

20 October 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Corporate & Improvement Services	Author	Andrew Weavers 282213
Title	Review of Remote (Digital) Council Meetings		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting on 23 June 2020 the Committee requested a review of the implementation of remote committee meetings, which were required as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. An initial report was considered by the Committee on 28 July 2020, and following this Councillors, officers and members of the public were asked to provide their views to help inform the review of remote meetings and formulate recommendations how future meetings should be conducted.

2.0 Recommended Decisions

- 2.1 To consider and note the review of remote meetings undertaken by Colchester Borough Council since 1 June 2020.
- 2.2 To review the Remote Meetings Protocol and recommend whether any changes are required in the light of experience.
- 2.3 The following recommendations be made to Full Council:
- (a) All meetings continue to be remote (digital) by default and hosted via Zoom and live streamed by YouTube for the remainder of this municipal year. However, this be kept under review in the light of evolving Government guidance and legal requirements.
 - (b) All briefings for committee and panel chairs and group spokespersons be held remotely.
 - (c) Consider the possibility of hybrid and face to face meetings but only when both Government Guidance and legislation permits and following a Covid- 19 health and safety risk assessment for each meeting.
 - (d) Chairs of meetings retain flexibility to determine how formal votes are conducted.
 - (i) Non-controversial items be agreed by the chair asking participants to indicate verbally whether anyone is against a proposal.
 - (ii) Where the subject matter is controversial or relates to a quasi -judicial matter, a roll call of councillors be taken to ensure transparency.
 - (e) Chairs of meetings retain the option of being physically present with officers when required, suitably socially distanced, whether it be due to procedural complexity of the meeting or of the nature of business to be transacted.
 - (f) Government be lobbied to extend the Regulations to enable remote and hybrid meetings to continue beyond May 2021.

3.0 Reasons for Recommended Decisions

- 3.1 The Covid -19 pandemic and Government guidance and regulations required the Council's decision making to move to a digital only platform. As we move forward the Council needs to determine how its meetings are conducted safely, in accordance with relevant Government guidance and the legal position.

4.0 Alternative Options

- 4.1 A return to full face to face meetings or hybrid meetings. However, this is not possible at the current time due to the ongoing requirement to ensure that meetings are conducted in accordance with Government guidance including the need to maintain social distancing etc. The current rise in Covid 19 cases demonstrates the need to have a cautious approach to the return of face to face and or use of hybrid meetings.

5.0 Background

- 5.1 At its meeting on 28 July 2020 the Committee considered a report (attached at Appendix 1) on the initial review of remote meetings. The Committee's initial feedback on remote meetings was very positive, although highlighting a number of issues. This report provides the Committee with further details on how remote meetings could be conducted going forward.
- 5.2 All local authority meetings were required by law to be held with all participating councillors physically present in the same room. Due to the challenges of the Covid – 19 pandemic, the Government introduced The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 ("the Regulations"). These came in to force on 4 April 2020 and apply to meetings taking place before 7 May 2021. The Regulations enabled Local Authorities:
- the flexibility to hold meetings at any time of day and on any day, to alter how frequently meetings can be held and to move or cancel meetings without requiring further notice.
 - to hold meetings remotely. For the purposes of any statutory requirement, members of the local authority are considered as attending a meeting if they can hear, and where practicable see, and be heard and, where practicable, be seen by other members and the public. This allowed for meetings to be held by remote means including via telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webchat and live streaming. The "where practicable" wording is important because it means that it is not an absolute requirement that every participant can be seen all the time, even when they are speaking.
 - to make standing orders about remote attendance at meetings in relation to voting, access to documents and facilities that can be employed to allow the meeting to be held remotely to suit their own circumstances. (Remote Meetings Procedure Rules and Remote Meetings Protocol were agreed).
 - the "place" at which a local authority meeting is held is not confined to the council building. The "place" may be where the instigator or arranger of the meeting is, or electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers. It could be an officer's or member's home.
 - requirements for a meeting being "open to the public" are satisfied by a local authority holding the meeting remotely. This enabled local authorities to facilitate

and hold remote meetings outside of the council offices and/or remotely and allows for members of the public to attend remotely.

- where documents must be “open to inspection”, this is satisfied by the documents being published on the council’s website. Documents include notices, agendas, reports, background papers, minutes etc. The publication, posting or making available of documents at council offices includes publication on the Council’s website. The normal five clear working day notice of publication of agendas continue to apply.

5.3 This report highlights the benefits and some of the disadvantages of remote meetings. It is suggested that remote meetings are the way forward and Local Authorities should have the flexibility to utilise remote or hybrid meetings in the (post pandemic) future rather than reverting back wholly to “traditional” meetings. It is therefore recommended that the Government be lobbied to extend the Regulations to enable remote meetings to continue to be held in the future.

5.4 The latest advice from Government is that they *“continue to recommend that where meetings can take place digitally, without the need for face-to-face contact, they should do so. The regulations do not preclude physical or hybrid meetings. Where council buildings need to be used for physical meetings, these meetings must be managed within the social distancing guidance and principles.”* As Government has implemented new guidance and regulations in response to the second wave of the pandemic and measures put in place for probably the next six months, it is evident that we will need to continue with remote meetings until the end of the Municipal Year. However, we will keep this under review in light of changing Government advice and consider when we can safely hold either hybrid or face to face meetings.

6.0 Our Experience of remote meetings so far

6.1 Earlier this year we decided to live stream our formal decision-making meetings via Zoom on the Council’s YouTube channel. This has proved to be successful, with councillors, officers and the public able to participate, and has been relatively easy to use. Appendix 2 gives details of viewing figures of our remote meetings, compared to the listening figures (when only the audio recordings of meetings were available to the public) of the same meetings last year. Based on our experience it is suggested that we continue to use Zoom for all our public decision-making meetings. Remote meetings come with additional transparency and accountability and participants need to be aware of this at all times.

6.2 As part of the review a survey was carried out of councillors, officers and the public on their experiences of remote meetings and how they could be improved going forward. The survey was promoted via direct email, the website and on the Council’s social media channels. A total of thirty-two councillors (64%) and thirteen officers responded to the survey, unfortunately no members of the public responded, despite extending the deadline for completion. The full results of the survey are contained at Appendix 3 – councillors and Appendix 4 – officers.

6.3 Overall the surveys demonstrated a positive response to remote meetings, with very positive feedback to the Democratic and IT teams that have facilitated them. There were some issues raised, including items such as connectivity, resources, behaviours and lack of physical interaction and these are considered in the following paragraphs. The key question of whether meetings should be remote, hybrid or face to face in the future prompted the following response:

How should future meetings be conducted?	Councillors	Officers	Total
Remote	13	8	21
Face to face	8	1	9
Hybrid of remote and face to face	7	3	10
No view	4	1	5

As can be seen a majority of respondents felt that future meetings should be remote.

6.4 Some of the comments relating to future meetings included:

"I believe the Council ought to now return to the Town Hall and Rowan House. When Members and Officers can meet together, democracy will be better served. Virtual meetings ought to now be restricted to occasional training sessions, if essential."

"As now. But a firm reminder of meeting disciplines, hands etc and a mandatory break at 90 minutes unless the meeting is close to an end."

"Ultimately, remote meetings are likely to be more efficient for attendees (due to reduced travel time etc) and more accessible for the public (as they can view online), but the working practices are quite difficult in my officer role at Committee."

"All online. It's the future."

6.5 The Councillor survey also asked what the benefits and disadvantages of remote meetings were. Some of the comments in relation to benefits included:

"Being able to meet without risking staff and cllrs also it saves from an environmental perspective by reducing pollution"

"No travel means not getting stuck in traffic = more time with family therefore less resentment."

Some of the comments in relation to disadvantages included:

"Meetings take longer. Harder to concentrate on the discussion."

"Remote meetings do not allow members to fully interact with each other"

6.6 The councillor survey also asked what areas of remote meetings could be improved. Some of the comments included:

"Is there a way of looking/ referencing at the agenda details/page when on the screen. Looks like needing two screens, one for being on the meeting and one to follow the agenda."

"Currently just everyone learning that muting the microphone when not speaking is essential. As is ensuring it is muted and turning off the camera during breaks."

6.7 Remote meetings have required additional officer support to administer. Most face to face meetings are supported by one Democratic Services Officer who would be able to provide the clerking and advisory functions, as well as administer the live audio streaming software. For busy meetings an additional officer may have attended for the start of the meeting to help with the registration of members of the public. With remote meetings, there is increased preparation. Remote meetings themselves will continue to

require two Democratic Services Officers for the duration of the meeting, one providing the governance support role and one dealing with issues such as helping attendees join the meeting, monitoring the live stream, dealing with any connection issues, displaying presentations and reports. Particularly large or complex meetings, such as Full Council, have required a team of officers to support.

- 6.8 The introduction of remote meetings meant that the Council was required to invest in some additional hardware to provide councillors with appropriate equipment. This initial cost amounted to £3.5k. The annual Zoom licences amount to £500 both of these costs were coded to the Council's Covid 19 budget. Some councillors have also enquired whether they could have a second screen to assist them during meetings. The Council's IT team can facilitate this depending on the type of equipment being used. From the Councillor survey results 90% of councillors felt that they had the right equipment to enable them to participate in remote meetings. In addition, the councillor survey results indicated that 88% of councillors felt that they had received sufficient training to enable them to participate in remote meetings. We will seek to provide further training where necessary to ensure that all councillors can participate effectively in remote meetings.
- 6.9 One option for the future is hybrid meetings; i.e. where some participants are in a room (socially distanced) and others remote. This is not being suggested at this time in the light of current Government guidance and regulations. However, if this option becomes viable in the future it is one that we could pursue subject to a Covid-19 health and safety risk assessment being undertaken for each meeting. This could enable either the Moot Hall and/or the Grand Jury Room to be utilised for this purpose.
- 6.10 As well as maintaining public involvement in meetings through Have Your Say, there is evidence that remote meetings have helped increase public engagement with meetings and have improved the transparency of decision making. The table and graphs at Appendix 2 show the number of views of each meeting held remotely since June 2020. The figures show that more people are viewing through the YouTube live stream than listened through the audio stream for the similar period last year. There have been 5780 views of meetings on You Tube from June – September 2020. The comparative figure for listens on Audio Minutes over the same period last year was 3,517. This indicates that more members of the public are engaging with remote public meetings. We will continue to monitor and report on these levels. In addition, the Democratic Team has received some very positive feedback from some members of the public about the benefits of live streaming such as the comment below: -

“Also - well done for holding the Zoom sessions and streaming to YouTube. First time for a long time I have felt that I can easily dip-into council discussions on topics and hear first-hand considerations.”

