

**REPORT OF:**

**DIRECTOR OF HR, GOVERNANCE & ENGAGEMENT**

**TO: STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**ON: 21 July 2021**

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**SUBJECT: Virtual Meetings Member Protocol**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To consider the adoption of a protocol for all Members to follow in meetings where Teams or a similar e-meeting product is utilised.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Standards Committee is asked to:

1. Finalise and agree the adoption of an updated Protocol for all elected members to follow in meetings where Teams or a similar e-meeting product is utilised.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

Following the emergency legislation introduced in 2020 the prevalence of `Teams` and similar e-meeting meetings has increased. Although in general meetings have gone well there have been instances when problems have occurred due to general protocols not being consistently followed.

This report seeks to introduce a simple written guide/protocol for adoption by councillors when participating in such meetings.

## **4. RATIONALE**

In March 2021 at the request of the Standards Committee, an `on line` training session was conducted for elected members in respect of Social Media. At the conclusion of that event a number of members commented on the distractions to this event and others, by protocols, not being fully followed by all members, for example inappropriate use of the `chat function` and, a request was made for the Standards Committee to set out some clearer protocols for adoption by the Council.

At their meeting later in March the Standards Committee formally requested officers prepare a report for this meeting addressing issues such as the appropriate use of the chat function alongside developing some other simple and supportive elements for a member protocol for `Teams/Zoom` etc., meetings.

The current BwD protocol adopted last year is attached as Appendix 1. This was adopted at the outset of the Pandemic when most Council meetings had to move quickly to be conducted virtually and emergency legislation was introduced which allowed this.

Although physical meetings have recommenced since May 2021, the advantages offered by virtual meetings, will mean that in the modern digital age, e-meetings will play an important part in the conduct of business going forward. Indeed Government is currently considering options for the possible re-introduction of legislation to allow virtual Council meetings again, but for now virtual meetings will continue for non-formal council business meetings.

Increasingly such meetings with partners, other agencies and the public will ensure that Councillors can more easily engage quickly and efficiently, but protocols need to be in place and be followed to ensure the meetings run effectively and efficiency and the good reputation of the Council maintained.

For this reason it has been suggested that our current protocol be reviewed and updated to a be a more generic protocol for use outside of that introduced to respond quickly at the outset of the pandemic.

A draft updated protocol is therefore set out as attached as Appendix 2 and is presented for the views, update and endorsement by Members of the Committee, subject to which it will be requested that it is recommended for adoption by the Council.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct policy implications from the report.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no costs to this proposal.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications relating to this proposal.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no resource implications relating to this proposal.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

The provision of a protocol provides assurance that conduct of meetings considers the equality aspects for all those taking part.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

The Standards Committee is being consulted through this report.

David Fairclough  
Monitoring Officer

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Date: 9th July 2021