

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF VIDEO-CONFERENCING FACILITIES

**The following protocol shall be adopted in relation to the conduct of all meetings of the Council and its various Committees and Sub-Committees:-**

#### **A. Prior to the Meeting**

- 1) Any Member wishing to participate by video-conference link in any meeting of the Council, or of a Committee or Sub-Committee, must intimate his/her request in writing to the Chief Executive not less than seven working days in advance of the meeting taking place and must specify at which of the premises listed in the Appendix to this Protocol the establishment of the remote link is requested. Any Member wishing to submit such a request less than seven days in advance of the meeting must give a reason for such late request, which shall be considered by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Convener, together with officer advice on the practicality of making the necessary technical arrangements within the available timeframe.
- 2) The Chief Executive will immediately notify the Convener or the relevant Chairman and also the Assistant Chief Executive. The latter will take steps to ensure that the requested venue is available throughout the required period, that the link can be established, that staff support for this link and for the Member using it can be provided, and that all associated facilities, e.g. telephone, fax, email, are available.
- 3) As provided in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Member's request will be determined by the Convener or relevant Chairman. This will be done in consultation with the Chief Executive. For the avoidance of doubt, the Convener/Chairman may not participate remotely.
- 4) In the case of a number of requests being received for the establishment of multiple remote links for the same meeting, such requests will be considered in chronological order of receipt until the maximum number that the equipment can support has been reached, subject to priority being given to voting members of the relevant Committee or Sub-Committee (including as a result of a successful "local member" request under Standing Order 13.2).
- 5) Details of fax and email facilities at the remote venue must be verified and tested.
- 6) The video-conference link must be established and tested before the commencement of the meeting.
- 7) The video-conferencing equipment must be arranged in such a way that the Chairman can see the remote Member(s), as well as those present in the Chamber or meeting room (Standing Order 23 refers: "A member wishing to speak will attract the Convener's attention by raising his or her hand .....").

## **B. At the Meeting**

- 8) The Convener will confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of the meeting that he can see and hear all participating Members. Any Member participating by remote link will also confirm at the outset and at any reconvening of the meeting that he/she can see and hear the proceedings at the main venue and at all other remote links.
- 9) Any Member participating by remote link who declares an interest in any item of business in terms of Standing Order 21 and is either required to leave the room or determines to do so, shall leave the room at the remote venue and this departure will be confirmed by a member of staff at that venue. This member of staff will thereafter confirm to the remote Member when he/she may rejoin the meeting.
- 10) Should any aspect of the video-conference link fail, the Convener will call a short adjournment of up to fifteen minutes to determine whether the link can quickly be re-established. If not re-established within this time, the Convener will temporarily suspend discussion of the item under consideration at the time of link failure and continue with the remaining agenda items. Efforts should continue to re-establish the link. The Convener will return to the suspended item on re-establishment, or on confirmation that this cannot be done, or before the end of the meeting, whichever is the earliest. For clarity, the item under consideration at the point of any re-establishment of a link will be concluded before returning to the suspended item.
- 11) In the event of link failure, the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure of the equipment and to have returned at the point of re-establishment, should this be successful.
- 12) Should a remote Member wish to move a motion or amendment, which, in accordance with Standing Order 25.1 must be "given in writing to the Clerk", the Member will arrange for this to be emailed on his/her behalf by a member of staff at the remote venue. If necessary, a short adjournment should be called to allow delivery of the email to the Clerk. Should email transmission fail, back-up arrangements for transmission by fax should be available.
- 13) A remote Member participating in a vote will cast his/her vote as if participating in a roll call vote.

## **C. Planning Applications and Review Committees/Licensing Committees**

- 14) As the Council must be able to demonstrate that decisions of a regulatory nature are taken on the basis of the same information being available to all Members involved in the decision, any additional papers tabled at a meeting of a Planning Applications and Review Committee or a Licensing Committee must be faxed to the remote venue and time allowed, by a short adjournment if necessary, for these to be delivered to and read by the remote Member.
- 15) Similarly, to help ensure that a remote Member can clearly follow any officer presentation, separate copies of the presentation should be shown simultaneously at all remote venues, in addition to using the video-conferencing link.

**D. Confidential/Exempt Items**

- 16) If a remote Member wishes to participate in discussion of a confidential/exempt item, he/she, and the member of staff at the remote venue, must verify that the venue is secure, that no member of the public has access and that no recording of the proceedings is being made.

**E. Appointments**

- 17) Standing Order 30 refers. A remote Member may participate on the same basis as the other Members present in an Election, Selection or Appointment of Members of the Council to any particular office, Committee or other Group or outside body where the Council determines that the vote will be by show of hands. If the vote is taken by electronic ballot, the remote Member will require to state his/her preferences via the link and will not be able to enjoy confidentiality. If the vote is taken by paper ballot, the remote Member may participate by fax. In such a case time must be allowed, by a short adjournment if necessary, for remote votes to be delivered to the Clerk.