

From: info@oalc.org.uk <info@oalc.org.uk>
Sent: 11 March 2021 13:50
To: Sharon Groth <sharon.groth@witney-tc.gov.uk>
Subject: Council Meetings post 7th May

Dear Sharon Groth,

We know you are probably increasingly concerned about the lack of clarity about how to hold meetings after 7th May when the Regulations https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/pdfs/uksi_20200392_en.pdf allowing virtual meetings come to an end.

We share that concern and uncertainty and have lobbied all the Oxfordshire MP's to allow virtual meetings to continue. We would prefer them to continue for at least for one more year until life is more certain, a greater percentage of the population is vaccinated and confidence in gathering in an enclosed space with strangers returns.

The lobbying continues, please see attached a letter from the LGA to Rt Hon Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State, MHCLG which NALC partnered with. In addition Lawyers in Local Government have joined with the Association of Democratic Services Officers to seek a court declaration that virtual meetings be allowed to continue under existing legislation. https://www.lawyersinlocalgovernment.org.uk/news_articles/lhg-adso-serve-pre-action-letter-on-secretary-of-state

The government's case being that there wasn't sufficient parliamentary time to introduce new primary legislation.

In the continuing absence of a solid statement from central government it would seem sensible to start planning for a possible return to physical meetings but in the hope that it won't be necessary. Hold the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council and the Annual Parish Meeting virtually (if you don't have elections this year) by the 6th May. It is difficult to try and bring items or projects forward such is the reactive nature of much of the work of parish councils. We suggest you have one eye on the horizon and try to be prepared but hope that your planning won't be needed.

NALC has general advice on its website here <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus#preparing-for-the-possible-return-of-face-to-face-meetings> but you know your village hall or usual meeting place better than NALC. Whether the 2m rule will still apply after 7th May is uncertain but natural caution would suggest if a return to physical meetings is necessary you will need to apply sensible covid safety measures:

- Providing hand sanitiser to those entering the meeting room and making sure hand sanitiser is readily available in the room itself
- Staggering arrival and exit times for staff, councillors and members of the public
- Placing seating at least 2-metres apart
- Ensuring everyone wears face masks
- Holding paperless meetings
- If papers are provided, people should be discouraged from sharing with others and asked to take the papers with them at the end of the meeting to minimise how many people handle the papers
- Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly

- Choosing a venue with good ventilation, including opening windows and doors where possible
- Choosing a large enough venue to allow distancing – this may mean choosing a different venue to what the council used before.
- The council (or venue owner/operator) will need to identify the venue's maximum capacity in their risk assessment, taking into account the need for social distancing. Consider how the council will ensure this capacity is not exceeded and how it will manage the situation if more people wish to attend than capacity allows. For example, could meetings be live-streamed or could members of the public submit questions via email?
- If the venue has an NHS QR code to support test and trace then all attendees should register using that app, for those without access to the app they should register attendance in line with the venue's test and trace procedure. NB all venues in hospitality, the tourism and leisure industry, close contact services, community centres and village halls must have a [test and trace procedure](#)
- Venues must conform with the government guidance for [multi-purpose community facilities](#) and for [council buildings](#). If the venue is run by the council then the council must take responsibility for this, otherwise, the council can ask the venue to provide confirmation that they do conform to this guidance
- The council must understand and ensure it is acting in compliance with the latest government [safer workplaces guidance](#)

Kind regards

Christine

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