

Date: 14 April

Item 12 Appendix 4
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Legislation, Covid 19 and Future Meeting Format
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## 1 Introduction

In response to Covid 19 legislation was introduced which permitted Parish and Town Councils to meet remotely. This legislation ends on 7 May 2021 and will not be extended. The Government will review the situation and have instigated a 12 week 'call for evidence'

Appended to this report are:

- a) Excerpt from 'Roadmap out of Lockdown – relating to Steps 3 (not before 17 May 2021) and 4 (not before
- b) Guidance issued by WALC on 24 February 2021

## 2 Impact

- a) Parish Council Meetings:

Ettington Parish Council has brought forward its May meeting to allow for it being a remote meeting.

In respect of the meeting scheduled for 9 June the Clerk is of the opinion that to hold this meeting would not fall within the Stage 3 Roadmap and the meeting should be deferred until Stage 4 of the Roadmap is reached. It is anticipated that an announcement will be made on 14 June in respect of whether Stage 4 will be activated from 21 June.

There is a further constraint in that the approved (at a full Council meeting ) AGAR (audit) submission is required to be submitted by 30 June (though in their email they quote a deadline of 2 July). The Clerk will focus on completing the AGAR paperwork in the hope that it can be submitted to the meeting scheduled for 5 May but this cannot be guaranteed.

**Action Required:** To consider and agree alternative date for June meeting.

- b) Format for Future Meetings:

Zoom meetings have led to an increase in attendance by Ettington parishioners but from 7 May meetings must be held in public though hybrid meetings are acceptable. The clerk has investigated and with purchase of microphone and speakers and some technical support (this being beyond her capabilities) and rehearsal it would be possible to allow for attendance by parishioners via Zoom. Both the small hall and the lounge have projection facilities though the main hall doesn't – to allow for social distancing the main hall would be preferable to either of the other rooms.. The Council does have a projector of its own but a screen of some kind would be required.

**Action Required:** To consider, debate and make a resolution in respect of whether to revert to 'live' meetings or to hold hybrid meetings.

## **C Parish Meeting**

It had been agreed that the Parish Meeting would be held on 26 May (it being a legislative requirement that it be held between 1 March and 1 June (inclusive) and be open the public). The Parish Meeting for 2020 was cancelled and, therefore, it is important that a meeting be held in 2021 though, in the Clerk's opinion, it will not be possible to hold in the prescribed period).

**Action Required:** To consider, debate and make a resolution regarding format and date for the Parish Meeting.

Appendices:

## **Step 3 - not before 17 May**

### **Social contact**

As part of Step 3, no earlier than 17 May, the government will look to continue easing limits on seeing friends and family wherever possible, allowing people to decide on the appropriate level of risk for their circumstances.

This means that most legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors will be lifted - although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal. Indoors, the Rule of 6 or 2 households will apply - we will keep under review whether it is safe to increase this.

As soon as possible and by no later than Step 3, we will also update the advice on social distancing between friends and family, including hugging. But until this point, people should continue to keep their distance from anyone not in their household or support bubble.

### **Business and activities**

Most businesses in all but the highest risk sectors will be able to reopen. In all sectors, COVID-Secure guidance will remain in place and businesses may not cater for groups bigger than the legal limits. Indoor hospitality will reopen - and as in Step 2, venues will not have to serve a substantial meal with alcoholic drinks; nor will there be a curfew. Customers will, however, have to order, eat and drink while seated.

Other indoor locations to open up in Step 3 include indoor entertainment venues such as cinemas and children's play areas; the rest of the accommodation sector, including hotels, hostels and B&Bs; and indoor adult group sports and exercise classes. The government will also allow some larger performances and sporting events in indoor venues with a capacity of 1,000 people or half-full (whichever is a lower number), and in outdoor venues with a capacity of 4,000 people or half-full (whichever is a lower number). In the largest outdoor seated venues, where crowds can be spread out, up to 10,000 people will be able to attend (or a quarter-full, whichever is lower).

## **Events**

Up to 30 people will be able to attend weddings, receptions and wakes, as well as funerals. This limit will also apply to other types of significant life events including bar mitzvahs and christenings.

