

Sampford Courtenay Parish Council
May 2021

Back to Face-to-Face Meetings Protocol.

Local councils including parish and town councils and parish meetings must return to holding physical meetings from May 7th, 2021. The recent High Court ruling means that the facility to meet and make decisions using virtual meeting arrangements is no longer lawful.

From the recent court judgements after 7 May 2021, we can now confirm the following outcomes:

- All meetings of local councils, their committees, sub committees or any other meeting held under the 1972 Local Government Act Sch12 para10 must be held as a physical, face to face meeting from May 7th, 2021.
- Members of the public must be able to attend any physical meeting. A secondary judgement has confirmed that the limiting the public to virtual access is unlawful; they must be able to attend in person
- Councils can continue to live stream/broadcast/record their meetings, but this cannot be instead of giving physical access to the meeting
- Only decisions taken by the council at a face-to-face meeting, or under the Scheme of Delegation will be lawful.

SCPC Guidance for holding safe council meetings.

SCPC will resume holding their meetings at the Village Hall and will:-

- Provide hand sanitiser for use before entering the building and on leaving.
- Keep a record of anyone attending the meeting, asking public to sign in on arrival and keep the list for 21 days. (A QR code will be registered for those with “Track & Trace” App, but Clerk will also keep a written record of those present)
- create a one-way system through the building of entry and exit signposted.
- arrange seating in the main room of the Village Hall to accommodate councillors and the public. It may not be possible to provide tables for members to use during the meeting. Wherever possible people should not sit face to face and must maintain at least 2m or 1m+ with adjustments. Expect the seating plan to be different.
- Publish a sign at the entry to the building will clearly state the maximum number of people allowed in the room at any time – and maintain this number. (Number to be agreed between SCPC and VHC based on their COVID capacity)
- ask that on arrival everyone moves straight to their seat and do not gather to talk/chat with others.

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- ask that masks should be worn. If distance provides, members may remove their masks during a meeting whilst seated. The public can be asked to wear a mask throughout the meeting unless addressing the council.
- (As per the advice) control/limit access to other rooms, kitchen, toilets etc is during the meeting.
- Remind Members to bring their own drinks but that no eating will be allowed.
- SCPC encourages anyone attending the meeting is to take a LFT test before attending the meeting. (Note that we cannot enforce a negative test result being provided for entry). N.B. LFT tests are currently available in Waitrose car parks on Tuesday mornings or Test Kits can be obtained from the Pharmacy at North Tawton
- **SCPC respectfully request that anyone displaying COVID symptoms, tested positive, returned from abroad in last 14 days etc - SHOULD NOT ATTEND**

Council Business

- SCPC will try to limit the length of the meeting to less than one hour; returning to the physical format does not mean a return to longer meetings straight away.
- Councillors who declare an interest and must leave the room will need a clear path and should wear a mask when moving about. (An alternative way of withdrawing without walking through the public seating will be indicated)
- No papers will be circulated at the meeting All documents will be circulated beforehand in electronic format – in advance Councillors are reminded that any proposals requiring a vote should be circulated 7 days in advance.
- Members are reminded to bring their own writing materials which must be removed at the end of the meeting.
- SCPC would like to continue the use of laptops/tablets at meetings which should be wiped down before and after the meeting. (This will hopefully enable Parishioners to still be able to participate via Zoom)
- Members should remain seated throughout the debate and standing orders which requires them to stand when speaking are suspended.

Public Attendance at Council meetings.

The capacity of the Village Hall main room is limited and the number of people able to attend the meeting safely will be restricted. Having assessed the capacity of the room and made reasonable adjustments to meet Covid 19 precautions and restrictions, SCPC are able restrict access when the room is 'full'.

If there is significant public interest and the room is full, SCPC will consider the following arrangements to provide public access.

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This could include:

- Restricting public participation to items on the agenda and **asking the public to either submit their question in writing and/or registering to attend the meeting.**
- Taking public participation per item. Whilst we may not be able to guarantee attendance for the whole of the meeting this should allow access for the item of interest.
- SCPC will try to continue to hold “Hybrid” meetings so that members of the public can participate via Zoom, safely from their homes.
- Identify if there is a spokesperson for the issue to limit the number of people wish to attend.
- **Encourage the public to write to the council to share their views if they are unable, uncomfortable or unwilling to attend.**
- SCPC hopes to continue with regular Q & A Sessions (either via Zoom or in person when allowed) to discuss issues of particular interest or concern by parishioners.

This Protocol has been written following DALC Guidance.

Marion Pratt

Clerk SCPC

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