

REPORT FROM THE CLERK TO LYDIARD MILLICENT PARISH COUNCIL

1. Purpose of Report

This report will set out reasons for and against holding future council meetings via a virtual platform, so that members can consider how future regular monthly meetings of the Council will take place. The following report will aid discussions; the points below are not absolute, there are many other similar views and reasons both for and against holding virtual meetings.

2. Background

Lydiard Millicent Parish Council hold twelve meetings a year. During recent years eleven meetings have been on the first Thursday of the month, with a meeting in August specifically for inspection of its land and assets.

3. Current Position

During these current circumstances Legislation has temporarily been amended to May 2021 allowing Local Councils to hold meetings virtually rather than physically. Advice from the National Association of Local Councils has been received reinforcing the recommendation to hold virtual meetings.

4. Financial Implications

In order to hold a virtual meeting access is required to the internet, or phone connection. There is a free platform which allows for virtual meetings up to 40 minutes only. Other platforms offer a limited trial free before subscribing.

Paid for platforms vary in price from £120 +VAT to in excess of £1,000 +VAT depending on size and technical functions, although they can be purchased monthly the minimum contract is for one year. Cost to hire the Parish Hall is £28.00 per monthly meeting.

Clerk has purchased, on behalf of the Council, a year's subscription to Zoom at a cost of £95.92 +VAT.

5. Considerations

Listed below are some considerations which may help with members' discussions. They are in no particular order:

- a. Legislation is in place to hold virtual meetings until May 2021, when the situation must then be reviewed by Parliament.
- b. Zoom licence already purchased by the clerk does not require additional software to be purchased by members. Entry to the meeting can either be via a search engine or a phone line.
- c. It is not yet known when social distancing rules will be relaxed, current regulations are that no more than six people can meet in a group. It may be that restrictions get tighter before being relaxed?
- d. Some Councillors have been shielding, and may feel uneasy about meeting virtually, as have a large number of residents who also may feel nervous about attending a physical meeting.
- e. The Council, as an Employer, is responsible for keeping its staff safe. For a physical meeting the Council would need to take extra precautions, face masks and/or face shields may be necessary.
- f. As responsible community leaders there will be an expectation from Residents "To do the right thing".
- g. The Parish Hall has issued extra guidelines, stating they are COVID Secure. How will members maintain this whilst attending a Council meeting? The room and equipment must be cleaned before and after use. Will members be able to carry out these tasks?
- h. To comply with COVID security, full contact details must be obtained from everyone attending the premises; no-one is to be permitted inside before answering COVID related health questions; there must be no mingling once inside the premises.

- i. Attendance at a Council meeting would, at the moment, be over the recommended number for a group (6). It is possible to socially distance with the Parish Hall but there are eight Councillors which is above the maximum for interacting with each other.
- j. Some Councillors, and residents, may be uncomfortable about attending a virtual meeting as they are not confident using the technology.

6. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Council resolve to hold virtual meetings until May 2021, using the Zoom platform already purchased.

If members find this platform difficult to navigate, training sessions should be held, or consideration given to trialling another virtual environment.

A new calendar of meetings should be published on the Council website, giving general instructions on how to attend a virtual meeting.

DEBORAH BOURNE
Parish Clerk/RFO