- 6.11 Remote meeting by their very nature require the participants to behave differently than in face to face meetings. In preparation for the introduction of remote meetings, a protocol was prepared and agreed by the Group Leaders and circulated to all councillors. A copy is at Appendix 3. In view of some of the comments made in the responses to the councillor survey it is worth noting that the protocol emphasises: -

You should also try to avoid eating or drinking during the meeting unless this is necessary and can be done discretely. Although being held remotely, meetings are still formal and should be treated as though they were being held in person, with the same expectations of appearance and behaviour. Although it is easy to forget, given the nature of the meeting, Councillors will still be on public display throughout, potentially to a wider audience than would normally be in attendance at a physical meeting.

The results of the councillor survey revealed that 72% of respondents felt that the protocol was helpful. The Committee are invited to review the protocol and consider whether it needs updating in the light of experience and comments made during the course of the survey.

- 6.12 Remote meeting have proved particularly successful for the North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee meetings, obviating the need for councillors and officers to travel to different locations to attend meetings in the County. It has had a similar impact on the Colchester and Ipswich Museums Joint Committee.
- 6.13 Remote meetings have meant that agendas have been digital for all meetings. Whilst it can be more challenging for some meetings, digital agendas have proved successful and mean a budget saving with printing costs being eliminated. By way of background agenda printing costs in 2019/20 amounted to £11k. With digital agendas there is no need for a weekly delivery of papers to councillors and accordingly a further saving from ceasing home deliveries. It is proposed that all meeting agendas remain digital going forward, regardless of whether the meeting is face to face or remote unless there is a demonstrable need for a paper agenda for individual councillors.
- 6.14 One of the key benefits of remote meetings is the flexibility it provides to councillors and officers to join meetings, even if they are away from Colchester. A number of councillors have been able to join meetings whilst on holiday or otherwise away from Colchester, and in circumstances when they would have had to send apologies. With the Regulations making it clear that participation by a councillor at a remote meeting counts towards their attendance, the number of substitutions for meetings has been low.
- 6.15 All briefings for meeting chairs and group spokespersons have been remote during this period. The briefings have worked well and have eliminated councillor and officer travelling time etc. It is accordingly recommended that briefings for meeting chairs and group spokespersons remain remote going forward.
- 6.16 Remote meetings also bring challenges for those chairing meetings. The nature of remote meetings makes it difficult for a chair to seek officer informal advice during the meeting particularly from the Democratic Services Officer. However, with the Remote Meetings Protocol and a new way of working being embedded this becomes easier once the participants become more familiar with the meeting structure. The option is available for the chair of a meeting to be in a room with officers if required. This has been used for, Full Council due to the number of participants and the often procedurally complicated nature of the business being transacted.
- 6.17 Voting in remote meetings poses some challenges as compared with face to face meetings. The key in a remote meeting is transparency of decision making. It is important that the public viewing can understand how councillors have voted, as they would in a face to face meeting. This is particularly important for meetings where not all of the participants are visible on the screen. The Remote Meetings Procedure Rules provide that the chair of a meeting has flexibility to require that every question to be determined at a meeting is done so by either each councillor:
 - (i) stating verbally whether they are for, against or abstaining; or
 - (ii) to indicate by a show of hands.

In practice this has led to most decisions being taken via a roll call particularly where the decision may be controversial or quasi – judicial. Other decisions where there is consensus could be taken via a show of hands or for a request for any councillor to indicate verbal dissent to a decision. It is however important that the chair retains some flexibility to deal with individual circumstances. It is suggested that the Remote Meetings

Procedure Rules and the Protocol be amended to clarify the circumstances when it would be appropriate to have a roll call and when to have a more informal process.

- 6.18 Remote meetings required the Council to adapt how the public participated with meetings via “Have Your Say!”. This was changed to permit either written submissions of up to 500 words or a live remote video contribution of up to 3 minutes. Members of the public are required to register and provide a written copy of their submission by 12.00 noon the day before the meeting. Whilst the need for this has been queried on occasions, it has proved invaluable as it is allowed submissions to be read to the meeting when some speakers have had technical issues joining the meeting. Both methods have worked well, and it is suggested that these options are retained going forward. The same facility has been made available to visiting councillors to and it is suggested that this is also retained going forward even if the meeting is hybrid or a face to face meeting.
- 6.19 It had been anticipated that remote meetings would take longer than face to face meetings, due to the slightly more formal structure and procedures such as voting by roll call. An analysis of the length of the remote meetings held to 4 September 2020, against the length of the meetings over the corresponding period in 2019 has been completed and is at Appendix 6. This shows a fairly marginal increase in the average length of a meeting from 2 hours 10 minutes, to 2 hours 18 minutes. However, there are notable increases in the length of some meetings: Cabinet has increased from 1 hour 55 minutes to 2 hours 39 minutes on average, and the average length of a Scrutiny meeting has also increased. The length of Planning Committee meetings has been reduced, but this will partly be explained by the change in the scheme of delegation whereby fewer applications are being referred to Committee.
- 6.20 One of the issues highlighted in the councillor survey is concern about the impact of long meetings being conducted online. The survey highlighted that 63% of councillors felt that they were given enough break times during meetings. The survey also found that 69% councillors felt that the four-hour maximum duration for remote meetings was too long. It is recognised that there are some meetings that by their very nature will be longer meetings due to the complexity of the business to be transacted. The Committee is invited to consider whether it is necessary either amend the Protocol or Remote Procedure Rules to address the issue in light of the comments made in the survey.
- 6.21 At its meeting on 10 March 2020, the Committee made a recommendation to Cabinet that the potential benefits of webcasting public meetings be considered further. Cabinet endorsed this recommendation at its meeting on 8 July 2020. Whilst the streaming of remote meetings through YouTube has met this objective, should the Council move to hybrid or face to face meetings, there would be a need to look again at streaming options. In terms of costs of a solution for streaming hybrid meetings, the Council is currently looking at an inhouse solution using existing equipment and it is intended that this will be trialled at the Full Council meeting on 21 October 2020.
- 6.22 If a more sophisticated solution were to be sought through a third party provider, such as Public I, the costs are likely to be significant, and in line with those reported to the Committee on 10 March 2020 when it considered the benefits of webcasting, which are set out below:
1. *Lease contract – To provide and install three HD quality cameras, webcasting software, hosting and support for a typical 60-hour contract for any period between one and five years starting at £24k for one year, reducing to below £15k annually for a £72k five year contract.*

2. *Purchase and installation by the Council of cameras, AV rack, associated equipment, integration with microphones and cabling at a cost of approx. £19k plus Lease contract - Webcasting software, hosting, support and on-line monitoring for a typical 60-hour contract for any period between one and five years starting at £11k for one year, reducing to below £8k annually for a £38k five year contract.*

Public I have indicated that to deliver a solution that would serve hybrid meetings effectively would need to be slightly adjusted to include additional hardware. There is currently no budget for such a solution.

- 6.23 It is suggested that work on future webcasting options continue with a view to a costed proposal being submitted to the Committee in due course.

7.0 Financial Implications

As mentioned above the direct costs in enabling remote meetings amounted to £3.5k for councillors IT equipment and £500 for the annual Zoom licences. There is currently no identified budget for any webcasting solution.

8.0 Consultation Implications

A public consultation exercise has been undertaken, together with a survey of councillors and officers in order to inform this report.

9.0 Health and Safety Implications

- 9.1 Any hybrid or face to face meetings will be required to be Covid-19 safe. This means that in addition to complying with social distancing requirements etc, we will be required to undertake a Covid-19 health and safety risk assessment for individual meetings. We will also need to consider whether any participants are within any higher-risk health categories.
- 9.2 The Council's Corporate Health and Safety Officer has advised that it would be possible to configure the Grand Jury / West Committee Room to hold approx. 12 participants in its familiar layout. However, we would need tables/chairs set up reaching almost the length of both rooms due to the distancing needed between them. It may be possible to accommodate 2-4 of members of public at seats on the sides. Windows would be required to be open during the meeting to ensure good ventilation.
- 9.3 The Moot Hall could be configured with tables and chairs in roughly the Council Chamber layout but 1m distanced between each participant. This would go from the edge of the stage area to around slightly over half the length of the room, and then allow space behind for approximately 15-20 members of the public. The side doors leading to the outside balcony would need to be opened for ventilation, but it could be made Covid secure for meetings, however it would require stringent controls for entry and exit. As social distancing would be less than 2m face coverings would be required during the meeting.
- 9.4 Although not being recommended at this time, with 1m social distancing the Council chamber could be used by a maximum of 31 participants (roughly every other seat) and 4 members of public. However, as the Chamber has limited ventilation the fire escape door and window behind it would have to be kept open to increase the ventilation. Again, as participants would be under 2m apart face coverings would be required to be worn for the duration of the meeting.

- 9.5 The Council's Facilities Team are investigating whether the air handling units in the Town Hall provide fresh air as this may be sufficient ventilation instead of opening the windows and doors, although keeping them open to increase ventilation would be recommended where possible.
- 9.6 None of the options mentioned in 9.2 to 9.5 above are currently being recommended from a health and safety aspect. The current health and safety advice is to remain with remote meetings at this time, but keep it under review.

10.0 Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 10.1 There are direct environmental benefits with remote meetings which support the Council's green agenda and assist towards its CO₂ reduction ambitions. The most obvious one being the reduction in car journeys and CO₂ emissions for journeys to and from the Town Hall for meetings.

The following estimates indicative and are based on all councillors attending meetings via a petrol car based on 29 Council meetings and 628 councillor one-way journeys from home to the Town Hall and back.

Length of round journey (miles)	Avoided miles travelled	Saving of CO ₂ (tonnes)	CO ₂ avoided from vehicle emissions (kg)
4	1256	0.37	370
6	1884	0.55	550
10	3140	0.91	910

- 10.2 In addition there will have been a saving in electricity consumption at the Town Hall. Whilst this is difficult to attribute purely to remote meetings, the 19/20 annual emission figures for the Town Hall were 224,696.6 kwh of electricity in 12 months, which is equivalent to 57.4 tonnes of CO₂. We would expect a significant reduction in 20/21 due to reduced use of the building both for meetings and other events.

11.0 Standard References

There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; community safety; risk management, publicity implications

Appendices:

Appendix 1: 28 July 2020 Report to Governance and Audit Committee

Appendix 2: YouTube viewing statistics

Appendix 3: Councillor survey results

Appendix 4: Officer survey results

Appendix 5: Remote Meetings Protocol

Appendix 6: Length of meetings

Governance & Audit Committee

Item
8

28 July 2020

Report of	Assistant Director of Corporate & Improvement Services	Author	Hayley McGrath 508902
Title	Initial summary of Digital Council Meetings		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the meeting on 23 June 2020 the committee requested a brief summary of the implementation of virtual committee meetings, that were required as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper gives a summary overview of the work and meetings that have taken place so far, and invites Councillors, and officers, to provide their views to help inform a detailed review of digital meetings, which will be reported to the committee later in the year.

2.0 Recommended Decisions

- 2.1 To consider and note the summary of virtual meetings undertaken by Colchester Borough Council since June 2020.
- 2.2 To note the future review of digital meetings.

3.0 Reasons for Recommended Decisions

- 3.1 The process for digital meetings is still being refined. Therefore, this report is for information only and further work will be undertaken to provide a more comprehensive review of digital meetings and any necessary decisions that may be required.

4.0 Alternative Options

- 4.1 As the report is for consideration and noting there are no alternative options.

5.0 Summary of Work Undertaken

- 5.1 The government decision in March 2020 to put 'lockdown' restrictions in place meant that it was not possible to have face-to-face committee meetings and Council business was effectively put on hold whilst an alternative solution could be found.
- 5.2 Whilst the Coronavirus legislation allowed for annual meetings to be postponed until 2021, it was necessary to ensure that decision making could be resumed as soon as possible.
- 5.3 Whilst the Council had been investigating digital meetings previously, there had been no decision on digital solutions or processes. Therefore, a suitable video conferencing system had to be implemented prior to the decision-making process resuming at the beginning of June. A process for allowing members of the public to still have their say was also implemented.

- 5.4 The Council was not using any video conferencing systems prior to the pandemic and as a result there was a very short time frame to identify a suitable system, roll it out to all users, produce user guides and train all participants on how to conduct meetings, as well as ensure that they all had suitable equipment to allow them to participate in meetings.
- 5.5 Since 01 June a full 'cycle' of committee meetings has taken place with every member now having taken part in at least one meeting. The meetings are live streamed on YouTube and are available for download. The full list of meetings, and the on-line viewing numbers are shown below:

Meeting	Date	Views
Scrutiny	01/06/2020	292 views
Cabinet	03/06/2020	462 views
Licensing	10/06/2020	138 views
Policy and Public Initiatives Panel	17/06/2020	153 views
Planning	18/06/2020	429 views
Governance and Audit	23/06/2020	161 views
North Essex Parking Partnership	25/06/2020	100 views
Licensing Sub-Committee	01/07/2020	219 views
Scrutiny	07/07/2020	292 views
Cabinet	08/07/2020	340 views
Planning	09/07/2020	125 views
Local Plan	14/07/2020	365 views
Council	15/07/2020	329 views

- 5.6 The feedback from members, officers and the public has generally been very good. Whilst there is a natural desire to have face to face meetings all participants are getting used to the new skills of digital meetings. Democratic Services have not received any specific complaints or concerns about the meetings.
- 5.7 Some of the benefits of the digital meetings have included the ability of members to participate from wherever they are based, no paper agendas for any meeting and greater accessibility for the public - one of the public speakers for the Licensing Sub-committee joined from an overseas location and stated that she would not have been able to participate previously as she could not attend in person. The number of online views for each committee is considerably more than the previous audio streaming.
- 5.8 There have been some connection issues as members get used to the new systems and these have predominantly about logging on and use of microphones and videos. There is a guide to meeting etiquette, and on the whole participants are following it.
- 5.9 Digital meetings do require more officer support than physical meetings, especially at the start of each meeting. Currently at least two Democratic Officers and an IT support officer will be online to assist members with logging on, changing the names that are displayed, checking video and audio connections and signalling if a participant has dropped out, which may require a meeting to be put on hold until they can reconnect.

6.0 Future Review of Digital Meetings

- 6.1 Currently there has been no decision about a timescale for physical meetings to be restarted and risk assessments are being undertaken to set out proposals for how limited meetings may be able to take place, in line with government regulations.

- 6.2 Whilst there have been no significant issues with regards to the digital meetings that have taken place, a full analysis needs to be undertaken to review the success and future options for digital meetings.
- 6.3 Therefore further work will be undertaken to review the full impact of digital meetings and set out recommendations for future actions, to ensure that there is a full and robust decision-making process whilst at the same time allowing for any social distancing regulations.
- 6.4 To help inform the review process all members will be invited to share their experiences of digital meetings and any suggestions they may have. A final report will be submitted to this committee later in the year.

7.0 Standard References

- 7.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety; risk management or environmental and sustainability implications.

You Tube Viewing Statistics: June – September 2020

APPENDIX 2

Meeting	Date	Number of live views	Peak concurrent viewers	Total number views	Total watch time	Average watch time	Meeting duration
Scrutiny Panel	01/06/2020	106	16	304	35	20.21	3.05
Cabinet	03/06/2020	240	40	483	96	25	3.05
Licensing Committee	10/06/2020	19	8	149	3	11.35	0.32
Policy & Public Initiatives Panel	17/06/2020	44	8	163	7	10.46	1.54
Planning Committee	18/06/2020	130	52	480	72	42.01	2.31
Governance and Audit	23/06/2020	57	10	204	14	14.56	2.28
North Essex Parking Partnership	25/06/2020	25	9	129	15	36.56	2.32
Licensing sub-committee - SEV	01/07/2020	57	7	261	12	13.26	2.3
Scrutiny Panel	07/07/2020	171	37	322	72	29.48	3.09
Cabinet	08/07/2020	136	28	419	48	27.49	3.1
Planning Committee	09/07/2020	33	17	176	17	31.43	1.15
Local Plan Committee	14/07/2020	129	41	536	72	38.56	2.45
Council	15/07/2020	192	38	383	96	32.46	4.01
Scrutiny Panel	21/07/2020	54	10	136	12	14.26	2.23
Scrutiny Panel	27/07/2020	56	25	117	20	22.59	1.12
Governance and Audit	28/07/2020	27	4	66	2	4.33	0.59
Planning Committee	30/07/2020	118	40	211	72	44.31	2.53
Policy Panel	05/08/2020	25	5	78	2	6.48	1.13
Licensing Committee	11/08/2020	10	4	41	0.23	2.22	0.18
Extraordinary Council Meeting	12/08/2020	60	23	132	26	26.08	1.31
Scrutiny Panel	17/08/2020	77	23	181	48	38.11	2.56
Scrutiny Panel	18/08/2020	70	16	164	33	28.57	3.56
Cabinet	19/08/2020	80	24	180	28	21.25	1.45
Planning Committee	20/08/2020	31	13	119	12	24.58	1.16
Local Plan Committee	24/08/2020	55	9	110	21	23.05	3.44
Cabinet	02/09/2020	88	21	139	41	25.02	2.39
Governance and Audit	08/09/2020	21	5	49	4	11.3	1.3
Crime and Disorder Committee	15/09/2020	48	5	48	7	9.48	2
Totals		2159	average of 19 per meeting	5780	887 hours 23 minutes	23 minutes average watch time per meeting	

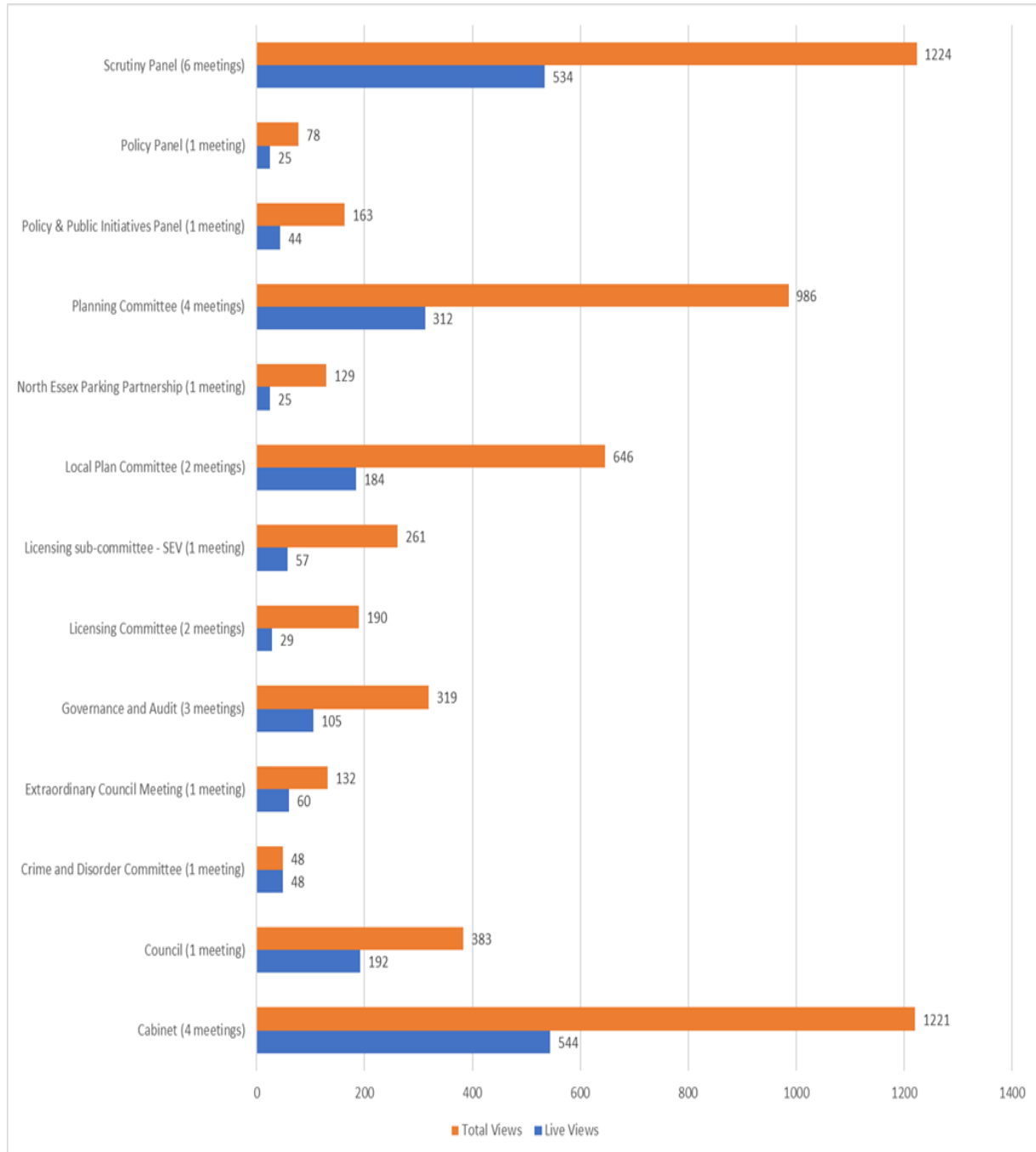
50 shares of the videos

64 Likes

8 dislikes

Views by Meeting Type

(Live and Total Views)

