the business whilst this happens, providing the meeting remains quorate and the public are able to hear.
- 2.12 In the event of connection failure, the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Member(s) before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with the item(s).
- 2.13 If the connection is successfully re-established, then the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment.
- 2.14 If a connection to a Member is lost during a regulatory meeting, the Chairperson will stop the meeting to enable the connection to be restored. If the connection cannot be restored within a reasonable time, the meeting will proceed.



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### 3. Remote Attendance of the Public

- 3.1 Any member of the public participating in a meeting remotely in exercise of their right to speak at Council or in regulatory or other meetings must meet the same criteria as members of the Council. Members of the public attending a meeting remotely must, likewise, when they are speaking be able to be heard (and ideally be seen) by all other Members in attendance, and the remote participant must, in turn, be able to hear (and ideally see) those other members participating be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.
- 3.2 A process is in place which requires advance notification from members of the public wishing to attend remotely (if practicable). For those items of business, an invitation to participate in the remote technology can then be sent out in advance.
- 3.3 Alternatively, if the Council is unable to provide a technological solution, the existing public speaking rights will be replaced with public participation by receipt of representations in writing only, unless there is an express legislative provision which requires the person to be given the opportunity to appear before and be heard by the Committee. Submissions received from the public can then be read out by the Chairperson or a supporting officer.
- 3.4 The Democratic Services Officer or meeting facilitator should mute the member of the public once they have spoken, and remove them from the remote meeting on the instruction of the Chairperson, in order to maintain the good administration of the meeting or to retain order.
- 3.5 A breakdown of the technology should not disadvantage the member of the public in remote attendance wherever possible.



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### 4 Meeting Procedures

- 4.1 Democratic Services will facilitate the meeting. Their role will be to control the video, telephone or conferencing technology employed for remote access and attendance and to administer the public and Member interaction, engagement, and connections on the instruction of the Chairperson.
- 4.2 Given the reliance on technology it is particularly important that those making proposals or amendments differing from or in addition to report recommendations should, where possible, ensure these are provided to Democratic Services in advance of the meeting also. Political Parties are also encouraged to co-ordinate this activity wherever possible in respect of full Council meetings and other meetings likely to result in a high number of requests to speak. This is particularly important if Members are unable to participate via video conference.
- 4.3 The Chairperson will follow the rules set out in Standing Orders when determining who may speak, as well as the order and priority of speakers and the content and length of speeches in the normal way.
- 4.4 The Chairperson, at the beginning of the meeting, will explain the protocol for member and public participation and the rules of debate. The Chair's ruling during the debate will be final.
- 4.5 Members are asked to adhere to the following etiquette during remote attendance at a meeting:
- Committee members are asked to join the meeting no later than fifteen minutes before the start to allow themselves and the meeting facilitator the opportunity to test the equipment.
  - Any camera (video-feed) should show a non-descript background or, where possible, a virtual background and members should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
  - Mute the microphone when not talking.
  - Rather than raising one's hand or rising to be recognised or to speak, Members should avail themselves of the remote process for requesting to be heard:
    - [e.g., where available]
    - Members are to use any chat facility to indicate to the Chairperson that they wish to speak. Members will unmute their microphone and turn their cameras on when the Chairperson invites them to speak. **The chat facility must not be used for private conversations between Councillors.**



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- Only speak when invited to by the Chairperson
- Only one person may speak at any one time
- Turn on the microphone and also the video-feed (if available or unless speaking to a diagram, presentation slide or drawing), then state your name before you make a comment
- When referring to a specific report, page, or slide, mention the report, page, or slide so that all members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

4.6 Where members of the public are exercising speaking rights at the meeting via remote attendance, the Chairperson will, as part of their introduction, explain the procedure for their participation which will reflect those relevant elements of the above. Members of the public must adhere to this procedure otherwise they may be excluded from the meeting.

### Voting

4.7 When satisfied that there has been sufficient debate, the Chairperson will ask for a proposer and seconder for the item being discussed and progress to making a decision. Unless a Recorded Vote is called, the method of voting will be as follows:

- Where there is a clear recommendation(s) in a report, the Chairperson will put the recommendation(s) forward. If there is no dissent then it is taken as agreed; or
- If there is a single amendment to the recommendation(s) or an alternative proposal, the Chairperson will put this forward. If there is no dissent then it is taken as agreed; or
- Where there is dissent or more than on proposal/amendment, these will be dealt with in the normal manner by means of a vote.
- Voting will take place as follows:
  - an officer will call out the name of each member present with:
  - members stating 'for', 'against', or 'abstain' to indicate their vote when their name is called
  - the Democratic Services Officer clearly stating the result of the vote
  - once confirmed the Chairperson will then move onto the next agenda item

4.8 Details of how Members voted will not be minuted (the minutes will, as normal practice state the numbers for and the numbers against) unless a Recorded Vote is called. Where a Recorded Vote is requested the Chair will ask members in turn to signify verbally whether or not they support that request.



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### **Leaving a Meeting**

- 4.9 Members leaving the meeting should use the chat facility or otherwise indicate to the Chairperson that they are exiting the meeting. Failure to do this will lead to an assumption that the Member has dropped out through a technology failure. The meeting may be adjourned to re-establish the remote link or to utilise the alternative phone connection. The Chairperson of the meeting will check with Members, joined to the meeting by phone, if they wish to make any contribution during discussion on any item. As the technology will make it difficult to monitor drop out at a Council meeting at which 60 Members may be present, a number will be provided enabling a message to be conveyed by text to Democratic Services.

### 5 Declaration of Interests

- 5.1 Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or other declarable interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. Their departure will be confirmed by the Democratic Services Officer or meeting facilitator, who will invite the relevant Member by link, email or telephone, to re-join the meeting at the appropriate time.

### 6 Exclusion of Public and Press

- 6.1 There are times when Council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or “exempt” issues (as defined in Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972) are under consideration. Where the technology is available, the Democratic Services Officer or meeting facilitator will ensure that there are no members of the public in remote attendance or remotely accessing the meeting are able to hear or see the proceedings once the exclusion has been agreed by the meeting.
- 6.2 Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings.