



Seaford Town Council

To the Members of the Full Council

An Extraordinary Meeting of the **Full Council** will be held electronically via Zoom* on **Tuesday 27th April 2021** at **7.00pm**, which you are summoned to attend.

Councillor Rodney Reed
Mayor of Seaford 2020-2021
22nd April 2021

***see overleaf for important information to join virtual meeting and accessing password**

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING WILL BE VIDEO RECORDED

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To consider apologies for absence.

2. Disclosure of Interests

To deal with any disclosure by Members of any disclosable pecuniary interests and interests other than pecuniary interests, as defined under the Seaford Town Council Code of Conduct and the Localism Act 2011, in relation to matters on the agenda.

3. Public Participation

To deal with any questions, or brief representations, from members of the public in accordance with relevant legislation and Seaford Town Council Policy.

4. [Town Clerk's Update Report – April 2021](#)

To consider report 174/40 updating the Council on key Council work and work priorities for the Town Clerk (pages 3 to 6).

5. [Return to Physical Council/Committee Meetings](#)

To consider report 173/20 updating the Council with the plans for the return to physical meetings and the decisions which Council are being asked to take surrounding this (pages 7 to 26).

For further information about items appearing on this Agenda please contact:

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Telephone: 01323 894 870 (*please note that due to working from home, this phone line is not currently manned, so please leave a voice message and this will be picked up and forwarded to the relevant member of staff to deal with*)

Circulation: All Councillors, Young Mayor, Deputy Young Mayor and registered email recipients.

Zoom Meetings

In line with the Coronavirus Act 2020 and subsequent regulations governing local authorities meetings, the Council will be holding this meeting via the online video conference facility, Zoom.

To join the Zoom meeting follow this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/99115424760?pwd=c1FUMWR0YnVoc1M2bWV3eS9SLzRtZz09&from=addon>

Meeting ID: 991 1542 4760

Password: (to ensure online security it is recommended that meeting passwords are not publicised and are given directly to those intending to attend the meeting. Please therefore email **admin@seafordtowncouncil.gov.uk** for the password at least 24 hours before the scheduled meeting date)

Telephone number to join by audio only: 0208 080 6592 (you will be prompted to enter the meeting ID and password before joining the meeting)

Zoom Joining Instructions and Guidance on Attending and Taking Part in Zoom meetings are available to download from **<https://www.seafordtowncouncil.gov.uk/council-meetings/>**



Seaford Town Council

Report 174/20

Agenda Item No:	4
Committee:	Full Council
Date:	27th April 2021
Title:	Town Clerk's Update Report – April 2021
By:	Adam Chugg, Town Clerk
Purpose of Report:	To update the Council on key Council work and work priorities for the Town Clerk

Recommendations

Full Council is recommended:

1. To note the contents of the report.

1 Preamble

This is my third report since I became the Town Clerk and Proper Officer on the 1st of December. In addition, I have also presented to the Seaford Town Forum on Council priorities on the 20th of April.

As with my previous reports, I provide an update against the key areas of work and priorities set out in my last report (underlined red text below), plus any additional areas of important work that have been added since mid-March.

2 Key Initial Pieces of Work

Current priorities for my role include:

- Oversee a complete review of all contracting and agreements relating to grounds maintenance and any other areas of significant expenditure.
This work has been scoped out, and initial informal conversations have taken place with other councils. The core of this review will take place after the work for the Lottery grant funding on Martello Toilets has been completed, and in time for the next budget-setting round.
One key aspect of this review is identifying appropriate opportunities for re-wilding. Work is already taking place on parts of The Salts, The Crouch, Normansal and Princess Drive. To further build on this, a report will be brought to Full Council in May.
- Take forward the revising of the Hurdis House lease.
Valuations are being obtained and our legal adviser has been briefed.
Further conversations have taken place with the surveyor to inform the revised lease. In addition, some comments have also been received from the tenant. We expect to proceed to a draft lease shortly.
- Oversee the completion of the budget setting process.

The budget was passed at Full Council in January.

- Work with Councillors and Officers on publicity and messaging relating to the budget and the precept for 21/22.

Thanks to the Officers for an excellent Council Tax leaflet and press release – coverage in the Sussex Express focused on the Council being frugal.

- Put together a confirmed list of measures to maximise revenue from ‘Staycation’ opportunities in 2021.

Following the endorsement at the March Full Council meeting, the first of the regular progress reports is being brought to the Community Services Committee Meeting on the 29th of this month.

A summary of the measures was also presented to the Town Forum on the 20th of April.

- Review and update the arrangements relating to the Golf Professional service. The review is underway and partly completed.
- Continue to implement any response to changes to Covid-19 regulations, while making sure Officers are doing all we can to ensure the rules are followed. There have been no changes since the last Council meeting. We are now planning for the changes outlined in the Government roadmap (see below).

In accordance with the Government roadmap:

The Golf Course re-opened on the 29th of March.

The View opened for outdoor customers on the 15th of April.

‘Non-essential’ concessions have started to re-open on the seafront.

At this meeting, we are considering the steps to take to restore physical Council Meetings.

- Seek updates from the Lottery regarding the application for funding for the Martello Toilets and work with Officers and Councillors on plans to take this forward in the light of the Lottery decision.

We are continuing to prepare the information requested by the Lottery to accompany the Council’s application.

3 Priorities

- Work with Councillors, Officers and stakeholders to update and refresh the Strategic Objective of the Council.

This work will begin after the by-election in early May.

- Enable the Council to play its role in tackling climate emergency, working with Councillors and Officers to build on the Climate Emergency motion.

Work is underway to plan for the Climate Day in August.

A lot of good work is taking place on the Golf Course, as part of the Council’s commitments to ‘Operation Pollinator,’ including beehives, wild flowers and maintenance that encourages a diversity of ecology and wildlife.

The presentation to the Town Forum described the range of work already underway, including:

Golf Course – bee hives; maintenance that encourages ecological diversity; use of indigenous flowers and plants; reduced use of pesticides.

Re-wilding – parts of The Salts, Normansal, Princess Drive and The Crouch.

We are looking into how best to enable Council decisions to always take account of environmental factors.

Climate Day in early August.

- Work with Councillors and Officers to confirm and implement work that can maximise revenue from ‘Staycation’ opportunities in 2021.
[An update report is on the Agenda for the Community Services meeting on 29th April.](#)
- Improve the financial stability and sustainability of the council over time.
Working closely with the RFO on this. Updated Finance Regulations and Risk Register are on the Agenda for the March Council meeting.
[Good progress is being made and will be reflected in the year-end accounts.](#)
[We have also introduced some new internal controls to ensure budgets are followed as far as is possible.](#)
- Lead and oversee the Town Council response to any further Covid changes and be ready for what the future may hold.
Plans are in place in response to the Government announcement of the roadmap.
These include:
 - Re-opening the golf course on the 29th of March.
 - Determining re-opening date for The View.
 - Claiming any relevant government funds and support outlined in the recent budget.
 - Working closely with our Concessions to work within the Covid guidelines.
 - Updating our Position Statement.
 - Preparing for the expected influx of visitors as the restrictions are relaxed – there is a report about this work on the Agenda for today’s meeting.

Please note that the current Government guidelines are that working from home remains the norm and so Officers are working on this basis, while plans are being made for when this guidance changes – a timetable for this was not part of the Roadmap announcements. In addition, Council meetings are currently ‘virtual’, in line with Government guidelines – we are looking at how to implement any changes that would follow from the guidance being changed and will keep Councillors informed about this.

[See above – today’s meeting is discussing the next steps for the Town Council and meetings.](#)
- Fulfill the Proper Officer role in relation to Council meetings and business for the calendar year ahead.
In place.
- Work with stakeholders to explore and develop options relating to the S106 monies from the former Newlands School site.
I have been briefed by Lewes District Council (LDC) on this matter and work to explore possible options will begin shortly.
- Work with Officers, Councillors and appropriate external expertise to move to the next stages of the HR review, at the most appropriate time.
This review will take place once the work to respond to Covid and the resultant changes are coming to an end.
[We are looking to confirm the timetable shortly.](#)
- Undertake the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) qualification.
Expect to start in Quarter One of 2021/22.

4 Other Key Areas of Work

Tennis Courts

An update report is on the agenda for the March Council meeting.

[The loan application has been submitted and Officers are waiting for the results.](#)

Beach Huts

I want to thank the team for their pro-active response to the unfortunate recent incidents of vandalism and in working with the police to seek to bring these incidents to an end.

Interest in the purchase of Beach Huts remains strong, and more sales are being completed.

[There have been no further instances of vandalism.](#)

[Beach Huts now nearly all sold.](#)

Land Availability Assessment – Call for Sites

LDC recently sent the Town Council this document so we could offer any intelligence on this list. LDC were clear that this was an initial list to then be reviewed, and not any more than this. I am grateful to Councillors and Officers for their pro-active response and a submission was sent to LDC by their deadline.

Assets Working Group

There has been no meeting of this group since the January Council meeting. There will be a meeting in the next few weeks, and an update report will be brought to the next full Council meeting.

[Good progress has been made with the necessary reports and feasibility studies so the group can be convened soon. A report to Full Council will follow this meeting.](#)

New Crack on the Cliff.

I want to thank the Officers for their swift response, including moving fences back and carrying out an urgent risk assessment to ensure public and Town Council staff safety. We continue to monitor the situation closely, in partnership with other key stakeholders such as the Coastguard.

[Discussions with stakeholders has continued.](#)

[A report about cliff erosion and the golf course will come to the June Meeting of the Golf & The View Committee.](#)

5 Conclusion

I trust this paper gives Councillors a good understanding of the key areas of work and priorities for STC and my role.


6 Financial Appraisal

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

7 Contact Officer

The Contact Officer for this report is Adam Chugg, Town Clerk.

Town Clerk





Seaford Town Council

Report 173/20

Agenda Item No:	5
Committee:	Extraordinary Council
Date:	27th April 2021
Title:	Return to Physical Council/Committee Meetings
By:	Adam Chugg, Town Clerk
Purpose of Report:	To update the Council with the plans for the return to physical meetings and the decisions which Council are being asked to take surrounding this.

Recommendations

Full Council is recommended:

1. To receive any verbal update in addition to the contents of the report.
2. To discuss the contents of the report fully, before addressing each recommendation in turn.
3. To agree to working with Seaford Baptist Church to hold Town Council meetings in the Church auditorium until 29th July 2021; if not possible, meetings would be facilitated at The View. (*section 2.5-2.15 below*)
4. To approve the change in meeting dates as set out within 2.11 of the report. (*section 2.11-2.12 below*)
5. To agree to invite members of the public to attend 1 meetings by watching via live streaming to the internet but not in person, until at least the 24th June 2021. (*section 2.22-2.28 below*)
6. To instruct Council Officers to temporarily amend the Town Councils' Public Participation Policy to reflect; (*section 2.29-2.42 below*)
 - a) Provision for members of the public to submit statements in writing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, to be read out loud by a Council Officer during the public participation section of the meeting.
 - b) Provision of a virtual meeting for the relevant sections of meetings to enable members of the public to participate in person, albeit remotely.
 - c) All other policy rules remain unchanged i.e. time allowed for statements, relation of content to an agenda item etc.
 - d) That these amendments to the policy are in place temporarily until 24th June 2021.
7. To note that where a councillor feels unable to physically attend a meeting, that they submit their apologies (arranging a substitute, where relevant), are invited to attend the virtual meeting to participate during public participation should they wish to and are encouraged to watch the livestream or recording in order to keep abreast with the meeting decisions and discussions. (*section 2.51-2.54 below*)
8. To note that councillors and officers attending physical meetings are requested to take a coronavirus lateral flow test within 24 hours of the meeting and if a positive result is

received, to not attend the meeting and follow Government guidelines accordingly for a positive lateral flow test. (section 2.55-2.58 below)

9. To discuss key points to form a response to the Government's call for evidence regarding virtual meetings, noting that the final response will be agreed at the next Full Council meeting on 20th May 2021. (section 3 below)

1. Current Situation

- 1.1 As councillors will be aware, during the coronavirus pandemic, the Government has temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person. This means that councils have powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology.
- 1.2 The regulations allowing the above were announced in April 2020 as [The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#)
- 1.3 These regulations allow local authorities to hold meetings remotely before 7th May 2021. This means that, without any further action from the Government, all local authorities including local councils must return to face-to-face meetings from 7th May 2021.
- 1.4 The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is working with a number of national bodies to press the Government to extend these regulations beyond this date and will continue to stress the urgency and importance of this issue. However, at this time Government has no plans to extend these regulations and due to this, NALC is advising that councils should start preparing for the real possibility of physical meetings from 7th May.
- 1.5 The reaction to this announcement has largely been one of shock, given the success of virtual meetings despite many local authorities having to adapt to them at very short notice, and importantly, the MP having verbally supported virtual meetings publicly.
- 1.6 At the time of writing, court proceedings have been started against Central Government in response to this lack of action regarding the legislation. NALC'S April 2021 Legal Update included the following on this topic:

'...(NALC's legal) team has been actively involved in the Lawyers in Local Government (LLG)/ Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO)/ Hertfordshire County Council remote meetings court proceedings against the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. We decided it was important for our sector that NALC join proceedings as an interested party and we do what we can to enable the continuation of remote meetings. This has been a big time commitment and has required quickly becoming familiar with the relevant and unfamiliar litigation processes and procedures. We have now submitted witness evidence for Jonathan as NALC Chief Executive. This means that Jonathan can be called upon to give oral evidence at the one-day Administrative Court hearing on 21 April. The matter was transferred to the Administrative Court and is now a Judicial Review case.

Being an interested party also means that we receive all of the other parties' submissions. We also attend the weekly meeting of the sector working group, with

representatives from LLG, ADSO, the LGA and others. We will of course update as and when we are able to do so. Judgment is expected before the end of April.'

- 1.7 The case was heard in the High Court on 21st April and it is therefore hoped that an official announcement on the judgment of the court will have been made before the Council meeting, although the Court is likely to take a few days to decide on this. As such, Council Officers will hopefully be in a position to update verbally on the above at the meeting.
- 1.8 The Government is also currently running a consultation seeking local authorities experiences of remote meetings, see section 3 below for more on this. It is requested that only one response per authority be made, so the Council is being asked to agree a response.

2. Return to Physical Meetings

- 2.1 As set out above, the Town Council is in a position where it needs to make preparations to return to public meetings in person from 7th May 2021 onwards. The first meeting after this actually being the Annual Meeting on 20th May 2021 (which is then followed immediately afterwards by an Ordinary Council meeting).
- 2.2 The advice issued was that annual meetings could be rescheduled to before 7th May, so as to be able to take place virtually. Unfortunately, this was only if the council does not have an election taking place on 6th May, of which Seaford Town Council has two by-elections and therefore it would not be possible to hold the Annual Meeting before 7th May.
- 2.3 Officers have been working on the options that are now available to the Council, whilst ensuring that arrangements made are in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions and allow a safe environment for all those attending.
- 2.4 NALC's website has been updated to include useful information for councils making these preparations and also links to key documents to ensure all activities are undertaken safely. For those that would like to read more, this can be found here: <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/coronavirus-page#preparing-for-the-possible-return-of-face-to-face-meetings>

Venue

- 2.5 A risk assessment was carried out at the Council Chambers with a view to ascertaining whether or not it would be possible/appropriate to hold meetings at the Church Street offices.
- 2.6 The result was quite conclusively that the Church Street building just does not allow for the required social distancing to safely hold physical meetings, in particular where shared spaces and facilities are concerned.
- 2.7 A subsequent risk assessment was carried out at The View, which is the next logical option due to; being Council-owned, having a much larger meeting space, having many arrangements in place to ensure the venue is adhering to social distancing requirements and importantly, the risk presented by shared spaces and facilities being low due to arrangements already in place.
- 2.8 The above risk assessments were carried out with reference to the requirements of the Government's guidance on multi-purpose community facilities and council buildings (both of which are linked to from the NALC web page above).
- 2.9 The only other suitable venue that Officers have been able to identify within town, that offers the space required, would be Seaford Baptist Church. The auditorium

within the Church building has recently benefitted from a brand-new sound/recording/live streaming system being installed, which would enable the Council to record and live stream its meeting with ease. The auditorium is also of a size that could accommodate a Full Council meeting and officers.

- 2.10 Attached at [Appendix A](#) is a table showing the pros and cons of the above three venues specific to the needs of Council/Committee meetings for the Council to consider.
- 2.11 Councillors will notice that if meetings were held in the Church’s auditorium, this would require a change in meeting dates, as set out below:

Meeting Type	Original Date (all 7pm)	New Date (all 7pm)
Council (Annual & Ordinary)	Thursday 20 th May 2021	No change
Planning & Highways	Thursday 27 th May 2021	No change
Golf & The View	Tuesday 8 th June 2021	No change
Planning & Highways	Thursday 17 th June 2021	Wednesday 16 th June 2021
Council	Thursday 24 th June 2021	Wednesday 23 rd June 2021
Planning & Highways	Thursday 8 th July 2021	Wednesday 7 th July 2021
Community Services	Thursday 15 th July 2021	Wednesday 14 th July 2021
Finance & General Purposes	Thursday 22 nd July 2021	Wednesday 21 st July 2021
Planning & Highways	Thursday 29 th July 2021	Wednesday 27 th July 2021

