



MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

MPC(20)54

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS OF MELTON PARISH COUNCIL AND ITS COMMITTEES FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2020/21

Background and summary

This report considers arrangements for meetings of Melton Parish Council and its Committees through to May 2021, against the background of the continuing pandemic and the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Report

The Regulations apply to local authority (including parish council) meetings held before 7 May 2021 and allow them to be held remotely. However the Annual Parish Meeting (the meeting of electors of the parish where the Parish Council is held to account) is not included in the definition and therefore that cannot be held remotely. The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council (i.e. its own commissioning meeting) *can* be held remotely, although Regulation 4 provides that any appointments e.g. appointment of Chairman, can be held over until next year; most parish councils have not held a Commissioning meeting this year.

Currently NALC advises local councils to continue to meet remotely until otherwise advised. That practice is also currently followed at District and County level where all formal meetings are currently held remotely. At some point advice may change and when it does, a further report and risk assessments will need to be provided.

Under Regulation 5(2) of the Emergency Regulations, remote meetings must enable Members:

- To hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance
- 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

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

Melton Parish Council has experimented with combinations of audio / video conferencing. We have now signed up to Zoom software (which is becoming the norm for local councils meeting remotely) which has a dial in option as well.

Since the start of lockdown on 24 March 2020, the Council has moved to a system of delegation to Officers combined with remote meetings of Interim Management Committee (IMC). Membership of that Committee consists of The Chairman of the Council, Deputy Chairs, together with the Chairs of Committees.

For the first time since the start of the pandemic, the Council is now to hold a virtual meeting of Full Council on 15 July. This is necessary both to fully engage all Councillors and to transact business which ought to be discussed by all Members. There is also the need to ensure that no Member is disadvantaged by failing to comply with s85(1) Local Government Act 1972 which stipulates that where a councillor fails to attend any meetings of the council (or its committees etc.) for six consecutive months he / she ceases automatically to be a member of the council. This applies regardless of whether a meeting has been called.

Some councils that have invoked emergency arrangements in terms of managing decision-making are now moving back to their pre-emergency meetings structure, albeit with holding them remotely. It is suggested that Melton should now consider doing the same.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members consider making the following changes to the Council's decision-making arrangements:

- Hold a final meeting of Interim Management Committee in August to deal with outstanding / urgent matters, and thereafter:
- Revert to its pre-emergency meetings structure from September, with broadly two monthly meetings cycles for Full Council, Recreation Committee and Finance, Employment and Risk Management (FERM) Committee, to be held virtually via Zoom, with a dial in facility as well.

If this approach is agreed, then Officers will draw up a programme of meetings through to May 2021 for Members to consider. A date for the Annual Parish Meeting in 2021 will be provisionally set but this will be dependent on a relaxation of social-distancing rules further. Under current rules such a meeting would have to be held at a larger venue than the Council's meeting room.

William Grosvenor

Clerk and Executive Officer to the Council

9 July 2020