

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

GUIDANCE ON VESTRY MEETINGS, PCC MEETINGS AND ELECTORAL ROLLS

UPDATED MARCH 2021

This guidance (March 2021) supersedes the previous guidance (September 2020).

VESTRY MEETINGS

The Constitution of the Church in Wales now permits the vast majority of church meetings to be held online. Vestry Meetings may now be held online in exceptional circumstances approved by the Diocesan Bishop. Such permissions may be given either individually to a parish, or generally across the Diocese.

The Agreed Actions of the Bishops

Given the current 'stay at home' regulations, the Bench of Bishops agree that in-person Vestry Meetings should not take place at this time.

This is clearly an exceptional circumstance, as envisaged by the Constitution, and each Bishop has therefore authorised that the 2021 Vestry Meeting may take place online, via video-meeting software such as Zoom/Microsoft Teams/Google Meet.

Before calling an online Vestry Meeting, the Bishops ask each PCC to consider how to ensure that as many of their congregations as possible are able to participate in the meeting. The PCC must also ensure it has suitable means to distinguish between those persons entitled to vote at the meeting and those who may attend but not vote.

In addition to the constitutional requirements for notices on the principal door of the church[es], the Bishops require (as a condition of their permission for the meeting to be held online) that at least two weeks' prior notice of the date and time of the meeting is published on the church website (if there is one) and any church newsletters/emails. All notices must include instructions for how to access the online meeting.

The Bishops also advise that announcements of the arrangements be made at services (whether online, or in person) for two weeks prior to the meeting.

If any parish does not feel they can hold a Vestry Meeting online (perhaps due to a significant portion of electoral roll members not having internet access), current Government regulations continue to permit essential charity governance meetings taking place in-person. Any in-person meeting must be subject to a stringent risk assessment, which should be approved by the Archdeacon.

If any parish is unable to hold a Vestry Meeting before 30 April 2021, they should be in touch, in the first instance, with their Archdeacon to discuss the use of the Bishop's powers to appoint Churchwardens, Parochial Church Councillors and parochial representatives under Regulation 5 of Chapter IV C (Regulations) of the Constitution.

Other matters – Vestry Meeting Business

Accounts

Whilst it is part of the Constitutional requirements for the Vestry Meeting to receive and discuss the Parochial Church Council's accounts, the *approval* of the Vestry Meeting is not required. Any delay or cancellation of a Vestry meeting must not delay the finalisation of the 2020 accounts and the submitting of annual returns and accounts to the Charity Commission (in the case of PCCs who are registered with the Charity Commission).

Electoral Roll

The next full revision of the Electoral Roll revision is not now due until 2022 as a result of constitutional amendments made at Governing Body in September 2020.

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCILS – ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

Subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the associated Regulations, a Parochial Church Council is authorised to regulate its own procedures by way of Standing Orders (Chapter IV C, Section 12(a)).

Parochial Church Councils meeting by electronic means (a video or telephone conference) is now specifically authorised by the Constitution of the Church in Wales, as a result of the Constitutional changes approved on 8 September 2020. Therefore, specific Standing Orders are not required to be adopted for an online PCC meeting to be validly held.

Additionally, some parishes may already have Standing Orders in place which allow decisions to be made by written/emailed resolutions. Parishes which do not currently have such provisions in place may wish to consider adopting them (which would need to be done at either an in-person or an online meeting).

Matthew Chinery
Head of Legal Services
Representative Body of the Church in Wales
March 2021