

Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings Arrangements Arising from COVID-19

In April 2020, in response to the developing COVID-19 pandemic and in recognition of the problem of holding and attending meetings, and the Government included s.78 in the Coronavirus Act 2020. This gave the Secretary of State the power to make provisions for the holding of meetings, which the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) brought into force by Regulations on 4th April 2020.

The parish council has subsequently held all its meetings remotely through zoom. However, the emergency legislation introduced last year is time limited and unless it is amended councils will have to return to meetings in person after 7th May 2021.

Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) and the National Association of local Councils (NALC) have been lobbying ministers on behalf of parish and town councils to ensure that the legislation is extended, but at present government has no plans to extend these regulations. Councils should therefore start preparing for the real possibility of face to face meetings from May. The NALC update includes information on the possibility of the return of face-to-face meeting, suggestions to help prepare, risk assessment considerations and some tips to help manage remote meetings. [Read further details](#)

If it is intended to hold such meetings by remote technology then the annual council meeting must be held between 1-6 May, and the annual parish meeting from 1 March – 6 May. Should the legislation be extended in the interim then there would of course be extra flexibility, and the parish council could revert to its scheduled meetings.

To ensure business continuity, the clerk will review the Parish Council's scheme of delegation and report back to the next meeting.

Actions:

Make provision to adjust the schedule of meetings for Wickhambrook Parish Council by adding in an ordinary meeting at the end of March (25th), cancelling the April meeting (29th April) and bringing forward the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council and Annual Parish Meeting to Thursday 6th May, to enable it to be held remotely.

This approach will have the following benefits:

- As much business as possible will have been completed before any requirement to revert to physical meetings comes into effect
- Councillors who are unable to attend face-to-face meetings will have as much time as possible before disqualification by virtue of s.85 of the Local Government Act 1972 becomes an issue.