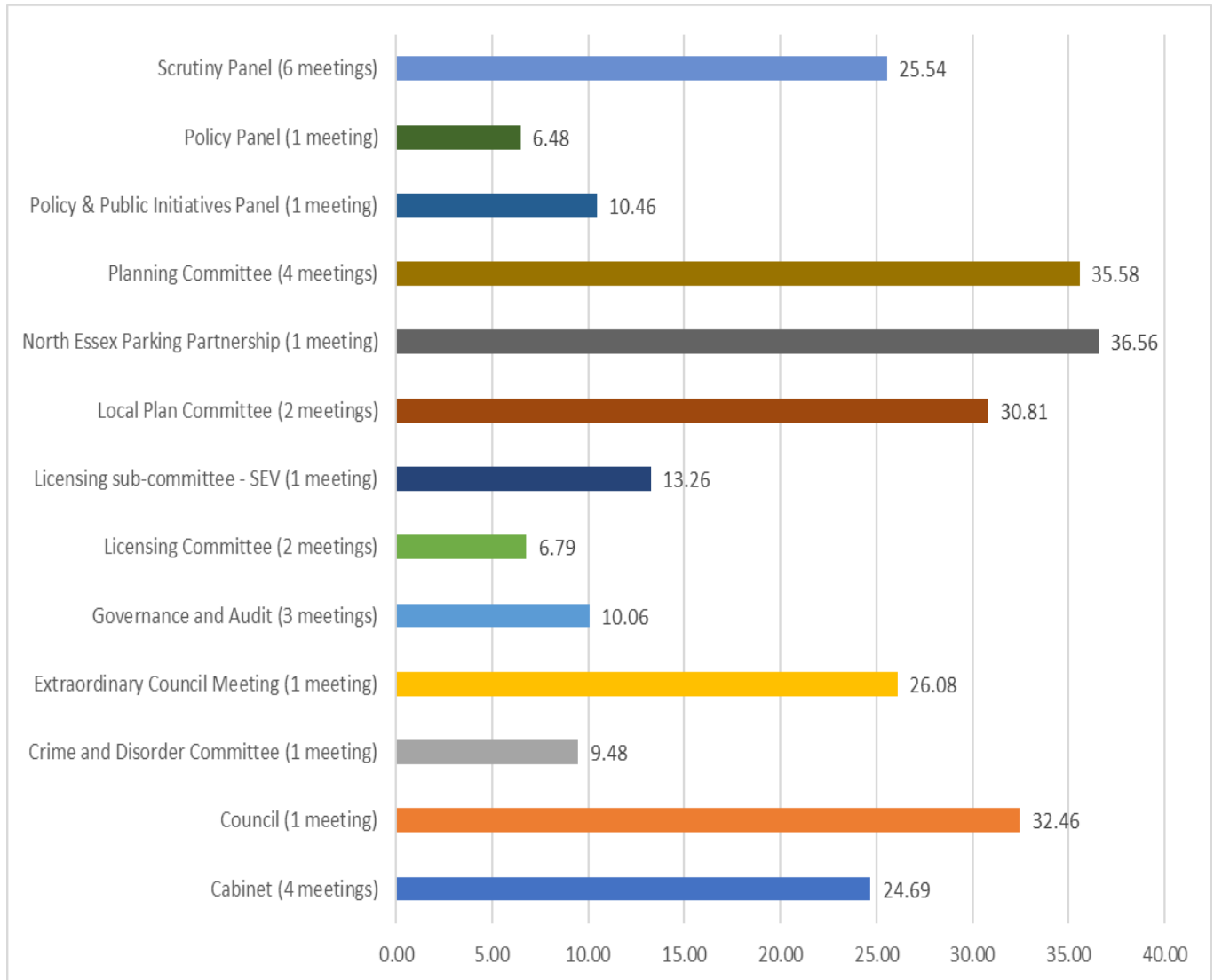


June – September 2020 – total views via YouTube = 5780

June – September 2019 – total listens via Audiominutes = 3517

Average Meeting Watch Time

(In Minutes and by Meeting Type)



Meeting Type	Average Meeting Length
Cabinet	2.50
Council	4.01
Crime and Disorder Committee	2.00
Extraordinary Council Meeting	1.31
Governance and Audit	1.39
Licensing Committee	0.25
Licensing sub-committee - SEV	2.30
Local Plan Committee	2.95
North Essex Parking Partnership	2.32
Planning Committee	1.79
Policy & Public Initiatives Panel	1.54
Policy Panel	1.13
Scrutiny Panel	2.60



Remote Meetings Questionnaire

Members

Introduction

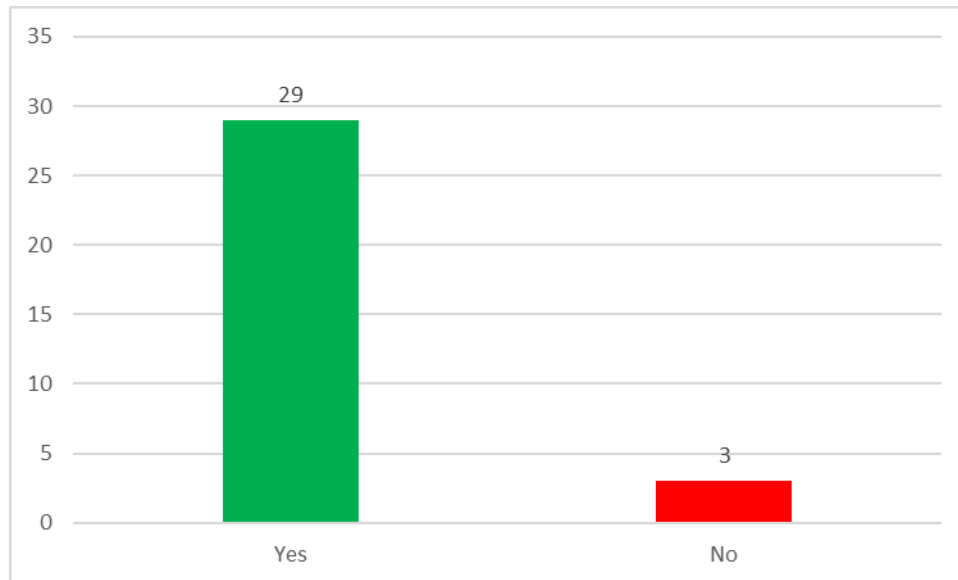
Since May 2020 following the Covid-19 Coronavirus lockdown, Colchester Borough Council has been conducting committee meetings on-line.

Now that all committees have met on-line, at least once, Members were asked to provide their views on how they have found the process, and if they have any suggestions on how remote meetings can be improved going forward.

Members were surveyed in September 2020 with 32 responses being received.

Q1. Do you have the right equipment to enable you to fully participate in remote meetings?

If not, what do you feel would help you?



Comments:

Luckily I have my own

Yes - but rather belatedly

Some more support
needed navigating IT

Yes, plus a backup kit

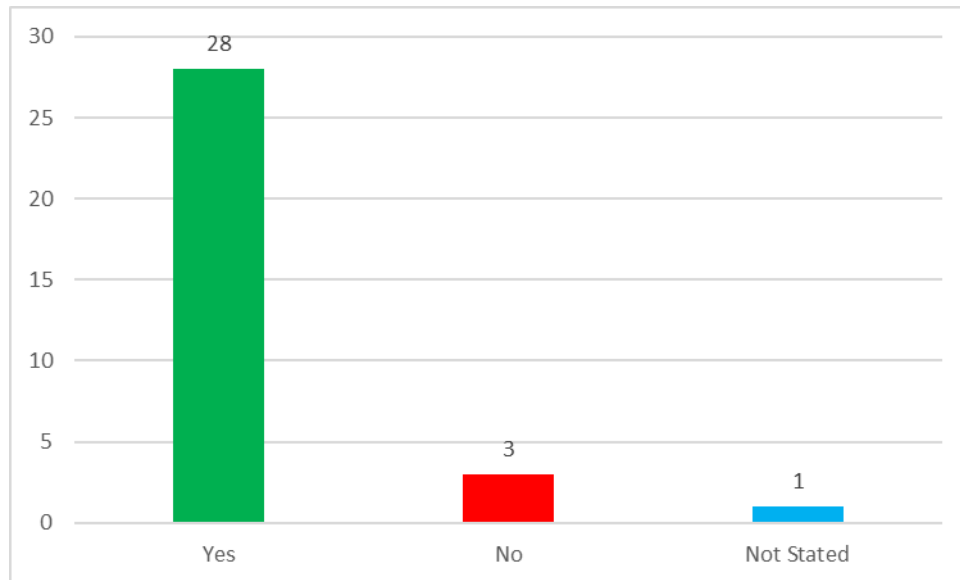
Yes, although when on
the go, headphones for
use with a mobile phone
would be helpful.

No mic on Laptop and no
CBC email or calendar on
iPad so a bit of
forwarding goes on.
Need to pick up emails
on Ipad.

I need hard copies of
meeting papers. I cannot
read on line and take
part in a zoom/teams
meeting.

Q2. Do you feel that you have received sufficient training to be able to participate in remote meetings?

If not, what further training do you feel that you need?



Comments:

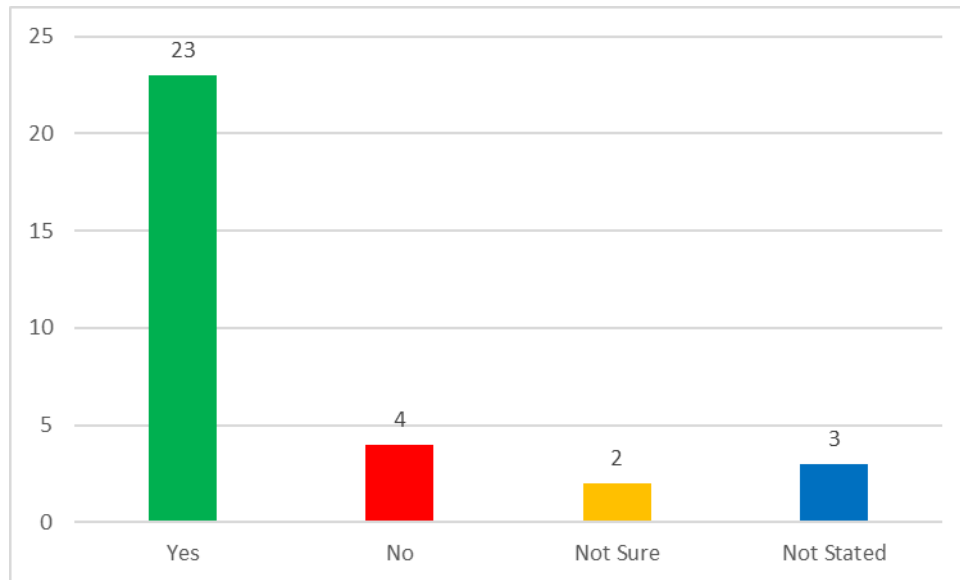
No - I am now able to access meetings but there were difficulties at the beginning and I feel that all Councillors should have been given full instructions much earlier on

At present I can only access Teams on my phone and not council laptop. This makes it more difficult to participate fully. I have requested help several times but as yet no one has solved my problem.

I need help with navigating moving from ECC teams and CBC teams

3. Do you feel that the Remote Meeting Protocol is helpful?

Are there any other issues that should be included in the Remote Meeting Protocol?