## **Review of social distancing**

Finally, before Step 4 begins, the government will complete a review of social distancing and other long-term measures that have been put in place to cut transmission. This will inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which the rules on 1 metre plus, the wearing of face coverings and other measures may be lifted. This will also inform guidance on working from home – which should continue wherever possible until this review is complete.

# **Step 4 - not before 21 June**

## **Social contact**

By Step 4 which will take place no earlier than 21 June, the government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact.

## **Business, activities and events**

We hope to reopen remaining premises, including nightclubs, and ease the restrictions on large events and performances that apply in Step 3. This will be subject to the results of a scientific Events Research Programme to test the outcome of certain pilot events through the spring and summer, where we will trial the use of testing and other techniques to cut the risk of infection. The same Events Research Programme will guide decisions on whether all limits can be removed on weddings and other life events.

As we move through each of these phases in the roadmap, we must all remember that COVID-19 remains a part of our lives. We are going to have to keep living our lives differently to keep ourselves and others safe. We must carry on with 'hands, face, space'. Comply with

the COVID-Secure measures that remain in place. Meet outdoors when we can and keep letting fresh air in. Get tested when needed. Get vaccinated when offered. If we all continue to play our part, we will be that bit closer to a future that is more familiar.

**Suggestions for Parish Councils regarding Annual Parish Council Meetings; Annual Assemblies and Ordinary Parish Council Meetings.**

This advice is based on the current situation with legislation which may change in the near future. The advice has changed from the Chairman's meeting held on Zoom last week due to the announcement of roadmap dates this week.

Expected return to normal legislation regarding Parish Council Meetings from 1<sup>st</sup> April

Legislation states that the Annual Parish Council Meeting must be held on any day in May. However, the 4 yearly cycle of elections is taking place in over half of the Parish Councils in Rugby District – for them they must hold their Annual Parish Council Meeting within 14 days after the date of the election. The election will be held on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

The Annual Parish Assembly must be held on a day between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June inclusive. I recommend that the Parish Assembly is not held on the same day as the Parish Council Meeting as it is a less formal meeting for the community for the PC to report to them what it has been doing over the last year but also it is for the community to discuss what they have been doing and what they would like to the PC to do over the next year. They may not be interested in the formal procedure of the Parish Council with the election of officers; setting of dates; reviewing of policies etc.

The current coronavirus regulations allowing virtual meetings of Local Councils end on 6<sup>th</sup> May

The new roadmap out of lockdown has first relaxation of meeting people scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> May when 30 people can meet outdoors but only 6 people to meet indoors.

Full relaxation of meeting people is scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> June.

Any of these dates could change due to legislative reviews or problems with infection rates during the relaxation of lockdown rules.

For those Councils not involved in elections I recommend holding your Annual Parish Council meetings between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May as a virtual meeting and extend the agenda beyond the essential items to include as much as you can within a 2-hour meeting. This should include looking at delegation of powers to your clerk renewing or extending them. This suggestion is based on trying to remove the need before restrictions are lifted on 21<sup>st</sup> June and then to keep the first few ordinary meetings as short as possible as we come out of the risks presented by Covid. As things stand you will no longer be able to hold virtual meetings but no more than 6 people could meet indoors so between 17<sup>th</sup> May and 21<sup>st</sup> of June you would have to meet outdoors.

For those Rugby Parish Councils involved in elections there is currently a significant problem with current lockdown regulations - to comply with legislation you would have to hold your Annual Parish Council Meeting outdoors as a physical meeting between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>th</sup> May.

For the **Annual Parish Assemblies**, you now have a choice you could decide to hold your Assembly between the 17<sup>th</sup> May and the 1<sup>st</sup> June outdoors or my recommendation would now be to hold it virtually ideally in April when your annual accounts should be ready – at least in draft form and could be reported to your communities on that basis. I would also suggest that you plan to hold another Assembly in late summer when hopefully it will be safer to meet physically. The legislation tells you when you have to hold your Annual Assembly but does not say anything about any further Assembly meetings.

My comments on Annual Parish Assemblies apply equally to Parish Meetings where there is no Parish Council.