



## Perth & Kinross Council – Virtual Committee Protocol

June 2021

### Why have a virtual committee protocol ?

The objectives of this Protocol are to help ensure the Council's virtual meetings are productive, conducted with courtesy and enhance the Council's reputation; and to mitigate any risks to the health and wellbeing of elected members, non-elected members, officers and members of the public.

Members of the public can view meetings which are held in public as they take place by accessing the link to the meeting via the Council's website. Meetings are also recorded and are available to view on YouTube, normally within a couple of days of the meeting.

This protocol is intended as guidance for use during virtual meetings and to supplement (not amend or supersede) the [Council's Standing Orders](#).

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Virtual council/committee meetings are relatively new to both officers and elected members and have been a vital means of ensuring democratic decision making continues throughout the Coronavirus pandemic. We must all work together to maintain public confidence in our democratic decision-making process.

## 2. Calling of meetings

- 2.1 Invitations to attend virtual meetings will be sent out electronically following the publication of the agenda and reports.
- 2.2 Reports will be made available electronically, wherever possible, at least 6 days before the meeting. Members are encouraged to view their papers electronically, using their surface pros and large monitors. If elected members wish a printed copy of the agenda document pack, they should advise their secretary as soon as possible. There is currently limited access to large photocopiers so as much notice as possible is required.

## 3. Attending meetings

- 3.1 Options for breaks during meetings will be considered at the start of the meeting and determined by the Convener in consultation with all members.
  - A lunch break of an hour will also be agreed by the Committee if the meeting is likely to go beyond 12.30pm.
  - All meetings will conclude by 5.00pm or as agreed at the meeting– If any item of business has not been commenced by then the item will be presented at the next appropriate meeting of the Committee/Council as appropriate.
  - If any member of the Committee wants an unscheduled break where practicable they should make the request to the Convener in the chat facility in the first instance.
- 3.2 Please try to join at least 15 minutes before the start time of the meeting to ensure your internet connection is stable. Make sure that your device is fully charged and plugged in whenever possible.
- 3.3 It is recommended that you activate the blurred background setting in Microsoft Teams or download and use one of the corporate backgrounds. No other backgrounds should be used.
- 3.4 You should consider having an alternative device on stand-by, such as your Council or personal mobile phone, which can be used in the event of any connectivity problem. If Microsoft Teams is installed on your mobile phone, whilst you would be able to watch the live meeting on your phone just like a member of the public, you would not be able to participate. The producers of the meeting will monitor the attendance of all members and try to resolve any issues, however if your connection issues persist, in order to continue to participate you would need to dial into the meeting from your phone. Prior to each meeting, please take a note of the specific number dial-in details which are available in the calendar invite.

- 3.5 If you continue to experience any issues you should contact the IT helpdesk on **01738 476677** or Committee Services on **07827 661096** as soon as practicable.
- 3.6 The Convener/Vice Convener may decide to pause proceedings before starting a debate or vote if they are aware of any member's connectivity issues. Once a roll call vote has commenced, if a member does not state their vote due to a technical issue, they will be asked if they can cast their vote via the chat function. If there has been a loss of connection, a member can contact committee services via the mobile number above either by text or call to confirm their voting intention. A member may also indicate at any point during the vote that they have re-established their connection and their vote will be made at that point. If a member indicates that they have re-established their connection at the conclusion of the vote and they still wish to cast their vote, having not already confirmed their intention using any of the methods above, then it will **not** be accepted.

#### 4. Meeting etiquette

- 4.1 In line with Standing Orders, the Convener shall decide all matters of procedure, competency and relevancy. The Convener's ruling shall be final and shall not be open to discussion. Councillors may bring forward motions and amendments on procedural matters. Procedural advice is available for the Convener/Vice Convener (or any other elected member if requested) via a separate chat facility during the meeting.
- 4.2 A roll call will be taken by Committee Services at the start of every meeting to confirm to both meeting participants and the public that all Councillors are present. This will be recorded in the minute.
- 4.3 Before the meeting starts, please ensure that your mic is muted. You should only unmute your mic when you are invited to speak. Once you have finished speaking, you should mute your mic again. If you forget to mute your mic, one of the producers will mute you. This will reduce background noise and feedback.

Producers will mute all mics during any recess. You should remain on mute and switch your camera off until the Convener announces that the recess has ended, as the meeting will continue to be recorded and live broadcast.

Should Councillors wish to have a private discussion with other members or officers during a recess, they should leave the Live Event and either - enter a pre-arranged separate Microsoft Teams meeting or one member of the group should create a group call to hold their discussions. Before the agreed restart time of the Committee members/officers should ensure that they have left their private chat and re-entered the Live Event. If members/officers haven't reappeared in the Live Event, the producers can call them back in.

