

ELLESMERE TOWN COUNCIL

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Face to Face Meetings Briefing

Background NALC Guidance

The regulations that allow local authorities to hold meetings remotely apply to local authority meetings that are required to be held, or held, before 7th May 2021. **This means that, without any further action from the government, all local authorities including local councils must return to face-to-face meetings from 7th May. NALC is working with a number of national bodies to press the government to extend these regulations beyond this date and will continue to stress the urgency and importance of this issue.** However, at this time government has no plans to extend these regulations and so councils should start preparing for the real possibility of face-to-face meetings from May.

NALC's position remains that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force. The guidance below has been written to help local councils prepare for the scenario that remote council meetings cannot lawfully take place from 7th May 2021. There is still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks may change over the coming weeks and months. NALC will update this guidance as the situation evolves. Each council will have to decide which course of action will best fit their needs and manage risks. From May 2021, as face-to-face council meetings resume there will still be the risk to attendees of COVID-19 exposure. Councils should conduct a risk assessment in advance of a face-to-face meeting which should give consideration to what the council can do to reduce risk to councillors, staff and public including:

- Providing hand sanitiser to those entering the meeting room and making sure hand sanitiser is readily available in the room itself.
- Staggering arrival and exit times for staff, councillors, and members of the public.
- Placing seating at least 2-metres apart.
- Ensuring everyone wears face masks.
- Holding paperless meetings.
- If papers are provided, people should be discouraged from sharing with others and asked to take the papers with them at the end of the meeting to minimise how many people handle the papers.
- Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly.
- Choosing a venue with good ventilation, including opening windows and doors where possible.
- Choosing a large enough venue to allow distancing – this may mean choosing a different venue to what the council used before.
- The council (or venue owner/operator) will need to identify the venue's maximum capacity in their risk assessment, taking into account the need for social distancing. Consider how the council will ensure this capacity is not exceeded and how it will manage the situation if more people wish to attend than capacity

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allows. For example, could meetings be livestreamed, or could members of the public submit questions via email?

- If the venue has an NHS QR code to support test and trace then all attendees should register using that app, for those without access to the app they should register attendance in line with the venue's test and trace procedure.
- The council must understand and ensure it is acting in compliance with the latest government [safer workplaces guidance](#)

Ellesmere Town Council Position

The Town Council meetings are normally held in the committee room at Ellesmere Town Hall which is a Covid – 19 secure building. The current Government Guidelines that are in place means that a Town Council meeting held in this room would exceed maximum capacity. There would be the option of using the Small Hall & Committee Room, however the maximum capacity in there is currently 15, therefore with full councillor attendance, this would limit the capacity of press and public able to attend.

In order to allow the public access to a meeting in Small Hall the Town Council will need to consider whether to hold hybrid meetings where councillors are physically present and the press and public attend using zoom.

In order to set up hybrid meetings we will need to consider the following:

- How best to set up hybrid meetings and whether zoom is the most appropriate tool to use. They could be run using an extra laptop and the existing screen and projector in the Small Hall. This process will require some trial runs to ensure the system works and the public can hear all councillors.
- Whether to live stream meetings and allow public to submit questions prior to the meeting which will be considered in the public participation session. There is some doubt over whether this option is legal as it does not allow the public to speak at the meeting, advice would need to be sought from SALC on this option.
- Whether there is a need to invest in a microphone system to ensure that the public attending virtually can hear what is being said.
- An additional member of staff may need to attend the meeting to manage the virtual side of the meeting especially during public participation.

The Town Council could use the Main Hall, where the current maximum capacity is 32, so there would be ample room for the full council, officers and members of the press and public, however due to an existing booking the meeting date would need to change to the second Thursday of each month, which would be the better option as the Annual Town Council meeting, must be held within 14 days of the local elections which take place on Thursday the 6th June.

Recommendation

1) To schedule the Town Council meetings from the 7th May as follows:

Annual Town Council Meeting – Thursday 13th May
Monthly Meeting – Thursday 10th June
– Thursday 8th July

If the Government's roadmap goes to plan the anticipated date for lifting of lockdown restrictions would be 21st June, but I suggest for some continuity the meeting until July are held on Thursday and then following summer

recess in August, hopefully the normal monthly meetings can return to the 1st Monday of each month (bank holiday dependant).

The only other alternative to the recommendation would be to keep the monthly meetings to a Monday evening in the small hall and for the Clerk to seek advice from SALC on the holding of hybrid meetings and develop a plan for the return to face to face meetings based on advice given by NALC.

