

COVID-19 Guidance for Meetings in the Council Chamber

Southampton City Council

July 2022

Cases of COVID-19 and hospitalisations are rising in Southampton and, in line with government guidance, it is important, where possible, to take steps to reduce the risk of infection and protect vulnerable populations. Doing so will also reduce the risk of transmission of other infectious diseases such as influenza.

Guidance for meetings

People are at highest risk of catching or transmitting COVID-19 when they are physically close to others or are sharing a poorly ventilated space. The Council Chamber is not well ventilated and therefore poses a risk. To mitigate this risk:

- Councillors, staff and members of the public should be strongly advised in advance of meetings that they should not attend if they have any symptoms of a respiratory or viral infection¹, or have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to carry out normal activities
- Should councillors and staff become ill with symptoms during the course of the meeting, they should inform the chair, put on a face covering, and leave the meeting using the closest exit (unless requiring immediate medical attention)
- Doors and windows should be kept open throughout the meeting to maximise airflow throughout the space unless incompatible with correct functioning of the mechanical ventilation system
- Councillors and staff should maintain as much space as possible between each other when seated and when moving around the room
- Meetings should be 'face-covering friendly'. Whilst no longer mandatory, government guidance advises wearing a face-covering when COVID-19 rates are high and when in close contact with other people, such as in crowded and enclosed spaces. A supply of face coverings should be provided. Attendees should be actively invited to wear a face covering should they wish to wear one, during any or all stages of the meeting, recognising that individual councillors, staff, and members of the public are best placed to understand their own level of risk
- Hand sanitising stations should be located at entry points to the Council Chamber
- Microphone use should be encouraged. This will reduce the need for people to raise their voices, which increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission
- Those attending should be respectful of others who may wish to adopt a more cautious approach
- Consideration should be given to providing additional support for those attendees who are more vulnerable or at higher risk of infection
- An individual bottle of water and a glass should be available at each seat
- Sharing of stationery, documents or other equipment should be avoided where possible

For meetings that members of the public are entitled to attend, consideration should be given to implementing an advance booking system to ensure there is adequate space in the room for additional attendees. Members of the public may still however attend without notice, and this should be taken into account when planning.

Following each meeting

The facilities department should ensure the meeting room is thoroughly cleaned using the normal cleaning materials appropriate for the space and surfaces. It should also be thoroughly ventilated for as long as possible after the meeting and before it is used again.

Review of this guidance

This guidance will be kept under regular review in light of changing or updated government guidance and COVID-19 case numbers and hospital admissions in the city.

Appendix:

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| 1. Common symptoms of COVID-19, flu and other respiratory or viral symptoms |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• continuous cough• high temperature, fever or chills• loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell• shortness of breath• unexplained tiredness, lack of energy• muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise• not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry• headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual• sore throat, stuffy or runny nose• diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick |