



Edenbridge Town Council

Town Clerk: Caroline Leet



Edenbridge Town Council Virtual Meetings held in public

The COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic and the response to the crisis (e.g. prohibitions on gatherings, social distancing, self-isolation) have meant that the requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person with all members present in one place cannot be met. The statutory requirements for meetings are mainly contained in the Local Government Act 1972 and the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. In recognition of the problem of holding and attending meetings, the Government included Section 78 in the Coronavirus Act 2020. On 2 April, the Government published changes for Council meetings and the way that can be held, as well as removing the requirement to hold an annual council meeting ([The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#)).

Under [regulation 4](#), it says that Councils *may alter the frequency, move or cancel such meetings*. This provides that where an appointment would otherwise be made or is required to be made at an annual meeting of a local authority, the appointment continues until the next annual meeting of the authority or until such time as that authority may determine (Regulation 4 (2)). This would apply to the election of the chairman, the first business at the annual council meeting. Therefore the current chairman will remain in place until an annual meeting is held (possibly next year) unless the council decide to elect a replacement earlier.

[Regulation 5](#) allows local councils to hold remote meetings using its preferred form of electronic communications. Edenbridge Town Council will call 'remote' meeting(s) when it considers it to be necessary and will publish notice of any public meetings in the usual way under the [Local Government Act 1972 sch 12 \(10\)](#). Decisions and background papers will continue to be made available to the public, by publishing them on the Town Council's website; or by such other means that the council considers appropriate (Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014).

Regulation 5(3) also provides that a member in remote attendance attends the meeting at any time if the member is able at that time:

- a. to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance,
- b. to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting, and

- c. to be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.

These conditions allow members to join via a video link system or by telephone so long as every member can be heard by every other member and the public.

These Regulations apply to local council meetings that are required to be held before 7th May 2021. This may change subject to the Government guidance.

Guidelines for Virtual Meetings

1. Standing Orders will continue to apply to the conduct of Council and Committee meetings, including virtual meetings.
2. Councillors will receive an email invitation to attend the meeting, containing a link and any log in ID and password
3. Members of the public and press are welcome to attend. To obtain details about how to attend the meeting remotely, email the Town Clerk no later than 9.00 am of the day of meeting so that the log in details can be provided
4. Public participation will be received under the agenda item 'public questions' only. Members of the public who wish to comment on an agenda item under 'public questions', will need to make a request by emailing the Town Clerk no later than 9.00 am of the day of meeting (log in details will be provided)
5. The Chairman of the meeting will invite participants to speak. Once the public participation section has ended, members of the public will be able to remain in the meeting, but will not be able to speak and microphones will be muted
6. Councillors' microphones will be muted during the meeting, unless they are speaking (this is to minimise interference and background noise). A Councillor who wishes to speak should indicate by raising their hand or using the hand indicator button
7. Councillors will be asked to vote on a motion as per the Standing Orders - by raising their hand **for** a motion; the Chairman will then ask for a show of hands **against**; and then any **abstentions**. (Subject which electronic platform is used for the meeting Members may be asked individually for their vote.) A Councillor who does not have video will be asked to vote verbally
8. Any person who engages in conduct which disrupts the meeting will be asked to stop and may be removed from the meeting either immediately or following a warning
9. Meetings may be recorded by the Council. Recordings will normally be deleted once Minutes of the meeting have been agreed by the Council or Committee