- 2.12 The Personnel Committee meeting on 3rd June 2021 has not been included, as this will be held under an exclusion of the press and public and is also a considerably smaller Committee than others, so can be held comfortably at The View.
- 2.13 If the Baptist Church were the chosen venue, Officers would need to be mindful to ensure that a clear message and justification is provided publicly as to why meetings are being held within religious premises, so as not to be mistaken for supporting or promoting that religion and as an explanation for those who may not otherwise choose to enter such a building. The prevailing justification would be one of ensuring participant safety under current restrictions and also the technological gain for enabling the public to still access and participate in the meeting.
- 2.14 Based on the above and attached, **it is the recommendation of Council Officers that the Council agree to working with Seaford Baptist Church to hold its meeting in the Church auditorium until 29th July 2021; if not possible, meetings would be facilitated at The View.**
- 2.15 Furthermore, **it is the recommendation of Council Officers that the Council approves the change in meeting dates as set out within 2.11 of the report.**
- 2.16 It is Officers proposal that at its meeting on 24th June 2021, the Council can review the situation alongside any changes in COVID-19 restrictions and vitally, any easing of social distancing requirements. The Council can then assess whether to continue holding meetings at Seaford Baptist Church or whether another venue is a more suitable option.
- 2.17 The reason for recommending booking the Church auditorium until 29th July 2021 is to allow Officers reasonable time to implement and prepare for a change in venue, if

required, without disturbing those meetings planned for July (which is currently one every week in July).

- 2.18** Officers felt that when balancing the various factors, the cost of hiring the Church auditorium was justified by the venue not only being COVID-safe and having ample space to accommodate meetings, which is the case with The View, but because of having the technology in place to allow for recording and live streaming of meetings, and the burden this removes from Council Officers workloads if Officers were going to have to install, use and troubleshoot the Council's own technology at this short notice.

Layout

- 2.19** The guidance is clear that social distancing must be maintained during council meetings, with ideally 2 metres between participants and if that cannot be achieved then 1 metre minimum. Participants cannot sit facing each other and instead should be side-by-side.
- 2.20** Committee meetings will be more easily achieved, given that Committees usually have a maximum of 10 councillors in attendance. Full Council meetings will be considerably more challenging, with up to 20 councillors to facilitate.
- 2.21** Meetings taking place at Seaford Baptist Church will provide enough space for officers to ensure meeting participants can be safely spaced apart. The View can accommodate meetings with social distancing but this would need to be in a less-conventional layout and may require time to return the venue back to its daytime layout at the end of meetings.

Public Access to Meetings

- 2.22** Whilst the public have a legal right to access council meetings, the law does not state the method of which public can be allowed to access meetings. This means that council meetings can be open to the public to attend in person, virtually (via Zoom or telephone, for example) or via live streaming to the internet.
- 2.23** NALC is quite clear in its guidance that whilst meetings in person may have to resume from 7th May 2021, councils should not be encouraging members of the public to attend meetings in person until the relevant stage of the Government's roadmap out of lockdown; this is currently stage 4, which is due to be implemented on or after 21st June 2021.
- 2.24** Looking at virtual meetings, the purpose of these since April 2020 have predominantly been to enable councils to continue making decisions that cannot be made by officers under delegated powers, with the benefit of being able to invite members of the public to attend.
- 2.25** With the removal of councillors from the virtual meeting (as it would not be possible for councillors to individually log in to Zoom when in the same room), the Council is faced with the possibility of the virtual part of the meeting being arranged specifically to allow members of the public to participate (see the section regarding public participation below). In order for members of the public to access/watch the meeting, this would have to be done via the live stream.
- 2.26** The virtual meeting would not form part of the live stream (which would just be of the physical meeting room) and as such would also not be recorded.

- 2.27 It is recommended that the livestream be made direct to the Town Council's YouTube channel; this can then be shared on the Town Council's social media pages and website.
- 2.28 **It is therefore the recommendation that Full Council agrees to invite members of the public to attend meetings by watching via live streaming to the internet but not in person, until at least the 24th June 2021** (this being the date of a Full Council meeting, at which the Council can review the arrangements).

Public Participation at Meetings

- 2.29 While members of the public have a legal right to access meetings, they do not have a legal right to participate at meetings. Any public participation in meetings is a result of local rules; in Seaford's case this being the Town Council's Standing Orders and Public Participation Policy.
- 2.30 It must be stressed that whilst there is no legal right to allow public participation in meetings, this is recommended and as such is provided for within NALC's Model Standing Orders.
- 2.31 When members of public are able to attend meetings in person, public participation is a fairly straight-forward process (one that the Town Council was regularly welcoming pre-pandemic).
- 2.32 Since April 2020, the public has been able to access the meetings via the online meeting platform Zoom and participate. As mentioned above however, it will not be possible to have the meeting held on Zoom as councillors will not be able to log on to Zoom individually within the physical meeting room.
- 2.33 The option for members of the public joining a virtual meeting is therefore in order to enable the meeting participants to hear (and see) the member of public. But in order to watch the meeting proceedings, the member of public will also need to have the live stream open. This in itself could confuse matters as anyone wanting to attend the meeting virtually will need to either have two screens/devices (one to watch the live stream and one to attend the Zoom meeting on) or will have to swap between the two screens on their one device. There is also the risk for sound interference if they are watching the meeting that they are then speaking in.
- 2.34 The above presents a fairly complicated process for those involved and also one the Council Officers will struggle to assist with due to this all being outside of Officer's control i.e. relating to people's personal devices in their homes. This could therefore see disruptions to the meeting or frustrations from virtual participants that want to participate and are unable to.
- 2.35 Councillors should also be aware that with public participation via the virtual meeting, this will not be easily heard through the live stream (or on a recording) and therefore those watching the meeting are likely to only clearly hear the Council's response and not any public statements.
- 2.36 One final consideration is that by facilitating a virtual meeting just to enable public participation, more equipment will be required and another level of procedure is added to the meeting proceedings. This is covered in more detail under 'Equipment Requirements' below.
- 2.37 If the Council is minded to still enable public participation via a virtual meeting, it would be officers recommendation that the virtual meeting be arranged purely for the purposes of the public participation section of the meeting and not the entire meeting. To explain, the virtual meeting would begin at 7pm but would then close at the end

of the public participation section and members of the public would revert to just watching the meeting via live stream.

