

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Protocol for attendance at physical meetings held during COVID-19 continued restrictions

1. General

The Government “roadmap” to coming out of COVID-19 restrictions indicated a possible date of 21 June 2021 for easing all restrictions. A delay of a month has been announced, and current restrictions on gatherings will continue. The provisions of this protocol will therefore continue to apply until the restrictions are lifted.

Meetings of the Council, its Committees and the Cabinet will be held in person, in compliance with legislation and the Council’s Constitution.

The risks associated with COVID-19 mean the Chief Executive is obliged to require attendees at meetings to comply with safety measures.

The safety measures which have been put in place are based on risk assessment of the venue in which meetings will be held, and with regard to government guidance.

The Chief Executive has consulted with the Chair and Leader of the Council in order to ensure that access to meetings continues to be fully upheld, whilst protecting those whose presence is necessary.

Attendance by decision-makers

Members of the decision-making body must attend the meeting in person if they intend to vote on decisions. The quorum of a meeting is based on physical attendance in the place in which the meeting is held.

Attendance by others

For meetings held in the Council Chamber, all other participants can join the meeting remotely and contribute directly to the meeting. This means:

- Members of the public, agents and applicants, and parish or town council representatives who have registered to speak on planning applications can do so by joining the meeting online
- Ward Members wishing to speak on an application may do so by addressing the meeting online
- Officers may present reports to the meeting online

For anyone other than the Members who are voting in a meeting, this method of participation in a meeting is strongly recommended, rather than attending in person.

Accessing the webcast

Anyone may watch and listen to the meeting remotely by means of the live webcast. This method of observing the meeting is strongly recommended, rather than attending in person.

Safety measures which will apply to meetings

Public attendance

Participation for members of the public is strongly encouraged to be by means of online access, as set out above. However, for those who do attend in person, it is important to be aware of the following provisions which will apply.

Seating for members of the public will generally be restricted to no more than 4 places at meetings held in the Council Chamber.

A queue system will be operated so that attendees who are present for a particular application or item on the agenda will only be able to enter the Council Chamber when that item is considered. Until that point any attendees will need to wait outside the Council Chamber in a queue, which would be subject to social distancing.

No refreshments will be available at South Cambridgeshire Hall, so any attendees will need to bring their own and food must be eaten outside in their car.

Public Health Guidance

South Cambridgeshire District Council has had regard to the following guidance and is implementing appropriate measures to follow this guidance. The Chair of the meeting and officers arranging meetings have been made aware of the hazards and appropriate risk mitigation from the risk assessment carried out.

1) Reduce the number and/or the duration of interactions between people

- Only absolutely necessary participants should physically attend meetings. Consider the number of Members and officers required to be physically present to carry out essential business/be quorate
- Until full easing of the roadmap (Step 4), the meeting should facilitate remote access for the public where possible.
- The venue needs to enable all attendees to maintain social distancing (2m, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable), if the Risk Assessment shows this is not possible – hire a larger venue. For any venue, consider:
 - Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
 - Members to sit side-to-side rather than face-to-face whenever possible
- Keep the meeting as short as possible, consider
 - Only dealing with essential business
 - Standing orders on duration of speaking, right to reply etc.
- For communal areas make sure there is an efficient flow in/out of the venue/Council Chamber for officers and members, ensure any queueing is outside, safe and indoor interactions are limited
- For areas where regular meetings take place, using floor signage to help people maintain social distancing.

2) Controlling the source of the virus and exposure through face coverings

- Face coverings control the source of the virus and provide some protection against exposure to virus particles.
- Members and officers are also strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet.

3) Reducing small aerosol transmission by effective ventilation

- Ideally the room should be well ventilated. The Council Chamber has very limited ventilation. However, the benefits of the hybrid technology mean that fewer people need to be present in person, and steps have been taken to advise members to use their substitute options where possible to ensure as many members in the room have received their vaccination. This decision is up to members, and was agreed by the group leaders.
- Guidance is available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus/ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

4) Reducing transmission from hands and surface

- Avoid transmission during meetings, for example avoiding sharing pens, documents and other objects.
- Good hand hygiene thorough hand washing and provision of hand sanitiser both in the venue and the meeting room itself for officers and Members (and public after 21st June).
- Frequent, focused cleaning of high hand-touch surfaces at venue including communal areas and items such as microphones/electronic voting system.
- Follow the HSE deep and periodic [cleaning guidance](#) for workplaces and gov.uk advice on cleaning after a confirmed case. If the Council Chamber/meeting room is currently used by an alternative service, contingency plans should be in place to ensure there is sufficient time for cleaning if there is a confirmed case identified just before the day of the meeting.
- Cleaning after somebody with symptoms/confirmed coronavirus – if the Council Chamber/Venue has had some one with symptoms/confirmed coronavirus in it in the day prior to the meeting day – the expectation is that it will be cleaned according to this guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>.

5) High adherence to testing and self-solation

- It is recommended that staff, members and any members of the public who choose to attend in person should have two negative rapid tests in the run up to the day of the meeting through options such as [Pharmacy collect](#).
- All attendees should be reminded if they have Covid-19 symptoms or are a contact of someone with confirmed Covid-19 they should not attend the meeting and should remain home to isolate.

6) Support changes in behaviours through clear communication and training

- There are going to be many differences to usual way Council meetings are run for both officers and members and the public. Clear communication and training will be required to help support the necessary changes in behaviour.

Liz Watts, Chief Executive

14 June 2021