Comments:

Yes, but don't sit in the dark, also try not to have your face in shadow or sit in front of a window with sunlight behind you.

Yes the remote meeting protocol is helpful.

If you're going to read something out hold the paper up rather than looking down and all I can see is the top of a head. When speaking turn camera on. Keep slides to a minimum.

Reminders that the public watch these meetings and having Councillors roll up cigarettes and smoking is not a good sign. Also drinking alcohol and asking for alcohol on screen is not a good image.

Feel though that all should be reminded in making sure that we put a good image over when on camera.

I think we need more clarity on how often we need votes when there are no objections to proposals and things can be passed nem con.

Some meetings have left members of the public as part of the meeting when they should be removed. This needs tighter management in future.

Not sure what the protocol is?

Just a reminder that in public meetings councillors should remain visible.

Clearer instructions on indicating to speak - electronic hands up or waving frantically. Keep mics off.

Q4. What do you feel are the benefits and disadvantages of remote meetings?

4a. Benefits:

The answers to this question have been grouped into the below themes:

Saves on time, travel and money	Better than nothing when it is not possible to hold actual meetings.	Easier to attend.	Safer at home Easier to book No disadvantages
Keeps councillors focused.	Being able to meet without risking staff and cllrs also it saves from an environmental perspective by reducing pollution.	Only benefit is that meetings are being held and decisions made.	Easier to fit around work and childcare commitments.
Objectivity, lack of interruptions, control.	Less need to travel in to town so often, especially during winter and cold wet evenings.	Clothing can be less formal.	Flexibility, more time efficient (especially if a visiting councillor).
Remote Meetings are valuable as a supplement to normal meetings. They can be quickly set up and organised, as well as recorded and broadcast.	The "Chat room" is really quite useful.	Remote is good for briefings.	Ability to attend to other matters (without first seeking the consent of the Mayor or chairman) during boring contributions, or those that just repeat what has already been said.
	Not having to Shout at people when they can't hear me.	No travel means not getting stuck in traffic = more time with family therefore less resentment.	

4b. Disadvantages:

The answers to this question have been grouped into the below themes:

You miss the human contact.

Personal interaction,
discussion with colleagues,
gaining information from
officers.

Remote meetings do not allow
members to fully interact with
each other.

Meetings take longer. Harder
to concentrate on the
discussion.

Can't read body language
especially on full council
meetings when you need to
scroll through all the screens.

No before or after chat which
is often an important
opportunity to find common
ground and resolve issues.

it's hopeless in term of public
scrutiny as we are feeling too
safe in our own territory.

When a controversial planning
application comes before the
committee, remote meetings
do not convey the strength of
feeling among the public
attending.

Not so easy to have a full
discussion as someone may
raise a point but it is difficult to
ask questions while they are
talking and the moment could
have passed by the time you
are able to speak.

Communication is often more
than verbal, body language is
lost on Teams and Zoom.

With no travel required - that
time is regularly filled with
another meeting. This can lead
to eye strain and brain faze.

The disadvantage is that there
is now hardly any break times
and we do need to build these
in more.

Responses can be slow and not
so spontaneous at times. Eyes
get very tired looking at the
screen.

No atmosphere .. no eye
contact ... no social
interaction.

Loss of human connections
with fellow councillors.

Connectivity is a problem also
residents can feel left out if
they do not have the
equipment.

Can't informally interact with
others. Hard to "read the
room" especially when
chairing.

Possibility that less
preparation will be carried out
for meetings.

Danger of parties becoming
further apart with polarisation
without face-to-face contact.

Q5. Do you feel that there are any areas of remote meetings that could be improved?

If one is not on the particular panel / committee, having to access the meeting through YouTube is a nightmare. There should be the possibility for non-panel members to join too.

Voting by hand rather than named vote, except for reasons normally given in full council.

We should be supplied with council laptops.

Keep agendas as short as possible. I'm not a fan of the chairing style where the chair comes to every member in turn for questions.

Dress code for Councillors. No silly slogans displayed on screen.

Shorter meetings.

The time lag when people are trying to umute Perhaps need an officer to do that quickly for all.

Perhaps the concept of a chat room before meetings could improve interactions between Councillors.

On the whole I think staff have done well to get us all up and running!!!

Is there a way of looking/referencing at the agenda details/page when on the screen. Looks like needing two screens, one for being on the meeting and one to follow the agenda.

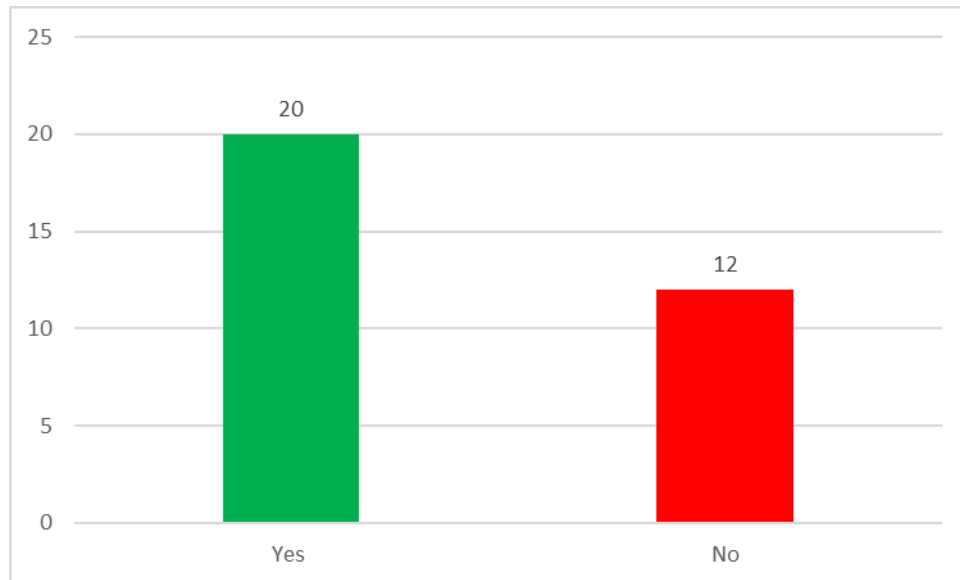
I think we could take more advantage of opportunities for submitting questions without needing to speak. It would save time if we could use the chat function, or something similar, to submit questions.

Currently just everyone learning that muting the microphone when not speaking is essential. As is ensuring it is muted and turning off the camera during breaks.

How voting is handled especially in full council.

6. Do you feel that you are given enough break times during meetings?

If not, what do you think is a reasonable time between breaks?



Comments:

90 minutes.

Staring at a screen is a tiring experience. I think a minimum of 10 minutes between sessions is essential.

Shorter meeting talk time and regular breaks, every 45 minutes there's a 5 minute breath.

No. even when its my own loo I have to dash and there still isn't time to put the kettle on as well!

Finish by 8pm.

It's incredibly tiring making sense of spoken word. Sometimes I realise I'm concentrating so much on understanding what's being said I realise I've lost sense of what is being said. I only need 1 speaker to not be clear and then I'm playing catch up.

Sometimes the meeting goes on for more than 2 hours before a break time.

Enough break times.

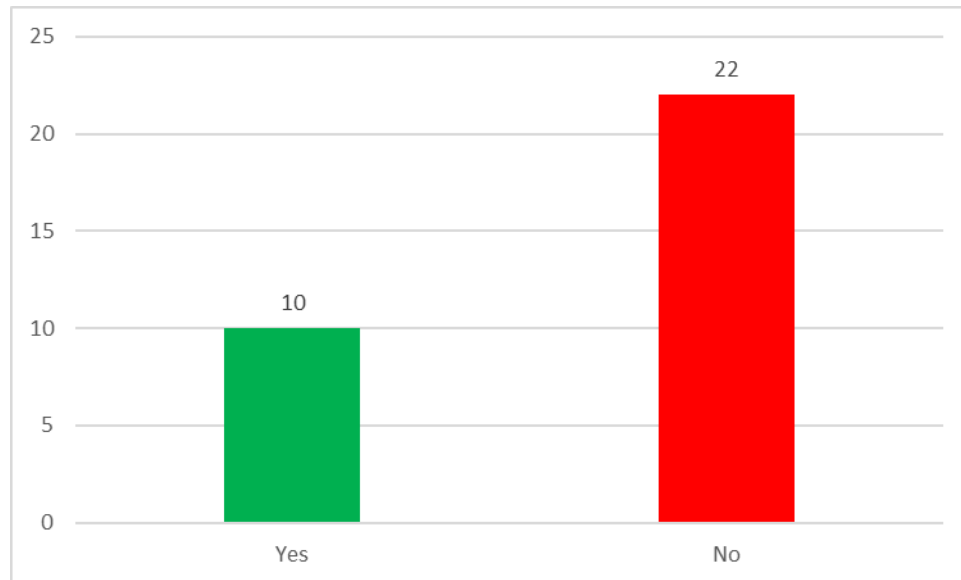
A 10 minute break should be sufficient. Although perhaps a 30 minute break during a very long (4 hour meeting) would enable participants to eat supper/dinner/tea.

Rather have 5 minutes every hour than longer less often.

Length of agendas need to better reflect the concentration and endurance of members. Evening meals seem to be a thing of the past . I often have 4 evening meetings per week.

Q7. Currently the maximum meeting time allowed is four hours, do you feel that is appropriate for remote meetings?

If not, what should the maximum meeting length be?



Comments:

3 hours quite enough, except perhaps for Full Council.	3 hours max.	No, unlimited and on chair and committee discretion.	No meeting, whether real or virtual should last more than 2 hours.
This is a non-issue.	I think 3 hours should be the limit.	I believe four hours is too long staring at a screen, even with breaks. I would suggest a maximum of three hours with at least one break.	Types of meeting should have a target ideal. Many meetings should be no more than an hour. Committee meetings of any kind should be no more than 3.
I think that 3 hours should be the maximum. Its very hard to concentrate for 4 hours on a video call.	No. This is much too long to be sat at a computer. Perhaps 2 hours would be sufficient.	We should be considering indicative timings for items on long agendas which will help give people an idea of whether we are running ahead or behind schedule and if there'll be a rush to meet a deadline.	It's not ideal. Four hours is really too long, but I understand that the roll call for votes is the main factor that lengthens meeting times.
It all depends on what is being discussed but if meetings are too long then it makes it difficult to concentrate.	I really don't think any meeting should last longer than two hours as even with breaks.	Far too long - 2 hours. Cut the waffle and just get the business done.	Exhausting, not only for the hearing impaired but those that struggle with vision.

Q8. If you chair a committee or panel, are there any particular challenges that you face performing that role in a remote meeting?

Comments:

I don't chair a CBC meeting but do chair others (eg CBH) and find the challenge is to keep a number of balls in the air; particularly spotting who wishes to speak in a meeting of 24+.

I am not chair of any meetings, although I would think the chairperson has to be very alert.