- 2.38** This would be with the exception of the Planning & Highways Committee meetings where public participation is invited immediately before each application, rather than at the beginning of the meeting. In these meetings, all in the meeting would have to be patient as the meeting Chair, clerk and host scan between physical and virtual attendees at various sections of the meeting.
- 2.39** Other local authorities (including locally Lewes District Council) allow for members of the public to submit their statements in writing in advance of the meeting for an officer to read out during the public participation section of the meeting. This opens public participation up to more members of public, in particular those who do not have the equipment or ability to attend the meetings virtually or quite simply are unable to attend at that given time.
- 2.40** There is an obvious downside of this approach i.e. not facilitating a virtual meeting for participation, in that members of the public will not be speaking to the meeting, their message instead being conveyed by Council Officers.
- 2.41** Council Officers would want to review the methods used to promote awareness of upcoming Council and Committee meetings and the ways in which members of the public can participate to ensure the right message is being sent of transparency, openness and inclusivity.
- 2.42** With all of the above taken into consideration, **it is recommended that Officers be instructed to temporarily amend the Town Councils' Public Participation Policy to reflect;**
- (a) Provision for members of the public to submit statements in writing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, to be read out loud by a Council Officer during the public participation section of the meeting.**
 - (b) Provision of a virtual meeting for the relevant sections of meetings to enable members of the public to participate in person, albeit remotely.**
 - (c) All other policy rules remain unchanged i.e. time allowed for statements, relation of content to an agenda item etc.**
 - (d) That this is in place until 24th June 2021** (this being the date of a Full Council meeting, at which the Council can review the arrangements).

Equipment Requirements

- 2.43** If the option is taken to hold meetings at Seaford Baptist Church, the Church would be in a position to provide all necessary chairs/tables and the technology for recording and live streaming meetings.
- 2.44** If the option is taken to facilitate virtual meetings to enable public participation, there will be very little additional equipment to enable virtual meetings to take place in addition to the physical meeting as the Council owns the necessary items to enable this. Officers may look to source a speaker to be used just to ensure that all those in the meeting room can hear the virtual speakers clearly however.
- 2.45** If the above recommendation at 2.38 is not approved then the main equipment implications are the technology requirements to live stream a physical meeting (in particular given the distance at which participants will be sitting apart).

- 2.46** Additional items would need to be purchased, such as tabletop microphones/conferencing/sound mixing facilities to ensure coverage of the entire meeting and also a new video camera/s due to the current being a fairly old device and not being able to facilitate live streaming and also one potentially not being enough to cover all councillors when socially distanced. Council Officers would also require training in how to operate the sound mixing board and other equipment, which would require the paid services of an external company to provide. Quotes are currently being sought for the costs involved and will be received in time to be discussed at the meeting.
- 2.47** The Council must be aware that an attempt to record and live stream meetings using its own technology will result in a less satisfactory video and sound quality; the full extent of which cannot be known (and possible courses for improvements) until it has been tested.

Officer Support

- 2.48** It will be a requirement to have at least two members of staff present at each physical meeting; the meeting clerk and another member of staff supporting.
- 2.49** If the decision were made to pick an option that required the Council to use its own equipment for recording/live streaming or to also facilitate a virtual meeting, it is likely that another one or two staff members would be required to support these functions specifically.
- 2.50** Other officers looking to attend the meeting will be kept to a minimum, so as to limit the number of people physically attending meetings. Although at times, it will be necessary to have other officers in attendance where they have written reports appearing on the agenda.

Other Considerations

- 2.51** Councillors that are unable to attend meetings in person in the immediate future – where councillors are not able to attend meetings in person in the immediate future (such as due to illness, for example), there are two available options. Firstly, the councillor may submit their apologies and in the case of a Committee meeting, attempt to arrange for a substitute to attend in their place.
- 2.52** Secondly, the Council could be minded to approve that councillors who are unable to attend meetings physically can attend the meetings virtually. Although, please note that it is officers recommendation that virtual meetings are only facilitated for the public participation section of meetings, so the councillor would only be virtually present for that part of the meeting and any statements they wish to make would have to form part of the public participation section of the meeting.
- 2.53** If the Council were minded to agree to facilitating a virtual meeting (whether for the purpose of members of the public to attend or councillors) there are a few caveats to this;
- (a)** Unless in the physical meeting room, councillors will not be able to vote on items and therefore would only be able to take part in the discussion;
 - (b)** The Chair and Vice-Chair would need to be present in the physical meeting room as it will not be possible to Chair the physical meeting remotely;
 - (c)** The physical meeting will need to be quorate, as quorum is reached with voting members i.e. those that are physically in the meeting.
 - (d)** This option should only be encouraged in exceptional circumstances.

