

## **Annual Meeting – 13 May 2021**

### **Agenda Item AGM186/21**

#### **Return to In-Person Council Meetings**

##### **Introduction**

This paper proposes measures to allow for the return of a small number of Councillors to attend meetings at the Parish Council office.

##### **Discussion**

Legislation was brought in during the pandemic in 2020 to allow local councils to meet virtually, rather than only in person. Despite this legislation being extended in Scotland and Wales, Councils in England are now being asked to return to meeting in person at all meetings from May 7.

The Council Chamber at the council offices does not have adequate space to permit all councillors, staff, and members of the public to attend and still ensure that the safety measures expected by the Government who will not extend the legislation, to be implemented.

All councillors were sent a questionnaire regarding returning to in-person meetings. Some findings from the responses include:

- Councillors overwhelmingly feel that the ability to hold remote meetings should not end on May 7.
  - The introduction of this legislation has shown that Councils can hold meetings online which not only helps during extreme events such as pandemics but allows for more flexible attendance, especially benefitting those with young children, caring responsibilities, who travel for work and work more unorthodox hours.
  - The legislation encourages a wider more diverse range of people to stand for election than before benefitting Croxley Green Parish Council, the Croxley Green community and the wider local government sector.
- Around 50% of councillors have suggested they would attend a meeting at the Council office from May 7.
- No councillors or staff should be excluded from council business if they cannot attend in person at the current time.

##### **Alternative Venues**

The Council does not have to meet in the Council chamber. Meetings technically can be held at any venue if alcohol is not being served. However, in the current climate larger venues are not in a position to rent out their space.

Many local halls only being used by those groups based at the building, and not hired out to external bodies.

The Council has not budgeted to meet anywhere but the Council office. There is no guarantee on how long council meetings last and it may not be the best use of Council funds to spend Precept collected from residents on hiring a hall, with the added cost of ensuring the space is well cleaned, when a meeting may only last for half an hour.

## Hybrid Meetings

Many councillors have suggested that a form of hybrid meeting be introduced. Permitting a small number of councillors to attend in person whilst other council members and the public join virtually using Zoom.

It is this method I feel the best way forward for Croxley Green Parish Council

To ensure health and safety practices are being followed, the maximum number of attendees in the Council chamber is six. This would be made up of five councillors and a member of staff.

This would mean that, as per the council's Standing Orders, a quorum of councillors can be present at the Council offices.

To help the meetings run smoothly and make sure that everyone is represented fairly, those councillors who attend in person should also log in to Zoom from the Council chamber on individual devices. The Council Chamber IT infrastructure is not adequate to live-stream meetings and so individual cameras, and microphones will be needed. Where possible Councillors will be asked to bring their own laptop / tablet If attending in person, as well as headphones with a microphone. Where this is not possible Councillors will be provided with equipment and a cost has been included in the recommendations to allow for this. The Council already has one laptop which can be used.

## Recommendations

That:

1. Council moves to a hybrid meeting style with some councillors and staff attending council & committee meetings in person and some online from May 18.
2. Members of the public are only permitted to join online at the current time.
3. No more than 5 councillors be permitted to attend in person.
4. Councillors bring their own devices to log into Zoom where possible.
5. All relevant health and safety procedures are in place including the availability of hand sanitizer, adequate ventilation and required social distancing.
6. If more than 5 councillors wish to attend in person, they do so on a rotational basis.
7. A budget of £500 be allocated for the purchase of:
  - a. 2 tablets (<https://www.currys.co.uk/gbuk/computing/tablets-and-ereaders/tablets/lenovo-tab-m10-10-1-tablet-16-gb-black-10212467-pdt.html>)
  - b. 6 headsets ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/Nigecue-Headsets-Microphone-Cancelling-Headphones-Black/dp/B08ML714HZ/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?dchild=1&keywords=microphone+headphones+for+pc+3.5mm&qid=1620384921&sr=8-3](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Nigecue-Headsets-Microphone-Cancelling-Headphones-Black/dp/B08ML714HZ/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=microphone+headphones+for+pc+3.5mm&qid=1620384921&sr=8-3))
  - c. Cleaning equipment
8. That the Clerk writes to Gagan Mohindra MP further requesting the extension of legislation to permit remote meetings.
9. This item be reviewed at the next Council meeting on July 29.

**Ryan Bennett (Clerk)**

**May 2021**