

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

PROTOCOL ON THE OPERATION OF PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

1. Introduction

In accordance with the Local Authority and Police Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, all Planning Committee hearings held during the Covid-19 restrictions will take place using a 'virtual' format. This document aims to give details on how the meetings will take place and establish some rules of procedure to ensure that all parties find the meetings productive.

2. Prior to the Hearing

Once the date for a meeting has been set, an electronic appointment will be sent to all relevant parties. This will include a link to access the virtual meeting as well as guidance on the use of the technology involved.

3. Format

For the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions period, all Planning Committee meetings will be delivered through conference call, using Zoom software. This can be accessed using a PC, laptop or mobile/landline telephone etc. and the instructions sent with meeting appointments will cover how to do this.

4. Structure of the Meeting

Although held in a virtual format, Planning Committee Meetings will follow the standard procedure with the following principal stages. Committee Members may ask questions of any party at any time. Questions are however, usually taken after each person has spoken.

- The Planning Officer presents their report (no time limit).
- Objectors to the application make their representations. Parties who are speaking should not repeat the information, which they have already given in writing in their representation. However, they will be able to expand on the written information given, provided the information remains relevant (3 minutes per registered objector).
- The applicant responds to the representations made (3 minutes).
- The Councillor who has called in the application (3 minutes).
- Ward Councillors for the area affected by the application (3 minutes per Councillor).
- The Planning Officer will then present a summary of the material planning considerations (no time limit).
- The Planning Committee members will then debate the item.

- The Clerk will ask members of the Committee to indicate which way they wish to vote and the Clerk will announce the decision of the Committee.

5. Technology Issues

An agenda setting out the items for the meeting will be issued in advance, to all parties in accordance with statutory timetables. This will include details of the applications together with all representations on the matter. The agenda will also be published on the Council's website – www.havering.gov.uk in the normal way.

All parties should be aware that the sheer volume of virtual meetings now taking place across the country has placed considerable strain upon broadband network infrastructure. As a result, Zoom meetings may experience intermittent faults whereby participants lose contact for short periods of time before reconnecting to the call. The guidance below explains how the meeting is to be conducted, including advice on what to do if participants cannot hear the speaker and etiquette of participants during the call.

Members and the public will be encouraged to use any Zoom video conferencing facilities provided by the Council to attend a meeting remotely. If this is not possible, attendance may be through an audio link or by other electronic means.

Remote access for members of the public and Members who are not attending to participate in the meeting, together with access for the Press, will be provided via a webcast of the meeting at www.havering.gov.uk.

If the Chairman is made aware that the meeting is not accessible to the public through remote means, due to any technological or other failure of provision, then the Chair shall temporarily adjourn the meeting immediately. If the provision of access through remote means cannot be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business will be considered at a time and date fixed by the Chairman. If he or she does not fix a date, the remaining business will be considered at the next scheduled ordinary meeting.

6. Management of Remote Meetings for Members

The Chairman will normally confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of a Planning Committee or Cabinet meeting that they can see and hear all participating members. Any Member participating remotely should also confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of the meeting that they can see and hear the proceedings and the other participants.

The attendance of Members at the meeting will be recorded by the Democratic Services Officer. The normal quorum requirements for meetings as set out in the Council's Constitution will also apply to a remote meeting.

If a connection to a Member is lost during a meeting of the Planning Committee, the Chair will stop the meeting to enable the connection to be restored. If the connection cannot be restored within a reasonable time, the meeting will proceed, but the Member who was disconnected will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion, as they would not have heard all the facts.

7. Remote Attendance of the Public

Any member of the public participating in a meeting remotely in exercise of their right to speak at a Planning Committee or other meeting must meet the same criteria as members of the Committee (outlined above) in terms of being able to access and, where permitted, speak at the meeting. The use of video conferencing technology for the meeting will facilitate this and guidance on how to access the meeting remotely will be supplied by the clerk.

8. Etiquette at the meeting

For some participants, this will be their first virtual meeting. In order to make the hearing productive for everyone, the following rules must be adhered to and etiquette observed:

- The meeting will be presided over by the Chairman who will invite participants to speak individually at appropriate points. All other participants will have their microphones muted by the Clerk until invited by the Chairman to speak;
- If invited to contribute, participants should make their statement, then wait until invited to speak again if required;
- If it is possible, participants should find a quiet location to participate in the Zoom meeting where they will not be disturbed as background noise can affect participants.
- The person speaking should not be spoken over or interrupted and other participants will normally be muted whilst someone is speaking. If there are intermittent technological faults during the meeting then the speaker will repeat from the point where the disruption started. Whilst intermittent disruption is frustrating, it is important that all participants remain professional and courteous.

9. Meeting Procedures

Democratic Services Officers will facilitate the meeting. Their role will be to control conferencing technology employed for remote access and attendance and to administer the public and Member interaction, engagement and connections on the instruction of the Chairman.

The Council has put in place a technological solution that will enable Members participating in meetings remotely to indicate their wish to speak via this solution.

The Chairman will follow the rules set out in the Council's Constitution when determining who may speak, as well as the order and priority of speakers and the content and length of speeches in the normal way.

The Chairman, at the beginning of the meeting, will explain the protocol for Member and public participation and the rules of debate. The Chairman's ruling during the debate will be final.

Members are asked to adhere to the following etiquette during remote attendance of the meeting:

- Committee Members are asked to join the meeting no later than fifteen minutes before the start to allow themselves and Democratic Services Officers the opportunity to test the equipment.
- Any camera (video-feed) should show a non-descript background or, where possible, a virtual background and members should be careful to not allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
- Rather than raising one's hand or rising to be recognised or to speak, Members should avail themselves of the remote process for requesting to be heard and use the 'raise hand' function in the chat box.
- Only speak when invited to by the Chair.
- Only one person may speak at any one time.
- When referring to a specific report, agenda page, or slide, participants should mention the report, page number, or slide so that all members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times

The Chairman will explain, at the relevant point of the meeting, the procedure for participation by registered public objectors, which will reflect the procedures outlined above. Members of the public must adhere to this procedure otherwise; they may be excluded from the meeting.

For voting, the Democratic Services Officer will ask Members to indicate their vote – either FOR, AGAINST or ABSTAIN, once debate on an application has concluded.

The Democratic Services Officer will clearly announce the result of the vote and the Chairman will then move on to the next agenda item.

Any Member participating in a remote meeting who declares a disclosable pecuniary interest, or other declarable interest, in any item of business that would normally require them to leave the room, must also leave the remote meeting. The Democratic Services Officer or meeting facilitator, who will also invite the relevant Member by link, email or telephone to re-join the meeting at the appropriate time, using the original meeting invitation, will confirm the departure.

10. After the Hearing - Public Access to Meeting Documentation following the meeting

Members of the public may access minutes, decision and other relevant documents through the Council's website. www.havering.gov.uk

For any further information on the meeting, please contact richard.cursons@onesource.co.uk, tel: 01708 432430.