- 2.54 As mentioned above, by way of the other recommendations made, **it is Officers recommendation that Council notes that where a councillor feels unable to physically attend a meeting, that they submit their apologies (arranging a substitute, where relevant), are invited to attend the virtual meeting to participate during public participation should they wish to and are encouraged to watch the livestream or recording in order to keep abreast with the meeting decisions and discussions.**
- 2.55 Coronavirus testing – it is now possible for all individuals to order lateral flow tests to test at home for coronavirus. The Council therefore must be minded to consider whether it is sensible to request that all councillors and officers attending a physical meeting use this testing service to prevent the risk of a coronavirus outbreak within Seaford Town Council.
- 2.56 The tests can be easily ordered online from here <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests> and are sent out seven at a time. It is likely that self-testing is going to become a standard part of many people’s lives in the near future; as restrictions ease further the onus is passed to the people to help limit the spread of the virus.
- 2.57 It is not known how other local authorities are approaching this and it is certainly not recommended that self-testing is mandatory, but **it is Officers recommendation that Council note that all Town Councillors and Officers attending physical meetings are requested to take a coronavirus lateral flow test within 24 hours of the meeting and if a positive result is received, to not attend the meeting and follow Government guidelines accordingly for a positive lateral flow test.**
- 2.58 If anyone in attendance at a physical meeting does test positive at a later date, they must let the Town Clerk and Mayor know immediately so they can assess the next steps the Council will need to take.
- 2.59 Masks – the guidance is not yet clear on the wearing of masks within a public meeting setting. The guidance is a little ambiguous and officers will therefore need to seek clarity that the expectation is not that meeting participants wear masks during the meeting itself.
- 2.60 Paper copies of meeting paperwork – regardless of venue, Officers are recommending continuing with the current process surrounding paper copies of meeting paperwork. That being that individual councillors ‘sign up’ to receive paper copies (either by post or left in their pigeonhole) and not that Officers automatically print copies for all councillors. This represents a significant saving in paper and printing costs for the Council and also reduces the amount of needless paper wastage, helping reduce the Council’s carbon footprint.
- 2.61 Councillors will be welcome to bring personal devices (tablets, laptops etc) to physical meetings, should they wish to access the meeting paperwork on that.
- 2.62 Working Groups and other non-Council/Committee meetings – can and should continue virtually, until stage 4 of the Government’s roadmap is entered into which is expected to be no earlier than 21st June 2021. For clarity, this will include the Grants Working Group meeting currently scheduled to take place on Wednesday 30th June 2021.

3. Call For Evidence

- 3.1 As previously mentioned, the Government has opened up a consultation calling for evidence of local authorities experiences with virtual meetings.

- 3.2 The Government has stipulated that one response per authority be submitted and therefore the Council is now being asked to discuss what it feels are the key points for a response before a final draft submission is presented to Council on 20th May for approval.
- 3.3 The details of the consultation can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>
- 3.4 Attached at [Appendix B](#) is a draft response that is now open for discussion and comment on by councillors.
- 3.5 Councillors will gauge from the draft response that Officers are generally in support of the continuation of virtual meetings as a permanent measure and that the response reflects this. Councillors are however encouraged to express any views they have to ensure that the final submission will be based on Councillor's consensus.

4. Summary

- 4.1 The above recommendations will result in Council/Committee meetings that are held physically within Seaford Baptist Church's auditorium and are live streamed and recorded by Church Operators trained in the equipment. The Council will be responsible for arranging the tables and chairs on arrival and stacking them after the meeting. This arrangement would be in place until 29th July 2021 and be reviewed by Full Council at its meeting on 24th June 2021.
- 4.2 Members of the public will be able to watch the meetings via live stream or at a later date by the recording. Members of the public will be able to participate by submitting a written statement in advance to Council Officers to then be read out at the meeting or by attending a virtual meeting specifically for the public participation section of the meeting. These arrangements will be in place until at least 24th June 2021, the date on which Full Council will be reviewing public participation methods.
- 4.3 It must be made completely clear that the only reason for choosing an alternative venue over the Town Council-owned venue, The View, is due to the requirement to be able to livestream and record these socially distanced and therefore larger scale meetings; were this not the case, The View would be the meeting venue of choice.

5. Financial Appraisal

- 5.1 The financial implications of this report are differing depending on the options chosen by Council;
- 5.2 Venue – meetings held at The View would incur an internal cost for the Council, so not a hire expenditure as such.
- 5.3 Holding meetings at Seaford Baptist Church are estimated to cost £2,700 for nine meetings, so an average of £300 per meeting. This includes hire charges (with a complimentary free hour for set up/tidy away and a discounted hourly rate due to multiple meetings being booked) and the costs for using the Church's livestreaming and recording equipment, which includes two trained operators to control these.
- 5.4 Any hire cost to facilitate Council meetings is an unbudgeted expense and would therefore have to be met from General Reserves.
- 5.5 Equipment – if meetings are held in Seaford Baptist Church, there will be no additional equipment required.

5.6 If meetings are held at The View, the Council will need to invest in microphone/conferencing facilities in addition to training for Officers to use the equipment and professional support with the initial set up. Quotes are currently being sought and will be received by the time of the meeting so this can factor into discussions.

5.7 As above, any equipment required for use for Council meetings is an unbudgeted expense and would therefore have to be met from General Reserves.

6. Contact Officer

The Contact Officer for this report is Adam Chugg, Town Clerk.

Town Clerk



Report 173-20 Appendix A

Options for Venue for Physical Meetings from May 2021

Venue	Pros	Cons	Notes
Church Street	n/a		The risk assessment was conclusive that meetings cannot be held in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions and therefore would not be safe for those attending. Church Street offices are not an option for meeting in.
The View	Council-owned.	-	
	Not currently used in evenings so STC meetings can be held on planned dates/times.	When/if evening functions restart, would have to decide whether to turn away paying customers or rehouse STC meetings elsewhere, possibly at short notice.	
	Currently adhering to COVID-19 restrictions; one-way system, cleaning regimes, hygiene products available etc.	-	
	Has plenty of tables/chairs to use; tables are single and good use of space.	-	
	Easily accommodate Committee meetings within function area.	Council meetings may be harder and may require using some of the restaurant/bar area too.	
	-	If/when the public look to return to physical meetings, this could be impossible in The View if social distancing is still in force.	
	-	If using some of restaurant area, would have to return chairs/tables to restaurant layout after meeting.	