Noting break times, reading the room on whether formal votes are necessary or not. Having to keep attention to several things during the meeting (speaker, hands up in the participant pane, any interjections or potential connection issues).

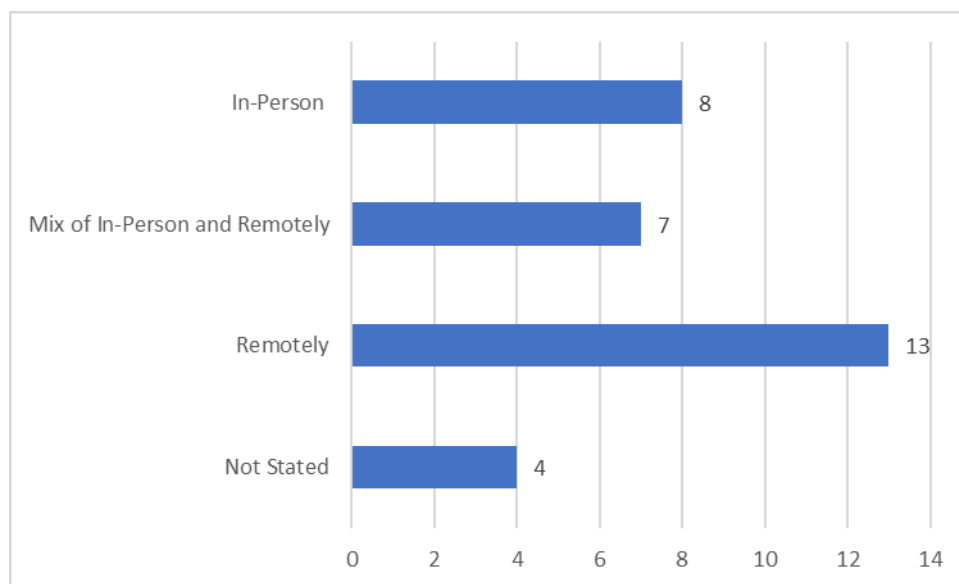
Not really - but I have to use two computers - one for the electronic papers and one for the Zoom call because flitting between two screens can be difficult while still trying to chair the meeting.

No, all ok.

Meetings too long.

The democratic services staff have been excellent. So no.

Q9. How do you think future meetings should be conducted?



Comments:

We should meet in-person for crucial, important meetings but others could continue remotely.

I believe the Council ought to now return to the Town Hall and Rowan House. When Members and Officers can meet together, democracy will be better served. Virtual meetings ought to now be restricted to occasional training sessions, if essential.

As they are until it is safe to return to normal public meetings.

As now. But a firm reminder of meeting disciplines, hands etc and a mandatory break at 90 minutes unless the meeting is close to an end.

Would like to see an element of remote meetings kept long term - maybe hybrid enabling people who cannot attend physically to still participate (attendance by Councillors has gone up and substitutions down) and briefings etc could be kept online.

As many as possible should be conducted virtually. Certainly ALL briefings. Cllr's and officers should be afforded the opportunity of attending physical meetings 'virtually'. For example visiting Cllr's to Planning Committee could be given a 10min warning that their slot is approaching, giving time to prepare, attend and leave the meeting. A process which up until now has taken a considerable amount of time (driving in, parking, sitting through a plethora of applications until yours is reached,

a sensible mixture of online/real as far as is possible in covid-19 scenario.

In-person with option to dial in, especially if visiting and especially for briefings.

Q10. Are there any other general issues or concerns, relating to remote meetings, that you would like to raise?

Difficult for members with families to attend a meeting without interruptions. Also it is difficult when things like phone calls or people coming to the door occur. Members would either have to ignore the call or leave the meeting for a time and therefore miss what other members have said.

I think we should carry on remote meetings but have physical meetings peppered in.

I think, frankly, that they have worked pretty well, and hats off to those as who have organised and sorted them out - at pretty short notice. I would like the facility to have a copy of what i've said here, please (!) Roger Buston.

A strain on eyes and concentration, meetings too long and no interaction with others in the meeting, difficult to read agenda notes and look at screen.

Lower public attendance.

Meetings are too long.

No, but there may be issues around the ability of the public to access meetings that we need to understand.

They do allow flexibility around attendance and are an easy way for the public and expert witnesses to participate.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the various staff and officers who have worked hard to ensure the remote meetings flow as smoothly as possible.

Making sure officers and members put over a good image on camera.

If these are to continue in the longer term, we might want to consider using different types of formal and informal virtual meetings. For example, it would be interesting for the Cabinet to have a meeting that was entirely Have Your Say, answering questions from residents.

Just to thank the democratic services team for their efforts so far.

Zoom is feeling the strain and is overloaded. Last night's meeting was breaking up.

It feels less democratic in terms of the public. Although I do appreciate they can tune in, there is no immediate feedback. We don't like heckling but it's the fastest way to get feedback.



Remote Meetings Questionnaire

Officers

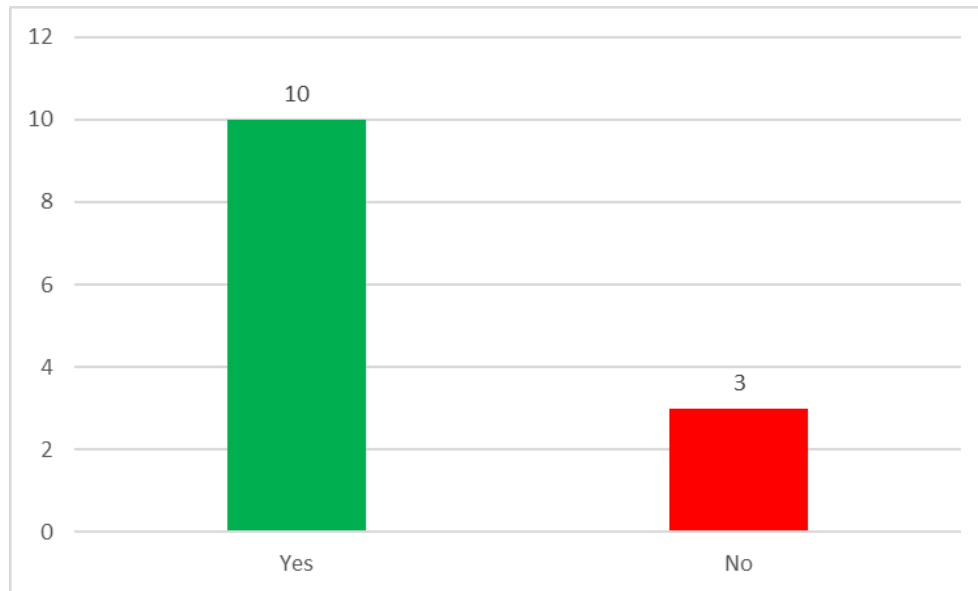
Introduction

Since May 2020 following the Covid-19 Coronavirus lockdown, Colchester Borough Council has been conducting committee meetings on-line.

Now that all committees have met on-line, at least once, Officers were asked to provide their views on how they have found the process, and if they have any suggestions on how remote meetings can be improved going forward.

Q1. Do you have the right equipment to enable you to fully participate in remote meetings?

If not, what do you feel would help you?



Comments:

Now I have a new laptop I do.

I am currently using my phone to do Zoom meetings; it would be far better to download zoom on to my cbc device.

Yes but these are all personal equipment, not CBC equipment.

I have appropriate equipment (although it is my own and not CBC).

Some colleagues still have Wyse boxes!

A CBC LAPTOP! For presenting at committee I will need to have two screens, one for the webcam and another for documents/notes.

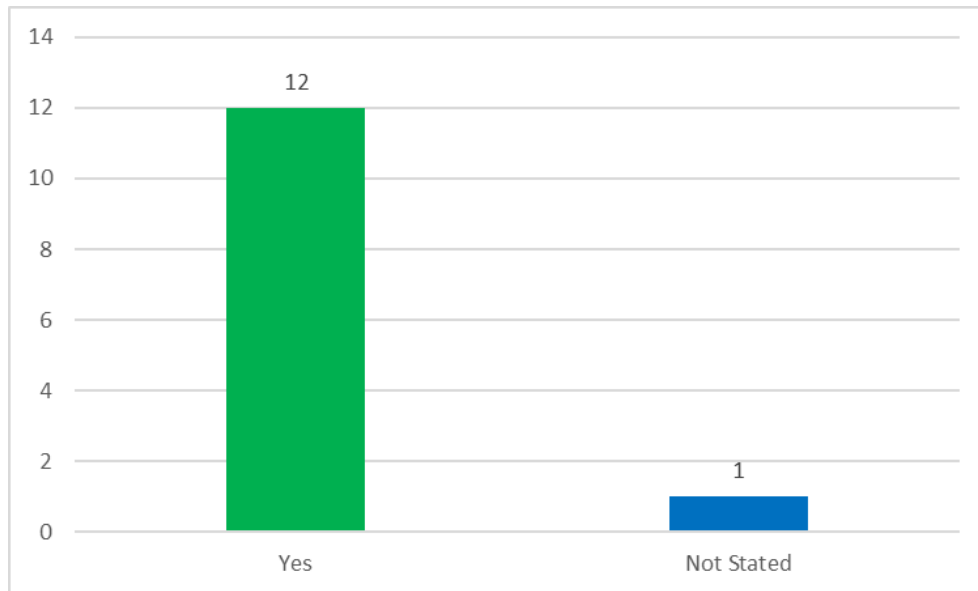
Equipment fine - wifi sometimes iffy but that is my problem!

Yes but reliant on having laptop for Teams/Zoom and desktop for documents. Laptop has failed a couple of times.

Not really if it is on ZOOM.

2. Do you feel that you have received sufficient training to be able to participate in remote meetings?

If not, what further training do you feel that you need?



Comments:

Happy with the training I received.

Yes but refresher training would be useful as I am attending less remote meetings due to the change in delegation.

I'm wondering whether Members have access to the online sharepoint area for training? If they do, some general zoom training would be good to go on there (and also for officers).

Training should be targeted at those who are struggling to use the technology (some Members and Officers seem to have a more difficult time). I believe there is an enabling officer in IT now - I know they are busy but targeted training is helpful and they could be used for this type of training.

Yes - Mandy Chidgey did a great session before her retirement.

Yes - well supported by Democratic Services - thank you!

Q3. What do you feel are the benefits and disadvantages of remote meetings?

3a. Benefits:

The answers to this question have been grouped into the below themes:

Better focus on planning issues and less political group actions.

For planning committee I find the IT much better at home - SharePoint on the iPad via HDMI to a TV in the Council Chamber always felt one step from simply not working. It works well at home.

Less officer time, faster resolutions, information is quicker to obtain, easier to prepare for, better for the environment (i.e. not required to attend Town Hall).

Time efficiency (no travel time)
Sharing documents on screen ensures that these can be seen clearly by all involved

Brings better discipline in terms of debate and discussion. Allows those who cannot be physically present to participate remotely.

