

# **Falkirk Council**

## **Virtual Meeting Protocol**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 makes provision for remote attendance at Council meetings on the direction of the Convener, whom failing the Depute Convener. The legislation enables meetings to be held without all, or any, of the members being physically present in a room.
- 1.2 In accordance with Standing Order 3.1(v) all participants in fully virtual meetings and all remote participants in hybrid meetings will follow the protocol set out below.

## **2. Meetings**

### Joining a Virtual Meeting as a Member

- 2.1 Councillors are encouraged to join the meeting promptly and will be able to log in at least ten minutes before the meeting start time. This will allow time for any issues with joining to be attended to in advance of the start of the meeting. Officers from Committee Services and Members Services will be contactable to assist members who are having technical difficulties but will only be able to assist when it will not cause disruption to the conduct of the meeting.

### Joining a Virtual Meeting as a Non-Member

- 2.2 Only those Councillors who are members of a committee or who are permitted to participate in all or part of the meeting (for example a Portfolio Holder not appointed to the Executive or Scrutiny Committee with an item within their remit on the agenda) will be permitted to join remotely. Otherwise, members should view proceedings via the livestream. An exception to this is the situation where a Councillor who is not a member of the Committee would have been entitled in a physical meeting to be present in the public gallery during a private item. On those occasions the Councillor may join remotely.

### Joining a Virtual Meeting as an Officer

- 2.3 Officers attending virtual meetings will be muted and have their video feed switched off unless they are presenting a report, answering a question or have an ongoing role in advising the meeting. This is to assist the Convener with the running of the meeting by promoting the videos of the other Councillors to the main view while demoting non-active officers.

### Speaking at Virtual Meetings

- 2.4 Councillors who wish to speak during a meeting should use the “raise your hand” icon, and their microphone should remain muted until asked to speak by the Convener. Microphones should be muted again once the Councillor has finished speaking. If any issues arise with this, Councillors should then seek to attract the Convener’s attention by unmuting and alerting the Convener to their desire to enter the debate. The Convener will, subject to their discretion, seek

to ensure that all Councillors who wish to contribute have that opportunity, but it is the responsibility of individual Councillors to ensure they have attracted the Convener's attention before the item is closed or they will not be allowed to speak.

- 2.5 The 'Chat Function' will not be routinely monitored and it should not be used in place of the provisions at 2.4.

#### Dealing with Technical Difficulties with the System

- 2.6 In the event that an issue is identified with the meeting platform the meeting will be adjourned until a resolution for the issue has been sought. If the issue is fixed the meeting shall resume as it was at the time of the adjournment. If the fault cannot be fixed, the meeting may then be adjourned to such future date and time as the Convener may determine. In circumstances where the Convener determines that the business is time critical, the meeting may continue provided that it remains quorate.

#### Dealing with Technical Difficulties for Councillors

- 2.7 In the event that individual Councillors have issues accessing the virtual meeting they should endeavour to contact a member of the Committee Services or Member Services teams. Officers will then seek to assist the Councillor with their issue. Where the issue is with an individual Councillor such as low wi-fi signal or no power in their laptop/tablet device the meeting will continue in their absence.

### **3. Visibility**

- 3.1 Councillors must remain in view of the camera at all times, unless taking a comfort break or for medical reasons. In all circumstances, Councillors must seek the Convener's approval to keep their camera off. Exceptions to this will be dealt with by the Convener on a case-by-case basis. The requirement to remain visible is particularly important in regulatory meetings, and in relation to those meetings where a Councillor's video feed is turned off, they will be deemed to have left the meeting, except where the camera is turned off in accordance with this provision.
- 3.2 Where a Councillor has declared an interest and stated that they consider they require to recuse themselves from consideration of the item the Councillor should leave the meeting and rejoin at the conclusion of the item.
- 3.3 Councillors must think carefully of the image which is being presented to the public when appearing remotely and avoid presenting a less than professional, or to some a controversial image (for example by being seen to be at work, or on holiday or by displaying political emblems or slogans). It is recommended that Councillors adopt the approved Council backgrounds or have their background blurred. Bespoke backgrounds should not be employed. No political campaigning material or commercial advertising should be on show including on clothing or other items (laptops, water bottles etc). This applies to

both in-person and remote meetings and is particularly relevant to regulatory meetings.

- 3.4 When participating remotely, Councillors should ensure that they join the meeting from a location where background noise is reduced. It is recommended that remote participants make use of headsets where there is likely to be disruption.
- 3.4 When participating remotely in a meeting which in part or entirely has excluded the press and public from its proceedings ie during confidential items, Councillors should carefully consider the location from where they are joining the meeting. It would not be appropriate to join such meetings from a public location. This includes when joining from home where others can view or hear proceedings. Where breaches of this requirement occur, a member may be asked by the convener to leave a meeting until they are able to join from a private location.

#### **4. Voting**

- 4.1 Where a Councillor for technical reasons is unable to give their vote verbally at the point they appear in the sederunt the Clerk will move on and ask them again at the end of the vote. Where the Councillor is able to hear proceedings and is visible on the camera and still cannot give their vote verbally, they should visibly indicate their intent clearly to the Clerk. If during the vote a Councillor loses the connection to the meeting, they should immediately seek to rejoin the meeting and providing they are able to do this before the vote is closed they will be able to cast their vote.