**FIVEHEAD PARISH COUNCIL**

**BUSINESS CONTINUITY PROCEDURE**

**(INTRODUCED FOR EMERGENCY OPERATING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC)**

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| **Adopted** | **Min 3118, Min 3125** |
| **Amended** | **Min 4186** |
| **Review date (annual)** | **Annual meeting of the Parish Council (May)** |

1. **Introduction**

1.1 On 20 March 2020, an Extraordinary meeting agreed at Min 3118:

**Resolution: in light of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and government advice, the following Emergency Operating Procedures to ensure Business Continuity are agreed:**

(a) Should the council be unable to meet for whatever reason, the Clerk be given delegated authority to progress all ongoing matters and projects and authorise all regular payments and incur expenditure in line with the council’s agreed budget.

(b) Any decisions taken under resolution (a) above will be taken, whenever possible, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of council. A record of all decisions and expenditure incurred under delegated authority will be kept and reported to members when the council next meets.

(c) The authority to decide the council’s response to planning applications be delegated to the Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of council. Whenever possible, members of the council will be informed of applications out for consultation and will be invited to submit comments to the Clerk.

(d) The provisions outlined in resolutions (a-c) above will override any requirements to the contrary in the council’s standing orders, financial regulations or terms of reference.

(e) Should the Clerk be unable to perform her duties, another member of the council will assume the role of Proper Officer and RFO in an unpaid capacity.

(h) The Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, may incur expenditure from the Reserve where such expenditure will help the community’s efforts to support those in need of assistance or prevent social isolation.

(i) Should government allow councils to meet virtually (online), the council will take all reasonable steps to facilitate this.

1.2 On 4 April 2020 the government introduced The Local Authorities Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 to allow local councils to meet remotely.

1.3 On 21 April 2020, councillors were asked how they wished to proceed. All agreed that Option 2 was their preference: virtual (online) meetings only when a key decision needs to be made (eg AGAR sign off; major planning applications; decisions on the use of the cemetery in the current crisis; any grants that you may wish to make under s137 to groups providing support). All other matters could be covered by the Emergency Operating Procedures and correspondence. The Clerk would also prepare a monthly summary for councillors and Members of the Public.

* 1. This protocol sets out how Fivehead Parish Council will operate using a Zoom platform during the pandemic.
  2. On 4 October 2021, it was agreed that the protocol for the pandemic would be readopted and updated for Business Continuity, to be implemented as needed. The policy would be renamed as Business Continuity Procedure (Min 4186).

**2. Planning and Preparation**

2.1 The meeting will be advertised in the normal manner and an agenda will be issued within the normal time frames.

2.2 Minutes will be taken from the meetings and displayed on the website in the normal manner. Minutes will be circulated after the meeting and signed when the council finally meets face to face.

2.3 Apologies need to be given in the normal manner.

2.4 The public are invited to observe the meeting.

2.5 The normal required standards of behaviour and discussion must be applied in the same manner of a face to face meeting. Please also be patient with those who are less experienced in this platform. Please also respect confidentiality and do not breach the code of conduct, and do not make enquiries about private matter, health, home, etc.

2.6 If a councillor is deemed to have an interest in a matter and would normally leave a physical meeting, then they will be invited to leave and will receive a text message (or asked to wait in the waiting room) when they can be invited back into the meeting.

2.7 There might be technical issues during the meeting and the Clerk might have to ask for clarification, for dialogue to be repeated in order to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard.

2.8 When speaking, you must be able to be heard (and ideally seen) by all other Members in attendance, and must, in turn, be able to hear (and ideally see) those other Members participating. You must be able to be heard by, and in turn hear any members of the public attending.

2.9 The normal quorum requirements for meetings apply. If the technology fails, the Chair will determine if the meeting is still quorate. If it is, the meeting will continue; or, if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn to allow the connection to be re-established.

2.10 If an individual’s remote participation fails, the Chair may call a short adjournment to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established. If the connection is not restored within that time, the meeting should continue to deal with the business whilst this happens, providing the meeting remains quorate and the public are able to hear; the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established.

2.11 Members who wish to speak at length on a particular item should indicate their wish to speak to the Chair and Clerk in advance of the start of the meeting where possible.

**3. Process to host meetings for Councillors**

3.1 The Clerk will host the meeting and set up the meeting perimeters. An email invitation will be sent to councillors from the Clerk. They need to click on the link and may need to enter the meeting ID number and the password.

3.2 Please join the meeting no later than 10 minutes before the start to allow themselves and the Clerk to test the equipment. Please type your name on joining the meeting in full, eg “Cllr xxx”. Before entering the meeting please ensure that you are in a private place where there is little background interference/noise. It is difficult to hear on occasions and some might wish to use a headset with a microphone.

3.3 On entering the meeting, you will be placed in a waiting room. The Clerk allows access and you will join with your microphone muted. When the Clerk has seen you and can verify you, you will be unmuted.

3.4 A check will be done to establish that you can be heard, but then all councillors other than the Chairman and the Clerk will be muted. If the Chairman invites someone to speak they can be unmuted. Please do not interrupt others. If you wish to speak during the meeting, please raise your hand for the attention of the Clerk. When you speak please state your name as you speak for the benefit of those who might not be able to see you.

3.5 The meeting will be chaired in the normal manner.

3.6 When a vote on a Resolution is required, the Clerk will ask each Member in turn to state ‘for’, ‘against’, or ‘abstain’. The Clerk will then state the result of the vote.

3.7 If you struggle with hearing during the meeting, please use the chat box to type a message which will be seen by the Clerk.

3.8 If people speak over others or if there is a time delay and matters are not heard, the Clerk will ask for people to repeat, and to speak in turn.

**4. Public Participation**

4.1 When the agenda is produced it will invite the Public to contact the Clerk by email if they wish to be invited to the meeting. They will be sent a link to the meeting, with the meeting ID number and password. They will be asked to check this link works in advance of the meeting. On arrival at the meeting they will be held in a waiting room and let in against a list of names held by the Clerk.

4.2 Their microphone will be on Mute unless unmuted by the Clerk (on the Chair’s instruction) during the Public Session. In order to effectively manage the meeting, they will be asked to submit any matters that they wish to raise under Public Participation in advance in writing – these will be circulated to Council Members and will be read out at the meeting. Members of the Public are reminded that they should not speak during the formal Council meeting.

4.3 If the Council resolves to exclude the Public from part or all of a meeting, the Chairman will make a statement to explain reasons for the Public’s exclusion. On conclusion of the Public business, the Chairman will thank the Public for their attendance, notify councillors that a new meeting invitation will be immediately issued by email to Councillors only, and close the remote meeting if it is available online.