Decision making based on merits rather than members being swayed by presence of large crowd. Increased delegation so committee can focus on important matters.

You get to deal with the issues at hand

Huge benefit in not having to travel, saving in fuel and time, and kinder where meetings are held at more antisocial hours. Could be played back if any doubt over proceedings.

More viewers - arguably better participation and more democratic recorded for Members of the public / officers.

Don't get home so late.

Less formality - time to eat before evening meetings for eg. as no travel
No travel and less opening of buildings - carbon reduction and corporate savings on energy As AD it means I can be available but not have to sit in the room for every meeting (if an item is presented).

3b. Disadvantages:

The answers to this question have been grouped into the below themes:

Less personal contact and informal conversations before and after.

Public feel less engaged and that meetings are less accessible.

Voting takes longer by needing a roll call.

Not much atmosphere online. Contentious applications generate a tension that's hard to match when they are heard in the Council chamber. Pure electricity on your Thursday night!

Very tiring (more so than face-to-face meetings)

Difficult to forget relationships.

Unable to have informal, 'off-line' conversations to build relationships and catch-up.

The heckling, the chanting, the ominous/angry looks from objectors. I can live without it though.

Meetings more informal and not as well structured as the usual interjections from officers to clarify matters and keep the meeting moving are harder to do - you can't catch the Chairman's eye over zoom.

Not being able to pick up on body language.

IT/internet errors (if they occur).

Lack of physical contact and interaction means some of the more informal communication between participants does not take place.

No way of cutting off if people go too far.

Unable to control background noise.

Difficult when only attending for one agenda item and are waiting to be called. I waited for 1hr and 45 minutes sitting at my screen and was then advised I could stand down.

Work station is in a family room and difficult to use if attending a evening session. Family are unable to watch TV etc

4. Do you feel that there are any areas of remote meetings that could be improved?

I think Democratic Services have done a brilliant job in such a short timescale - I think they are responsive and pro-active and work incredibly hard in some very difficult situations.

Voting process could be made more dynamic.

Making sure that you the meeting is run progressively and in a timely manner. Improving all the time i.e. removing public speakers at appropriate time.

Enabling/providing staff to have faster internet connection would be an improvement; Ensuring staff have large screens so that documents/plans can be viewed clearly and all/most attendees of the meetin

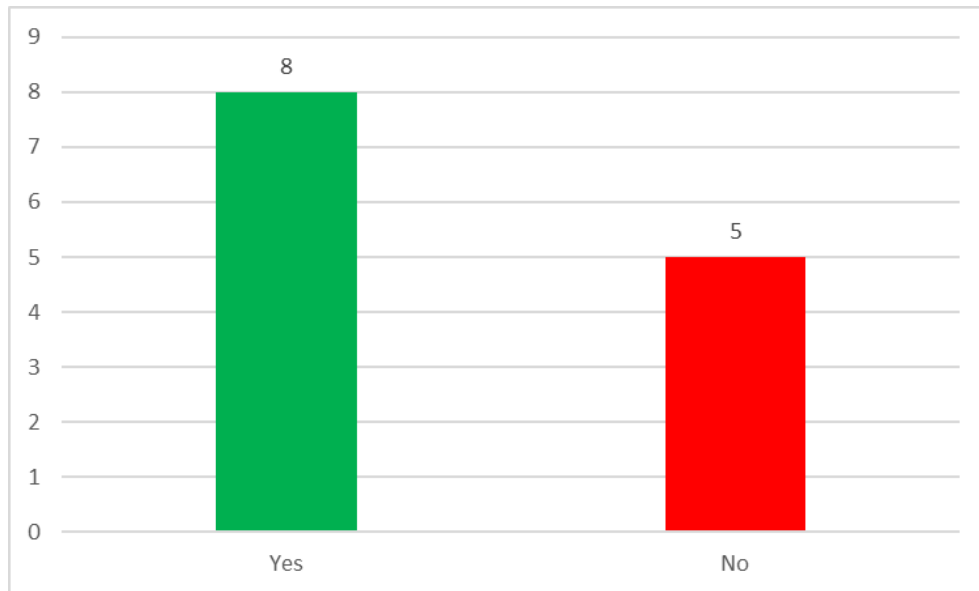
I think they work well.

It works perfectly well if chaired properly.

Limit member comments/questions to a maximum of two individuals before officer allowed to respond.

Q5. Do you feel that you are given enough break times during meetings?

If not, what do you think is a reasonable time between breaks?



Comments:

Reasonable breaks have been given during planning committee meetings.

Need break after two hours

2 hours

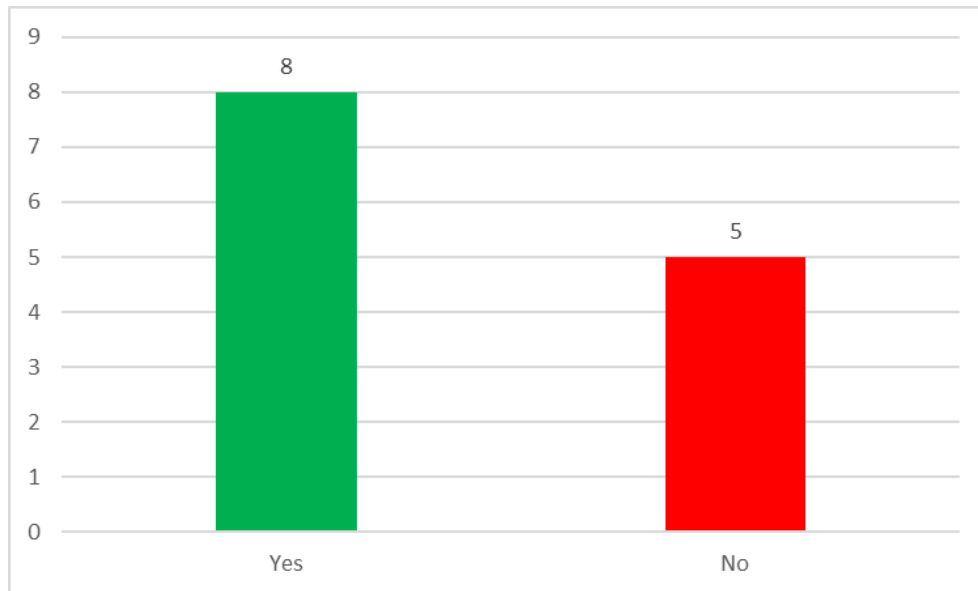
No - you need at least 10 minutes break between meetings days when I have 4/5 meetings I am exhausted.

Breaks are usually judged by the agenda item or around 8pm which isn't always the best time.

We don't tend to break in our meetings as they are generally hearings.

Q6. Currently the maximum meeting time allowed is four hours, do you feel that is appropriate for remote meetings?

If not, what should the maximum meeting length be?



Comments:

It depends on each case but four hours with a break seems reasonable to me.

4 hours is a considerable time, although Planning Committee meetings can be longer (as a necessity if there are a number of applications to discuss and deliberations are extensive) - 5 hours should cover this.

Dependent on the topic/subject and breaks permitted.

I think 4 hours is sufficient.

3 hours including breaks would be preferable. Remote meetings are hard work/tiring especially after a full day's work.

Yes, four hours is plenty.

No longer than 4 hours.

3.5 - with a break

I can handle 4. Any more would be a push though.

I haven't had a four hour meeting yet but I would think this is too long.

There is likely to be a break within the 4 hours. I have had training sessions on screen for 4 hours and this has been a max.

Q7. If you present or advise a committee or panel, are there any particular challenges that you face performing that role in a remote meeting?

WIFI dropping out!

Just ICT - worry that something won't work or connection will be lost and the need for either hard copies of documents (which isn't ideal) or another device.

Working from home and having home commitments/distractions. Also, the working environment at home is a little cramped so not overly comfortable for a long meeting.

Advising the chair privately can be quite challenging - perhaps the protocol should be that all chairs/advising officers must have a WhatsApp group to facilitate

No - I find it easy. If it's a PPT, I think as long as you liaise with the Democratic Services Officer to ensure you've decided who's driving the PPT then it should be fine.

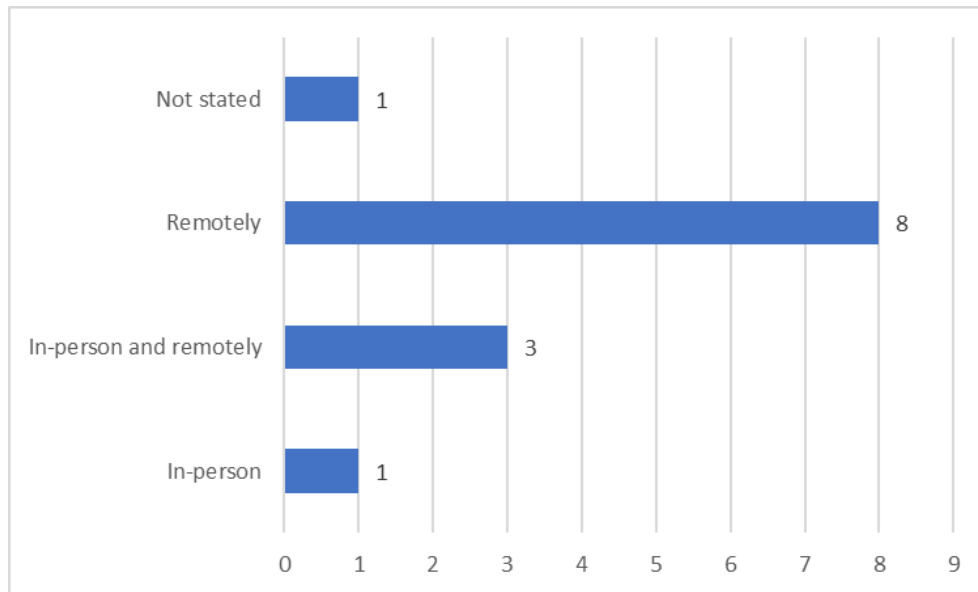
It is difficult to catch the Chairman's eye, and to engage with other officers individually.

Not being able to communicate with colleagues (other than by text or Teams chat) is a little difficult - queries are more difficult to resolve.

The protocols around being able to speak or contribute when presenting slides on Teams, as the presenter you are unable to see reactions or notifications.

When waiting to be called to present. You do not join the meeting the usual way and are only required for one item. This is fine if your item is first but more difficult if you are further down the agenda. You have no idea if the meeting has started or if it is over running whether you will be called in the next 2 minutes or the next hour, you just sit waiting anxiously.

8. How do you think future meetings should be conducted?



Comments:

Licensing Hearings would be better conducted in person than over Zoom. The level of informality afforded by a virtual platform is not ideal in appeal cases and hearings where outcomes can be appealed to court and people's livelihoods depend on the proper consideration of all matters.

