

COVID 19 Update - New legislation introduced to allow 'virtual' Parish Meetings

As you may know all local authorities have been waiting for emergency legislation which would allow us to have Council meetings without councillors being physically present in the room. **The Coronavirus Act** was passed by Parliament at the end of last week and it contained s78 which dealt with the issue of Local Authority Meetings. The Act didn't contain any detail itself, so we had to wait for the Secretary of State to publish regulations to set out the detail. **These regulations have now been published this afternoon and come into force on Saturday 4th April 2020.**

The Government has issued the regulations that will give local authorities greater flexibility in the conduct of meetings, including allowing members to attend remotely, and for public and press access to those meetings.

They apply to local authority meetings and police and crime panel meetings that are required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021.

The Association of Democratic Services Officer (ADSO) guidance that has been published to sit alongside these Regulations, they have clarified that it was the intention of Parliament to enable publication of said notices on principal council websites but not that it would be mandatory to do so if the town or parish council could publish on their own websites. Hail Weston Parish Council publish on website here <https://hailweston.org.uk/parish-council/meetings/>.

Regulation 4 (2) carries the current appointment of chairman on until the Annual Meeting in May 2021 although councils may elect a chairman at earlier meeting should they wish to.

Regulation 5 covers remote attendance; extending the definition of "place" to include more than one location and including electronic, digital or virtual locations. It goes on to set out all the conditions that must be complied with, making sure the member attending remotely can be heard and where possible seen by other members and by the press and public and can hear and preferably see the other members.

Regulation 13 modifies the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 allowing for remote attendance by the press and public. Clerks should note that Regulation 13 (a) requires any electronic notice of a meeting to be published on the principal authority's website and does not negate the normal requirement under Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12 Part II Paragraph 10 (2) (a) to publish a notice in a conspicuous place.

The Regulations come with an explanatory memorandum which can be accessed [here](#).