

LEVENS PARISH COUNCIL

PROVISIONS FOR PARISH COUNCIL BUSINESS IN THE LIGHT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The *coronavirus* (C-19) emergency is disrupting normal life and activity in so many ways, including how local councils operate.

In particular, Government measures requiring most people to stay at home and away from others, and to self-isolate if your own circumstances require it, mean that **the requirement for local councils (including parish councils) to hold public meetings in person with all members present in one place cannot be met.**

Levens Parish Council has already cancelled its meeting due to be held on April 14, 2020 and will not physically meet again until such time as it is permitted / appropriate to do so.

In response to this situation, Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 gives the Secretary of State the power to make Regulations governing how local councils, including parish councils, may operate during this period.

These Regulations are contained in The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the 2020 Regulations”) which came in to force on 4 April.

Key provisions are as follows:

- **Elections** to local councils have been postponed until May 2021
- The 2020 Regulations apply to local authority meetings that are required to be held before 7 May 2021. Dates may be brought forward if Government rules are relaxed.
- The 2020 Regulations have removed the requirement to hold an **Annual Parish Meeting** until May 2021 (or earlier if the council *wishes* to do so - such a meeting will only be possible if permitted by the general rules on distancing in place at the time). Levens Parish Meeting was due to be held on 17 March and was cancelled.
- The Parish Council also holds an **Annual Parish Council Meeting** in May. This meeting appoints office bearers such as the Chairman and vice-Chairman as well as Councillor representatives on a number of local and

regional organisations. In the current circumstances, the Annual Parish Council meeting will not be held. Regulation 4 of the 2020 Regulations provides that where an appointment would have been made at the Annual Parish Council Meeting, the appointment continues until the next Annual Meeting can be held. **Therefore, current office bearers and representatives will remain in place until an Annual Meeting can be held (possibly next year).**

- Rules for the holding of Parish Council meetings are largely contained in the Local Government Act 1972 which requires parish councils to hold not less than 3 meetings in a year. This requirement has not been modified by the 2020 Regulations.
- Levens Parish Council has already held 3 meetings in 2020 (January, February and March). Enquiries are taking place to determine the meaning of 'a year' (i.e. calendar year or May – April).
- Regulation 5 of the 2020 Regulations *permit* (but do not require) the holding of '**remote**' meetings. This means that a formal local council meeting may be held and that persons attending do not need to be in the same place, subject to specified conditions.
- In addition, rules governing Levens Parish Council meetings are contained in its Standing Orders. Regulation 5(6) of the 2020 Regulations enables local councils to make standing orders to state how remote meetings might be managed, based on their own needs and capacity.
- Methods for holding a meeting may include electronic, digital, telephone conference calls, or virtual locations provided for by platforms such as Skype, Zoom etc.
- **Levens Parish Council is considering the most appropriate means by which it may conduct necessary Parish business. Updates on this will be posted on the Parish Council webpage**
- **Please remember that Levens Good Neighbours, our village shop and volunteers are providing fantastic support in looking after our self-isolating villagers. If you need support, please phone Levens Good Neighbours on 07908 004 672**