

# SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL – EXTRAORDINARY FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 27 MARCH 2020

## GUIDANCE FOR PRESS AND PUBLIC

### Access and Attendance

#### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Although the County Council meeting in Shire Hall is open to the public, due to the current Coronavirus outbreak there is very limited capacity for public health and safety reasons. This is to allow everybody in attendance to sit at least 2 metres distance from each other, to reduce the risk of spreading the infection in line with Government Guidance. Therefore for this meeting only we require any member of the public who wishes to attend the Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 27 March 2020, to email the Monitoring Officer – Scott Wooldridge (email: [swouldridge@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:swouldridge@somerset.gov.uk)) by 5pm on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March. You will receive an acknowledgment to this email, however please do not attend the meeting unless you subsequently receive an email confirming you have a place to attend. These emails will be issued on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March.

The Council Chamber in Shire Hall is located on the first floor of the building. Shire Hall is used principally by the Courts Service and their staff are responsible for security arrangements at the main entrance. **All those attending the council meeting and the courts are required to pass through the security 'gate'. At peak times this can take well over ten minutes – so please arrive early.**

Priority in attending the meeting will be given to those who have registered to speak at Public Question Time.

The design of Shire Hall and the listed Council Chamber is not ideal for those using wheelchairs, with restricted widths in corridors and elsewhere, but council officers will ensure they have access to the meeting if at all possible.

### Recording of Meetings

The Council in support of the principles of openness and transparency allows filming, recording and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public providing it is done in a non-disruptive manner. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings and a designated area will be provided for anyone who wishes to film part or all of the proceedings. No filming or recording will take place when the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting. As a matter of courtesy to the public, anyone wishing to film or record proceedings is asked to provide reasonable notice to the Democratic Services Team by emailing [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk) or phoning 07790577336/ 07811 313837/07790577232 so that the Chair of the meeting can inform those present.

We would ask that, as far as possible, members of the public aren't filmed unless they are playing an active role such as speaking within a meeting and there may be occasions when speaking members of the public request not to be filmed.

The Council will be undertaking audio recording of some of its meetings in Shire Hall as part of its investigation into a business case for the recording and potential webcasting of meetings in the future.

A copy of the Council's Recording of Meetings Protocol should be on display at the meeting for inspection, alternatively contact the Committee Administrator for the meeting in advance

## **Members' Code of Conduct Requirements**

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: HONESTY; INTEGRITY; SELFLESSNESS; OBJECTIVITY; ACCOUNTABILITY; OPENNESS; LEADERSHIP. The Code of Conduct can be viewed at: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/organisation/key-documents/the-councils-constitution/>

## **EXPLANATORY NOTES: QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS/PETITIONS BY THE PUBLIC**

### **General**

Members of the public may ask questions of the Council or may make a statement or present a petition – **by giving advance notice** and this **must relate to items on the agenda**.

### **Notice of questions/statements/petitions**

Prior submission of questions/statements/petitions is required in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer – Scott Wooldridge (email: [swouldridge@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:swouldridge@somerset.gov.uk)) by 5pm ON MONDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> MARCH. The Monitoring Officer may edit any question or statement in consultation with the author, before it is circulated, to bring it into an appropriate form for the Council.

In exceptional circumstances the Chair has discretion at meetings to accept questions/statements/ petitions without any prior notice.

### **Scope of questions/statements/petitions**

Questions/statements/petitions must:

- (a) relate to a matter for which the County Council has a responsibility, or which affects the County and **relate to the item or items on the agenda**.
- (b) not be defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
- (c) not be substantially the same as a question/statement/petition which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; and
- (d) not require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

The Monitoring Officer has discretion to reject any question that is not in accord with (a) to (d) above. The Monitoring Officer may also reject a statement or petition on similar grounds.

### **Record of questions/statement/petitions**

Copies of all representations from the public received prior to the meeting will be circulated to all members and will be made available to the public attending the meeting in the Chair's Schedule, which will be distributed at the meeting. Full copies of representations and answers given will be set out in the minutes of the meeting.

### **Response to Petitions**

Normally the Council will refer any petition to an appropriate decision maker for response – see the Council's Petition Scheme for more details. The organiser will also be allowed 2 minutes at the meeting to introduce the petition and will receive a response from a relevant member (normally a Cabinet member).

If a petition organiser is not satisfied with the council's response to the petition and the petition contains more than 5000 signatures (approximately 1% of Somerset's population) the petition organiser can request a debate at a meeting of the County Council itself. The Chair will decide when that debate will take place.