

VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY – WESTGATE-ON-SEA TOWN COUNCIL

Virtual meetings are to be treated the same as normal meetings for standards of behaviour and conduct. The virtual meetings will be recorded and posted on the Town Council website – the reputation of the Council should be respected. The legislation that covers remote meetings can be found in regulations LO1-20 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020.

Before the meeting:

- Ensure you log on at least fifteen minutes early for the meeting and allow for any connection issues to be resolved.
- Ensure you are visible, and background is not cluttered.
- Follow protocols about how to vote and request to speak.

During the meeting:

- You should remain muted unless you wish to speak.
- Wait to be invited to speak and speak clearly
- Make sure everyone can contribute and check all present can see and/or hear what is being discussed, particularly for any decisions as this reinforces the process of resolutions.
- If a Member loses connection during an item debate they will not be permitted to vote if they have missed part or all of the discussion as they will not be in a position to make an informed decision.
- If the meeting is not quorate as a result of poor connections, a time out to wait for Members to connect back in will be permitted of five minutes.
- Any presentations should ideally be sent to Members before the meeting and use screen sharing to guide the conversation.
- Each item should contain a summary at the conclusion to signify the item is completed and that any decisions are recorded concisely.

After the meeting:

- Before leaving the meeting, spend a few minutes to reflect on the meeting, what went well and what can be improved?

Remote Public Participation

- The public access session will include an opportunity to ask questions to Council and the link directly to the virtual meeting is available on the Agenda, this can be found in the Town Council noticeboards and on the Town Council website at least three clear days (not including Sundays or Bank Holidays) before the meeting takes place.
- A maximum of TWO members of the public may speak remotely by submitting a question at a meeting. The question must relate to a matter affecting the Parish of Westgate-on-Sea and/or its residents. Each submission must last no longer than three minutes in total.
- Any such question can alternatively be delivered by way of a written statement to be submitted by email by midday on the day of the Council meeting, to be read out by the Clerk during the meeting, if the member of the public does not have access to email, a question can be submitted by a representative on their behalf.

- Any member of the public who wishes to attend the Council meeting must provide their name when joining the virtual meeting before being admitted from the virtual waiting room by the Clerk.
- Any request to raise a question by a member of the public should be advised to the Clerk in writing prior to the commencement of the Council meeting.
- If there are more than two requests to participate from residents the system will operate on the basis of “first come, first served” as identified by the Clerk. The Clerk will confirm as soon as possible as to whether or not you will be able to participate virtually.
- If it is possible to provide a response to your question at the meeting, we will do so. If it is not possible a response will be provided in writing – usually within 28 days of the meeting taking place.

Laws of Libel and Slander

- These laws are very strict.
- If, in public, you say something about a person that is not true, even if you believe it to be true, you may be sued and have to pay compensation. Therefore, you need to be careful about any criticism you wish to make of people in any written submission.
- Councillors are able to speak more freely and bluntly while in Council or Committee meetings than members of the public.
- You, as a member of the public, do not have the same protection.