

Desborough Town Council Protocol on remote access to meetings

Background

This protocol will be observed for all meetings under the direction of Desborough Town Council to which *the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020* apply. Meetings are open to the public and press unless there is an overriding reason for confidentiality (set out in other legislation). The protocol applies to everyone logging into meetings whether they are “participants” (voting Councillors and non-Councillor voting members); Unitary, Borough or County Councillors representing wards in Desborough; or “visitors” (members of the press and public). The protocol will be reviewed periodically and alterations may be made as a result.

Behaviours

The Council will not accept or tolerate any inappropriate behaviours, comments, postings, or contributions. Standing Orders including Standing Order 6.4 apply to remotely accessed meetings. However, given the immediate and potentially highly offensive nature of online abuse any suspected infringement will result in the host muting the feed from the alleged offender, returning them to the waiting room, and reporting the matter to the Chair. The Chair may either direct the host to close the connection to the party concerned if possible, or to readmit them to the meeting. The Chair may issue warnings about behaviour if they see fit. If it is not possible to exclude any contribution or contributor then the meeting may be terminated on the direction of the Chair, and resumed immediately afterwards excluding the party concerned. All those attending the meeting should be mindful that they may be seen, heard, and recorded; they should act in a manner appropriate to a formal Council meeting (this includes the use of virtual backgrounds and other images on screen); and be mindful that apps can access personal information.

1. Before the Meeting

- 1.1. The Town Clerk will make arrangements for the virtual meeting room and will publish the access information with the agenda.
- 1.2. At least two hours before the meeting, all participants should declare to the Town Clerk any interest in any matter to be discussed. If as a result of any interest declared, any participant would normally be required to leave the meeting room then the item may be moved to minimise the disruption to the meeting when the participant with the interest leaves the virtual meeting room.

2. Start of meeting

- 2.1. The Town Clerk will open the meeting room fifteen minutes before the advertised start time for the meeting and admit participants.
- 2.2. All participants:-
 - (a) will be unmuted as they enter the meeting room;
 - (b) will be asked to test their connection to ensure that they can hear and be heard by others, and if possible to see and be seen by others;
 - (c) should confirm that they are in as quiet a location as possible and that others will not interrupt or disrupt proceedings;
 - (d) should turn mobile phones off or to silent, unless being used for remote access to the meeting.

3. During the Meeting

- 3.1. The host will admit visitors to the meeting who will remain muted and with cameras turned off.
- 3.2. The Chair will welcome everyone to the meeting and will provide information for attendees.
- 3.3. The meeting protocol will be broadly as it would be in a traditional meeting in the Council's normal meeting rooms; in summary:-
 - all contributions must go through the Chair,
 - items will be introduced,
 - participants may discuss the matter or ask questions which may be answered,
 - any visitors who wish to put forward views (and who are invited to do so by the Chair) may do so,
 - the discussion may be summed up by the Chair, and motions moved, and any vote taken.
- 3.4. If any participant leaves the meeting for whatever reason during a debate and rejoins:-
 - (a) during the same discussion, this will not be recorded in the minutes;
 - (b) after the voting on that issue, the absence will be recorded in the minutes.

4. Speaking and voting

- 4.1. Any participant who wishes to speak must raise their hand and clearly indicate to the Chair who will direct the order of speaking. (Visitors who wish to speak should so indicate so using the guidance on the agenda.)
- 4.2. Voting at remote meetings will be carried out by a clear show of hands, by a roll call of Councillors' names and asking them to state their vote, or by another method of voting should a platform allow it, as determined by the Chair of the meeting. The Town Clerk will read back the votes of each participant for clarification if necessary. Votes will only be listed in the minutes if a recorded vote is properly requisitioned.