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**Elstead Parish Council**

**Virtual Meeting Protocol**

Elstead Parish Council have agreed that Councillors will be able to participate and vote virtually at Parish Council meetings including committee meetings in **exceptional circumstances only**. Virtual participation includes but is not limited to telephone, Skype and video conference. This protocol is only effective during COVID-19 or during such times as social distancing is required. In usual circumstances it is expected that councillors will attend in person.

* In **exceptional circumstances** Councillors may attend virtually for any single meeting and any single committee meeting.
* Notice of virtual participation must be given to the Clerk by the Councillor who wishes to participate no later than 48 hours prior to the meeting.
* Virtual participation is only to be used in **exceptional circumstances** and should not be utilised for convenience.
* It is the responsibility of members of the Parish Council wishing to participate virtually to ensure they are able to do so through a secure method in an environment conducive to confidential and private communication.
* Virtual participation must be for the entire meeting and not just for specific agenda items or solely for voting purposes
* It is the responsibility of those participating virtually to ensure they have a reliable connection.
* If the communication connection fails and reasonable attempts to reconnect are unsuccessful virtual participation will no longer be possible and the agenda will not be delayed. The Clerk will note the time that the connection was lost.
* If the Clerk is participating virtually and the connection is lost, a Councillor will take notes in their absence.
* Quorate meetings are the responsibility of the Clerk who will monitor this throughout meetings involving virtual participation and advise if the meeting becomes inquorate.
* Where there is no visual connection all meeting participants will start their comments by stating their name.
* If there is no visual connection any vote will be given verbally, indicating whether they wish to vote in favour or against. If a visual connection exists a show of hands will counted. The outcome of any vote taken will be communicated to all Councillors participating in the meeting both in person and virtually.
* The Chair and Clerk will attend in person unless exceptional circumstances deem this not possible.
* Residents will be able to attend such meetings. The Clerk will publicise that the meeting in the usual format and send meeting codes to anyone wishing to attend.

**Guides for holding virtual meetings.**

All participants to mute microphones unless when talking.

All participants to have their video camera on so that the clerk can gauge if they would like to speak.

Participants to raise their hand if they wish to speak and the clerk will invite them to speak when practicable.

**Code of Conduct for participating in a virtual meeting**

The virtual code of conduct relates to all meetings associated with the Parish Council that are held virtually including, but not limited to; monthly meetings, planning meetings, neighbourhood plan meetings and EER meetings.

The code of conduct for participating in a virtual meeting is the same as if councillors were meeting in a formal setting. Minimum requirements are:

Councillors should be dressed appropriately

Councillors should not eat food or consume alcoholic beverage during the session

Councillors should ideally have a blank background behind them and/or be mindful of what is visible in their rooms.

A complete set of guidelines are set out by the Centre of Public Scrutiny- see link below

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2020-04-09%20-%20covid%20guide%201%20behaviour%201st%20edn.pdf>

Signed / date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Cllr P Murphy\_\_\_May 2020\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on behalf of Elstead PC