Venue	Pros	Cons	Notes
	-	There is no sound/recording system installed within the venue meaning that this would be to be arranged separately. This would represent a cost to STC as well as considerable additional workload for officers outside of core hours.	
	Helps to promote The View as a meeting space and increase awareness of The View.	-	
	Cost of hire would be journaled as a cost against STC 201 account code and show as income for The View.		
	Need to think about staffing the venue - someone would need to be available to lock up building after the meeting. If a member of The View staff, they would be paid purely for this purpose. May mean training STC staff in how to do this.		

Seaford Baptist Church	-	There would be a cost to hire the venue.	
	Has a brand-new recording/sound/live streaming system installed within their auditorium, which STC could use to record and live stream meetings. This means no equipment costs for STC to be able to do this and reduces the chance of technical glitches due to having trained operators managing this.	There would be a cost to pay for two operators to assist with the system.	
	-	The auditorium is fairly well-used and therefore STC's current meeting dates are not available. The Church has provided a list of alternatives for the Council to consider (set out within report).	

Venue	Pros	Cons	Notes
	Currently adhering to COVID-19 restrictions; one-way system, cleaning regimes, hygiene products available etc.	-	
	Has plenty of tables/chairs to use; tables are single and good use of space.	-	
	No need to worry about having to set up tables and chairs afterwards.		
	Auditorium can accommodate both Council and Committee meetings.		
	Auditorium has a viewing gallery which could be used if/when the public return to physically attending the meeting at a future date.		
	Officers would need to be mindful to ensure that a clear message and justification is provided as to why meetings are being held within religious premises, so as not to be mistaken for supporting or promoting that religion and as an explanation for those who may not otherwise choose to enter such a building. The prevailing justification would be one of ensuring participant safety under current restrictions and also the technological gain for enabling the public to still access and participate in the meeting.		
	Officers would need to give thought to how to explain not using The View, its own meeting venue. Again, this would be due to the size of Council meeting (requiring socially distanced 22+ participants) and the technology already in situ.		

Report 173/20 - Appendix B

Draft Response to the Government's call for evidence regarding remote meetings.

Details: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence/local-authority-remote-meetings-call-for-evidence>

Questions

The government would like to gather evidence about the use of the arrangements that make express provision for local authorities to meet remotely or in hybrid format during the coronavirus pandemic, including the arrangements that existed for Scottish Authorities prior to the pandemic.

Q1. Generally speaking, how well do you feel the current remote meetings arrangements work?

- Very Well
- Well
- Neither well nor poorly
- Poorly
- Very Poorly
- Unsure

Very Well – there were initial challenges with getting set up for remote meetings, largely due to the short notice in which to do this, but remote meetings quickly became a very efficient and effective way for Seaford Town Council to hold its public meetings and make its necessary decisions in an open and transparent manner. Remote meetings have seen an increase in number and diversity of public both attending and participating in meetings, which the Town Council has welcomed. Remote meetings have also hugely improved the quality of meeting recordings which are then shared on the Town Council's YouTube channel and have attracted an increased number of watchers than the recordings of physical meetings. The Town Council believes remote meetings have definitely enabled a greater level of public understanding and involvement in its activities.

While the powers in section 78 of the Coronavirus Act were brought in specifically to help local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland deal with the challenges of holding meetings during the coronavirus pandemic, the government would also like to hear from interested parties about the pros and cons of making permanent express provision, in whole or in part, for local authorities in England.

Q2. Generally speaking, do you think local authorities in England should have the express ability to hold at least some meetings remotely on a permanent basis?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Yes

Beyond having express provision to avoid face-to-face meetings during the coronavirus pandemic, we are aware of feedback from local authorities about additional benefits of being able to hold remote meetings including, but not limited to, the environmental and cost benefits of reduced travel, increased participation from local residents, and the potential to attract more diverse local authority members. We are keen to obtain representative views on the benefits of remote meetings and would particularly welcome any quantitative evidence to support these views.

Q3. What do you think are some of the benefits of the remote meetings arrangements? Please select all that apply.

- More accessible for local authority members
- Reduction in travel time for councillors
- Meetings more easily accessed by local residents
- Greater transparency for local authority meetings
- Documents (e.g. minutes, agendas, supporting papers) are more accessible to local residents and others online
- Easier to chair meetings in an orderly fashion
- A virtual format promotes greater equality in speaking time during meetings
- I do not think there are any benefits to remote meetings
- Other (please specify)

- ***Reduction in travel time for councillors***
- ***Meetings more easily accessed by local residents***
- ***Greater transparency for local authority meetings***
- ***Documents (e.g. minutes, agendas, supporting papers) are more accessible to local residents and others online***
- ***Easier to chair meetings in an orderly fashion***
- ***A virtual format promotes greater equality in speaking time during meetings***
- ***Other (please specify):***
 - ***Encourages a better work-life balance for councillors and officers with meetings often held in the evening and able to be carried out from home***
 - ***Creates a more accessible meeting format where attending a physical meeting may have been hard; such as for participants with health problems or mobility issues, for example***
 - ***Has brought more local authorities online, with a virtual presence, meaning as a town council we are able to view other town council meetings and gain useful insights from these***
 - ***Broken down the distance barrier, enabling councillors to attend meetings if they are out of town (for business or holidaying, for example) and indeed members of the public and officers too***

In their representations to us, many local authorities have referenced the cost savings they have achieved through implementing remote meetings, particularly regarding a reduction in travel expenses and accommodation costs.

For example, one upper tier authority has reported that running meetings remotely has enabled them to save in the order of £6,000 per month through reduced travel expenses. We would be interested to receive more quantitative data about the cost savings that have been achieved, including any estimates of the comparative cost of running a remote meeting versus a face-to-face meeting.

Q4. (For local authorities only) Have you seen a reduction in costs since implementing remote meetings in your authority?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Unsure – this has not been quantified. Seaford Town Councillors do not claim travel expenses for travel to meetings so this was not a cost to save on. Paid officer time is reduced though, as is the volume of paper used and printing costs for meeting paperwork.

