



Parish Council Meetings in Village Halls from 7th May

Following a High Court decision (28th April and 4th May), it has been confirmed that Parish council meetings must be held in person from 7th May. Whilst parish councils (and other local authorities) are encouraged to allow the public to participate remotely until at least 21st June, provision must also be made for the attendance of members of the public in person. This is because the High Court decision also confirmed that parish councils are under a legal obligation to admit members of the public if they can do so safely.

Buildings in which parish council meetings are held must be Covid secure and meetings must be conducted in a Covid secure manner. If a village hall is used, this means the village hall management committee must carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment for the building and the parish council needs to carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment in respect of the meeting. So social distancing, mask wearing, signage and other measures will need to be in place.

The main difficulty currently facing parish councils and village hall management committees is that the legal requirement placed on parish councils to hold meetings in person comes into effect on 7th May. This is before step 3 (17th May) of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown, when many indoor activities can start to take place including gatherings organised by a public body such a parish council. This presents a particular difficulty for those parish councils who are legally obliged to hold their annual meetings on or before 24th May.

Given practical difficulties such as those outlined above, parish councils and village hall management committees will need to work together to find a solution and should consider the following:

1. Hold the parish council's annual meeting after 17th May where it is practicable to do so. The 17th May is step 3 of the Government's roadmap when indoor gatherings organised by a public body can take place subject to Covid-19 secure guidance, risk assessment, the premises capacity limits and social contact rules.
2. Hold the parish council's annual meeting outdoors. During step 2 of the roadmap (i.e. before 17th May) outdoor gatherings/events organised by a public body can be held under Covid-19 secure conditions.
3. In order to comply with premises capacity limits, consider allowing members of the public to participate online as well as in person. The parish council could also consider only allowing enough parish councillors to attend so the meeting is quorate. There is also the option to meet outdoors or in another parish.



When making arrangements, parish councils and village hall management committees should refer to:

Covid-19: Guidance for the safe use of council buildings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-council-buildings>

Covid-19: Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>

National ACRE's information sheet for halls reopening after lockdown contains guidance about how to run a public meeting safely:

<https://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/re-opening-information-sheet-v.10-april-2021-2.pdf>

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