



MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

MPC(21)33

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2020/21 COUNCIL YEAR IN THE LIGHT OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

Background

This report has been prepared in the light of a potential return to face-to-face meetings from early May 2021.

Issues

The legislation permitting the holding of virtual meetings expires on 6 May, so unless extended, which NALC is asking the Government to do, but which it has so far shown no inclination to respond to, Councils will have to return to physical meetings.

There is also the possibility of a request to the High Court from a group of lawyers, supported by NALC, seeking a declaration that, whether or not the emergency legislation permitting remote meetings is extended, it is still lawful to hold remote meetings under Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972.

However the chances of either an extension to the current arrangements or success in obtaining the desired declaratory judgment are not high and realistically, it is likely that there will need to be a return to some form of face to face meeting after 6 May.

What NALC is suggesting, which is sensible, is that virtual meetings are held prior to 7 May in order to dispose of as much business as possible to enable shorter face to face meetings to be held thereafter. That would also give any Members who are advised not to attend physical meetings on health grounds (those over 70 and those with serious medical conditions - as per updated Government advice January 2021) as much time as possible before disqualification for non-attendance under s85 Local Government Act 1972.

In a non-election year the Council's AGM (Commissioning meeting) has to be held in May. It is currently in the calendar for Wednesday 26 May, but could be held on Wednesday 5 May via Zoom to deal with as much business as possible so the subsequent physical meetings if the emergency legislation is not extended can be shorter. The only other meeting in the diary for May 2021 is Recreation Committee on

19 May, and that could be rescheduled to 26 May to allow more time to elapse before holding the first face-to-face meeting since March 2020.

Annual Parish Meeting (APM)

In terms of the APM, when the emergency legislation was passed last year there was an omission in respect of the APM in the Regulations that allowed for virtual meetings, and hence the APM could not be held virtually and therefore could not be held at all last year. However, this omission in the legislation was made good in late summer of 2020, so the APM can now be held virtually this year. Normally the APM has to be held between 1 March and 1 June in any year. At the moment the APM is in the diary for 28 April, so can continue to be held virtually on that date.

Return to face-to-face meetings

When there is a return to physical meetings, all attendees must wear face masks, socially distance, and not sit directly facing each other. Requirements imposed on any meeting room under the Regulations will include:

- carrying out a risk assessment and taking reasonable steps to mitigate any risks identified
- the provision of sanitiser to all entering the venue
- an enhanced cleaning regime
- the provision of an NHS QR code to support test and trace.

Additionally the Council as a corporate body will need to be sure that it complies with its duty of care to any attendees to provide as safe an environment as possible. NALC has suggested ways in which Councils might reduce risk which include live streaming the proceedings / inviting members of the public to put queries to the Council via email or telephone to enable members of the community to participate without the need for a physical presence / using larger venues so social distancing can be easily achieved.

Recommendations

Members are invited to agree the following recommendations:

1. In respect of the meetings in the calendar for May 2021:
 - Reschedule the Council's AGM from 26 May to 5 May 2021
 - Reschedule the meeting of Recreation Committee from 19 May to 26 May 2021
2. To remit to Finance, Employment and Risk Management Committee at its meeting on 14 April to receive and consider a report on the arrangements for the discharge of the duty of care and compliance with the Covid regulations at the Council's premises for the provision of face-to face-meetings
3. In the context of face-to-face meetings to agree to receive a report at next Full Council on ways in which risk might be reduced. This will include proposals like:
 - Live streaming the proceedings
 - Inviting members of the public to put queries in advance via email or telephone to enable public participation without physical attendance

- Where it might be difficult to hold a socially distanced meeting in the Council's meeting room due to the numbers likely to attend, then to use a larger venue for e.g. Full Council, in line with the NALC recommendation.

William Grosvenor

Clerk and Executive Officer to the Council

16 March 2021