Some local authorities have also made reference to the difficulty that some members have had with the remote meeting format, particularly in relation to the difficulties in managing misconduct, the challenges of working with unfamiliar software, and technological issues caused by a poor internet connection. We are keen to obtain representative views on the disadvantages of remote meetings and would particularly welcome any quantitative evidence to support these views.

Q5. What do you think are some of the disadvantages of the remote meetings arrangements, and do you have any suggestions for how they could be mitigated/overcome? Please select all that apply.

- It is harder for members to talk to one another informally
- Meetings are less accessible for local authority members or local residents who have a poor-quality internet connection
- Meetings are less accessible for local authority members or local residents who are unfamiliar with video conferencing/technology
- There is less opportunity for local residents to speak or ask questions
- Some find it more difficult to read documents online than in a physical format
- Debate is restricted by the remote format
- It is more difficult to provide effective opposition or scrutiny in a remote format
- It is more difficult to chair meetings in an orderly fashion
- Virtual meetings can be more easily dominated by individual speakers
- It might enable democratically elected members to live and perform their duties outside their local area on a permanent basis, therefore detaching them from the communities they serve
- It may create too substantial a division between the way national democracy (e.g. in the House of Commons) and local democracy is conducted
- I do not think there are any disadvantages to remote meetings
- Other (please specify)

- **Meetings are less accessible for local authority members or local residents who are unfamiliar with video conferencing/technology – the Town Council has produced guidance to try and assist with the use of this technology, in order to try and help those less comfortable with the process. The Town Council has received no complaints or comments regarding not being able to attend remote meetings.**
- **Some find it more difficult to read documents online than in a physical format – the Town Council has returned to providing paper copies of documents for those councillors that require it, in order to directly tackle this disadvantage.**
- **Other (please specify)**
 - **Remote meetings remove the social interactions and therefore peer relationship reinforcement that occurs from physical meetings, helping foster the ‘team’ environment for councillors – Town Councillors have had to look at other ways in which to foster and reinforce these relations already, steered by the 2020/21 Mayor. If remote meetings were enabled to continue, the Town Council would look at implementing permanent features to encourage these more social interactions such as informal Zoom meetings, ‘on site’ socially distanced meetings in the town at places of interest to the Town Council at that point, continued use of the Town Councillors messaging groups and others.**

The government considers that there are also many advantages of holding meetings face-to-face. For example, physical meetings provide numerous opportunities for local authority members to speak with one another informally and build alliances, as well as to encounter local residents in the flesh and listen to their concerns in person.

Additionally, some members have referenced the vast improvement in the quality of debate when there is a lively atmosphere and they are able to make full use of their oratory skills to persuade and influence others. Some may consider remote meetings stifling and that physical meetings are essential to effective democracy and scrutiny.

Q6. What do you think are some of the main advantages of holding face-to-face meetings, as opposed to remote meetings?

- ***There is no reliance on technology for the meeting to take place and the removal of any risks that could pose.***
- ***For individuals that find it hard to communicate via video meetings, face-to-face meetings remove that hurdle and may encourage easy flow of discussion.***

If express provision for remote meetings were made permanent, it might be preferable for the government to constrain the meetings or circumstances in which remote meetings can be held to ensure that effective democracy and scrutiny can still take place.

There are some occasions, for example, where a remote meeting format may be seen as more appropriate, such as for smaller sub-committees, meetings convened at short notice, or for meetings where attendees are drawn from a large geographical area i.e. for some joint committees, combined authorities and large rural authorities. On the other hand, there are occasions where a remote meeting format may be

viewed as less appropriate, for example larger meetings involving Full Council or an authority's Annual Meeting.

Q7. If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, for which meetings do you think they should have the option to hold remote meetings?

- For all meetings
- For most meetings with a few exceptions (please specify)
- Only for some meetings (please specify)
- I think local should be able to decide for themselves which meetings they should have the option to meet remotely
- I do not think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings for any meetings
- Unsure

- ***I think local authorities should be able to decide for themselves which meetings they should have the option to meet remotely***

Q8. If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, in which circumstances do you think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings?

- In any circumstances
- Only in extenuating circumstances where a meeting cannot be held face-to-face or some members would be unable to attend (e.g. severe weather events, coronavirus restrictions)
- I think local authorities should be able to decide for themselves which circumstances they should have the option to meet remotely
- I do not think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings under any circumstances
- Other (please specify)
- Unsure

- ***In any circumstances***

While local authorities have risen magnificently to the challenge of ensuring vital council business continues by conducting meetings remotely during these unprecedented times, there may be concerns that, if the arrangements were to be made permanent, a situation could arise where remote meetings arrangements were used by a ruling party to avoid effective scrutiny or abuse the power in some other way.

Q9. Would you have any concerns if local authorities in England were given the power to decide for themselves which meetings, and in what circumstances, they have the option to hold remote meetings?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

- ***No – not specifically for Seaford Town Council***

Q10. If yes, do you have any suggestions for how your concerns could be mitigated/overcome?

n/a

In deciding whether and how remote meetings arrangements may be made permanent for local authorities in England, the government needs to ensure that it has due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty. In particular, the government would need to avoid unlawfully discriminating (either directly or indirectly) against individuals with a protected characteristic, and also consider whether the arrangements advance equality of opportunity or help to foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Many local authorities have spoken of the potential benefits that remote meetings could have for members or potential members with disabilities or young families. However, there are also those for whom remote meetings could pose additional difficulties, for example those with hearing or visual impairments or those more likely to struggle with the technology.

We are keen to consider views on these aspects of remote meetings and would particularly welcome any quantitative evidence to support views provided.

Q11. In your view, would making express provision for English local authorities to meet remotely particularly benefit or disadvantage any individuals with protected characteristics e.g. those with disabilities or caring responsibilities?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

• ***Unsure – the Town Council has no data or evidence upon which to confidently agree a yes or***