- 4.4 If you are comfortable with switching your camera on and off you can do so, otherwise please turn your camera on and leave it on throughout the meeting. If you have requested to speak, please ensure that you switch your camera on

in advance of being invited to speak. This will help the producers to obtain your feed for the broadcast.

4.5 Use the chat facility, when you wish to: -

- ask a question - Q,
- make a comment - C
- raise a point of order - PO
- raise a point of clarification - PC
- propose a motion - M
- propose an amendment – AM
- second a motion – 2M
- second an amendment – 2A
- officer available to answer question – A
- break required - B

By using the chat in this way, the Convener can see that you wish to contribute to the meeting and will invite you to speak at the appropriate time.

Do not use the chat function to have general chats or to add any additional information, even if you think it might be useful. The public cannot see chat correspondence and it undermines the transparency of proceedings.

The information in the Live Event chat is subject to Freedom of Information requests. While a chat entry can be subsequently deleted, the system will contain a record of the entry and the full chat history including the entry and deletion will be released if a Freedom of Information request is received.

4.6 Reports – the Convener/Chair will ask the appropriate officer to introduce the report – the officer will make short introductory remarks.

The Convener will invite Councillors to ask questions.

- It is always helpful if Councillors can send any questions, they may have to the author of the report in advance of the meeting. Councillors should still ask their question on the day, this will assist the flow of discussion and increases the likelihood that the information can be provided.
- It would be helpful if Councillors could group questions on any particular topic. Councillors should keep their questions succinct and to the point. Where applicable, they should indicate which part of the report their question refers to. Councillors should avoid making statements in the lead up to their questions or in place of questions.
- Officers should also keep their response to questions succinct and to the point.

4.7 Moving Motions or Amendments – to assist the flow of the meeting, the Convener/Vice-Convener will advise the Committee when moving a motion/amendment. All other members should use the chat facility (separate arrangements at Council meetings).

- If Councillors know in advance of the meeting that they intend to put forward an amendment to a report, they should consider forwarding it in

advance to the Committee officer, ideally 1-2 days before the meeting. This will allow the competency of the amendment to be confirmed prior to the meeting and avoid any unnecessary delays during the meeting. Councillors are asked to contact officers in Legal and Governance Services in advance of the meeting to discuss any planning related amendments they are considering, this would be without prejudice to the consideration of the full merits of the application which will be established at the meeting.

- Should a motion or amendment require further discussion on competency during a meeting, this will be considered during a short recess/break out with the meeting. Committee Services will advise on the process and make the necessary arrangements.
- Councillors should follow the procedure described in paragraph 4.5 to show a wish to move or second motions and amendments.

4.8 Timing - By adhering to timescales set out in Standing Orders, it is hoped to have informed debates and reduce the length of time taken during the debate.

- Councillors should not speak for more than **5 minutes** in a debate, except by permission of the Convener.
- No Councillor shall speak more than once (except when raising a point of order, making a point of clarification, moving or seconding a procedural motion) in a debate on any one motion and amendment.

4.9 Deputations at Committee – committees will be asked if they agree to hear a deputation and whether they wish to re-order the business to hear the deputation immediately before the item. Arrangements will have been made in advance and those members of the public will be invited to join the meeting via telephone. Any Councillor wishing to make a deputation to the meeting can do so by using Microsoft Teams or via the telephone.

- Any member of the Council may, with the Convener's agreement, put a relevant question to a deputation but shall not express any opinion on the subject or the position being taken by the deputation until the deputation has withdrawn.
- The questioning of deputations should be undertaken with respect. The questions should be clear and succinct. If the deputation is being made by phone, it is possible that they will not have had sight of the material displayed to councillors during the meeting and allowance should be made for this.
- The time available for such questions shall not exceed **ten minutes** - departures from this timeframe will be at the discretion of the Convener.

4.10 Smoking and eating shall not be permitted on camera during virtual meetings of the Council or Committees / Sub-Committees.

## 5. Quasi – judicial meetings

5.1 In accordance with Standing Order 10.1, no member shall participate in the taking of a decision on an item of business unless they have been present during consideration of the whole item in respect of the following Committees/Sub-Committees:

- Licensing Committee; Local Review Body;
- Planning and Development Management Committee;
- Lifelong Learning Committee - Review Sub-Committee;
- SP&R - Appeals Sub-Committee and
- Licensing Board.

It shall not be a breach of this standing order where, in the judgement of the affected councillor, the loss of their internet connection and subsequently leaving the meeting is for a brief and inconsequential duration.

## 6. Review the Protocol

6.1 This protocol will be reviewed in December 2021 and when any further developments in Microsoft Teams are released.