

Milborne Port Full Council - 27th April 2021

Agenda Item: 7

Council Meetings from May 7th Onwards

Background:

- The ability for Town / Parish Councils to hold formal remote meetings was awarded to Councils via: *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*
- This law came into effect on 4th April 2020
- This law has an expiry date of 7th May 2021
- The Government have made it clear that they will not be making parliamentary time to extend the law to allow formal remote meetings to continue
- This means that all formal meetings of Council and Committees will have to be held in-person from May 7th onwards.

There is some concern that the 7th of May is simply too soon to be holding in-person meetings and I know that some Members have said to me they will not be attending.

At the same time there will be others who will be very keen to return to in-person meetings and will not feel the risks as keenly as others.

The Council also has a duty of care towards its Staff some of whom will not have been inoculated for some time to come.

The last formal remote meeting will be the Annual Council Meeting on 4th May

What are the options:

A. Return to in-person meetings:

The Council can quite simply return to all formal meetings being in-person. But as the Council Chamber in the Town Hall is not suitable for hosting Covid secure meetings, the alternative venue of the Village Hall has been secured.

The meetings will have to be held under some strict guidelines:

- Hand sanitiser to be used when entering the meeting room and to be available at your table.
- Possible staggering arrival and exit times for staff, councillors and the public.
- Placing all seating / tables at least 2-metres apart, every councillor will have their own table.
- Ensuring everyone always wears face masks (at all times).
- Holding paperless meetings.
- Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly.

- Opening windows and doors where possible.
- Members could be encouraged to take a lateral flow test 24 hours before the meeting.
- The council will need to identify the Village Halls 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.
- Signing in with the NHS QR code to support test and trace - for those without access to the app they should register attendance in line with the venue's test and trace procedure.
- The Village Hall must also conform with the government guidance for multi-purpose community facilities
- The council must understand and ensure it is acting in compliance with the latest government safer workplaces guidance

In short, the meetings will not be anything like pre-covid meetings and will be very sterile affairs for some time to come.

There is also the issue that the Village Hall is only available on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays in the month, this would mean that the Management Committee would have to share a night with the P&E Committee.

B. Continue with informal remote meetings:

The key word here is 'informal' as any remote meeting held after 7th May will not be able to make decisions. The responsibility for the decision making would be delegated to the Staff, but any such decisions would be made in conjunction with an informal meeting of the relevant committee.

Committee meetings would look almost the same as they do now, only with the technical difference that they were not making decisions.

This arrangement would not work for some of the decisions that Full Council maybe required to make, and so this arrangement would only apply to Committee meetings. It is quite possible that a few in-person meetings of Full Council would still have to be called. This would be worked out on a case-by-case basis in conjunction with the Chairman of Full Council.

How long will either of the above arrangements last:

We are very lucky in the UK in that we have one of the fastest vaccination programmes in the world. Either of the above arrangements are unlikely to be appropriate for the situation in three months' time. A further report should be made to the Full Council in August allowing the Council to review and update the meeting arrangements as appropriate to the circumstances then. By August, it is hoped that all the Staff will have received an inoculation and so the duty of care will be in some way reduced as well.

Recommendation:

That the Council resolve to adopt one of the approaches as outlined above, for a period of three months and reviews again in August 2021