Ultimately, remote meetings are likely to be more efficient for attendees (due to reduced travel time etc) and more accessible for the public (as they can view online), but the working practices are quite difficult in my role at Planning Committee.

A mixture of online and town hall.

Online/virtual is definitely the best choice.

If you are waiting to be called you should be advised that the meeting has started, the time when you are expected to be called, if the meeting is over running and the new time.

Evening meetings are definitely better for officers online as they have often had a full day of meetings anyway. I think a combination would be ideal.

All online. It's the future.

9. Are there any other general issues or concerns, relating to remote meetings, that you would like to raise?

Some attendees need to be aware that they have to be able to familiarise themselves with the technology fully - both the hardware and software - before taking part.

Staff need the equipment urgently, the roll out of laptops has been far, far too slow.

Publicity and notifications need to be automated for the public.

Colchester Borough Council

Remote Meetings Protocol

1. Introduction:

The following guidance is intended to provide Councillors with useful information to assist with navigating new ways of working, and in particular preparing for and attending remote meetings. Information considered to be of specific use to meeting Chairs is highlighted separately to form a useful quick reference guide.

2. Meeting location and paperwork:

The time of meetings, together with agenda documents, will be published on the Council's website. Instructions on how to access the meeting remotely will also be provided. www.colchester.gov.uk

Councillors will be notified of a remote meeting by an Outlook invitation, with the meeting password sent separately in a different Outlook invitation for security purposes. The invite will contain links to all relevant papers and to the meeting itself, to enable Councillors to join as participants as opposed to observers.

3. Preparing for the meeting, practical arrangements

These steps are particularly important for participants in meetings viewable by the public, but also apply to any others.

- Substitutions: Where you will be represented by a substitute, as much notice as possible should be given to Democratic Services, with details of who will be substituting as soon as this information is known, and at the least by midday on the day of the meeting. This will enable any necessary arrangements to be made to ensure that all Councillors who will be members of the Committee meeting may be accommodated and are in receipt of the correct meeting paperwork.
- Please note that due to logistical difficulties, it will not be possible to make printed agendas available for any meetings. If printed copies of paperwork are required then you will need to make the necessary arrangements to provide these yourself.
- Try to ensure that you are joining the meeting from an area in the home where you are less likely to be disturbed, and pay particular attention to anyone else in the area who may be able to overhear parts of the meetings – in particular any confidential or exempt from publication items that may form part of the meeting;

- Turn off noise sources such as television and radio and ensure that any smart speakers are turned off (Amazon Echo, Google Home etc) as they could turn on or inadvertently record the meeting.
- Try to ensure that the broadband connection is sufficiently stable to join the meeting. If your connection has low bandwidth, you may find it helpful to reduce the number of users or other devices that are using your broadband connection, turning them off for the duration of the meeting. You might find it easier to join using your mobile phone's data allowance, or if absolutely necessary by making a voice-only call – instruction on how to do this will be provided with the email inviting you to the meeting.
- Try to ensure that your background is as neutral as possible (a blank wall is best), and that it contains no political slogans or posters. Even if the option is available to you, you should resist the temptation to change your background to an idyllic beach scene!
- Your name will be shown onscreen if you are appearing in video; all Councillors are asked to ensure that their name is in the same format, for example 'Councillor Mark Cory', to enable members of the public to identify easily who is a Councillor and who is an Officer, and to recognise Councillors they may not have seen before.
- Before joining the meeting, double check to make sure that your camera is positioned to provide a clear, front-on view of your face. This may involve thinking about lighting in the room you're in (for example, sitting in front of a window may plunge your face into shadow). It may also involve putting your webcam, laptop or tablet on top of a couple of books so that you can look into the camera face on. Carry out a test or preview of your display before joining the meeting;
- Try to take an opportunity to practice with the functions of the software you are using to access the remote meeting. Guidance notes will be provided in a separate document, but if you have any concerns or worries, please contact Democratic Services before the meeting. Of key importance during a meeting will be the ability to mute and un-mute your microphone, and to indicate to the Chair that you wish to speak.
- Where possible, arrange to use a headset during the meeting rather than the speaker and microphone built in to your device. Not only will the quality of your audio be dramatically improved, but audio quality for all participants will be also. This is of particular importance should anyone participating have a hearing issue.
- Try to ensure that you aim to 'arrive' at the meeting no later than 15 minutes before it is due to start. In this way, there will be an opportunity to address and resolve any technical issues.

- Keep the contact details of Democratic Services Officers who will be facilitating the meeting handy so that you can contact them with any issues that you may have attending the meeting easily.
- Please give some extra thought into any input that you wish to have into the meeting, having read the meeting papers through carefully. If you wish to speak or ask a question, you may wish to contact either the Chair or Democratic Services before the meeting so that your intention to speak can be noted and will be addressed in the meeting. You may wish to liaise with individual Officers prior to the meeting to seek clarification on any points in reports you feel necessary, and which may assist with concise delivery of the relevant report. You will also have the option of indicating your desire to speak during the meeting itself by utilising the 'raise hand' function of the Zoom software – for security reasons, the meeting 'chat' function will be disabled.
- Having considered the agenda document, Councillors should also give careful thought as to any pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests that they may have to declare in relation to any agenda items. Any such interest should be communicated to Democratic Services as soon as possible, so that any arrangements necessary can be made to ensure that the meeting runs as smoothly as possible. This may include excluding you from the vote on any particular item or arranging for you to be removed from the meeting altogether (in the case of a disclosable pecuniary interest) and invited to re-join once the relevant agenda item had been dealt with.
- Try to make sure that you are as physically prepared for the meeting as possible, so that you will be comfortable throughout the meeting. This is particularly important as it may be some time before the meeting finishes or there is a break in the agenda.

Because of the nature of remote meetings, they tend to run much longer than meetings that are carried out in person, and so additional preparation before the meeting is key to ensure that business is conducted in as focussed and efficient manner as possible, but still with full consideration of the pertinent issues.

Chair information:

- You should liaise with the Democratic Services Officer with the conduct of the meeting in plenty of time before the meeting is due to start – ensuring that you have a list of all attendees that you are expecting to be present, together with a list of Councillors who have indicated that they wish to speak or ask a question, or any who may need to declare an interest in an agenda item.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, you have the means to be contacted outside the meeting in the event of any failure in the broadcast or technical issues meaning that the meeting is no longer quorate.
- Be familiar with the functions offered by the software being used to broadcast the meeting – particularly the muting capacity of the software.

4. During the meeting:

The Chair, at the beginning of the meeting, will explain the protocol for member and public participation and the rules of debate, and Councillors will be asked to introduce themselves. The Chair's ruling during the debate will be final.

Councillors are asked to adhere to the following etiquette during remote attendance at a meeting:

- ✓ Councillors should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
- ✓ Councillors should have their microphones muted when not talking.
- ✓ Only speak when invited to by the Chair.
- ✓ Only one person should speak at any one time.
- ✓ Turn on the microphone and also the video-feed (if available or unless speaking to a diagram, presentation slide or drawing), then state your name before you make a comment.
- ✓ When referring to a specific report, page, or slide, mention the report, page, or slide so that all Councillors have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.
- ✓ Ensure that your mobile phone is set to silent mode.
- ✓ Don't make comments about other Councillors or Officers during the meeting, even if you believe that your microphone is muted.
- ✓ Refrain from smoking during the meeting – this is prohibited by the Council's Constitution.
- ✓ You should also try to avoid eating or drinking during the meeting unless this is necessary and can be done discretely. Although being held remotely, meetings are still formal and should be treated as though they were being held in person, with the same expectations of appearance and behaviour. Although it is easy to forget, given the nature of the meeting, Councillors will still be on public display throughout, potentially to a wider audience than would normally be in attendance at a physical meeting.
- ✓ Councillors and Officers should introduce themselves before they speak, particularly if only attending the meeting via an audio link.

- ✓ As remote meetings are new to both Officers and Councillors, please be patient during the meeting as some processes may take a little longer than usual – you will still get your chance to speak.

Chair information:

- At the start of the meeting, read out the introductory statement, and advise all Councillors that their microphones will now be muted.
- Ensure that Councillors are introduced to the meeting, and Officers introduced with their job titles when speaking.
- Remain vigilant throughout the meeting to those indicating their wish to speak on an item by physical gesture or by using the 'raise hand' function.
- When inviting a Councillor to speak, remind them to unmute their microphone (if necessary).
- Ensure that everyone who wishes to speak has done so at the end of each agenda item and before moving to the vote. It is good practice for the Chair to pause at this point to give any Councillor who wishes to comment further a chance to do so – they may have to unmute their microphone etc.
- Ensure that any vote taken during the meeting is done so clearly, by making a roll call of Councillors present and asking them to confirm their vote, and ask the Democratic Services Officer to confirm the voting.
- The Chair will be in control of the meeting, and will invite input where necessary in accordance with indications received either in advance of, or during the meeting.
- The rules around breaks apply to remote meetings too, and breaks should be utilised to promote greater concentration, particularly during longer meetings.
- Where it becomes apparent that a Councillor has lost connectivity, the Chair will pause the meeting for a brief time to enable reconnection to take place. Where this is not possible, consideration will need to be given to adjourning the meeting for a longer period of time – this will be essential if the meeting is no longer quorate.

5. Review

This Protocol will be kept under review by the Monitoring Officer and will be revised in the light of experience in consultation with the Group Leaders.

LENGTH OF MEETINGS 1 June 2019 – 4 September 2019
1 June 2020 – 4 September 2020

MEETING	DATE 2019	DURATION hours: minutes	DATE 2020	DURATION hours: minutes
Full Council	17 July	2:36	15 July	4:01
			12 August	1:31
Average		2:36		2:46
Cabinet	5 June	0:55	1 June	3:05
	10 July	1:37	8 July	3:10
	4 September	3:13	19 August	1:45
			2 September	2:37
Average		1:55		2:39
Policy and Public Initiatives Panel / Policy Panel	19 June	1:15	17 June	1.54
	31 July	2:15	5 August	1.13
Average		1:45		1.34
Governance and Audit	25 June	1:59	23 June	2:28
	30 July	1:01	28 July	0:59
	3 September	1:41		
Average		1:33		1:44
Scrutiny	11 June	2:55	1 June	3:05
	16 July	1:50	7 July	3:10
	6 August	2:17	21 July	2.24
	28 August	2:23	27 July	1:12
			17 August	2:56
			18 August	3:56
Average		2:21		2:47
Local Plan	22 July	4:12	14 July	2:45
			24 August	3:16
Average		4:12		3:00
Planning	13 June	2:54	17 June	2:31
	4 July	4:19	9 July	1:15
	25 July	0:56	30 July	2:54
	15 August	2:20	20 August	1:17
Average		2:37		1:59
Licencing	28 August	0:37	10 June	0:32
			11 August	0:18
Average		0:37		0:25
NEPP	20 June	2:00	25 June	2:32
Average				
Average over all meetings	2019	2:10	2020	2:18