

London Office of Technology & Innovation

How to hold online committee meetings that are
accessible to the public

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About this document

With council staff and elected members across the UK now working remotely, many are getting used to holding online meetings using tools like [Google Hangouts Meet](#), [Microsoft Teams](#) and [Zoom](#).

The Local Digital Team at MHCLG has already [published useful links](#) to advice on how to conduct such meetings effectively.

This document covers a different type of use case, where an online meeting needs to involve a wider audience - in this case, the public.

Example scenarios may include:

1. Elected member committee meetings
2. Planning meetings
3. Town hall-style meetings

NOTE: Holding these kinds of meeting online is still awaiting a legislative change.

Typical user requirements:

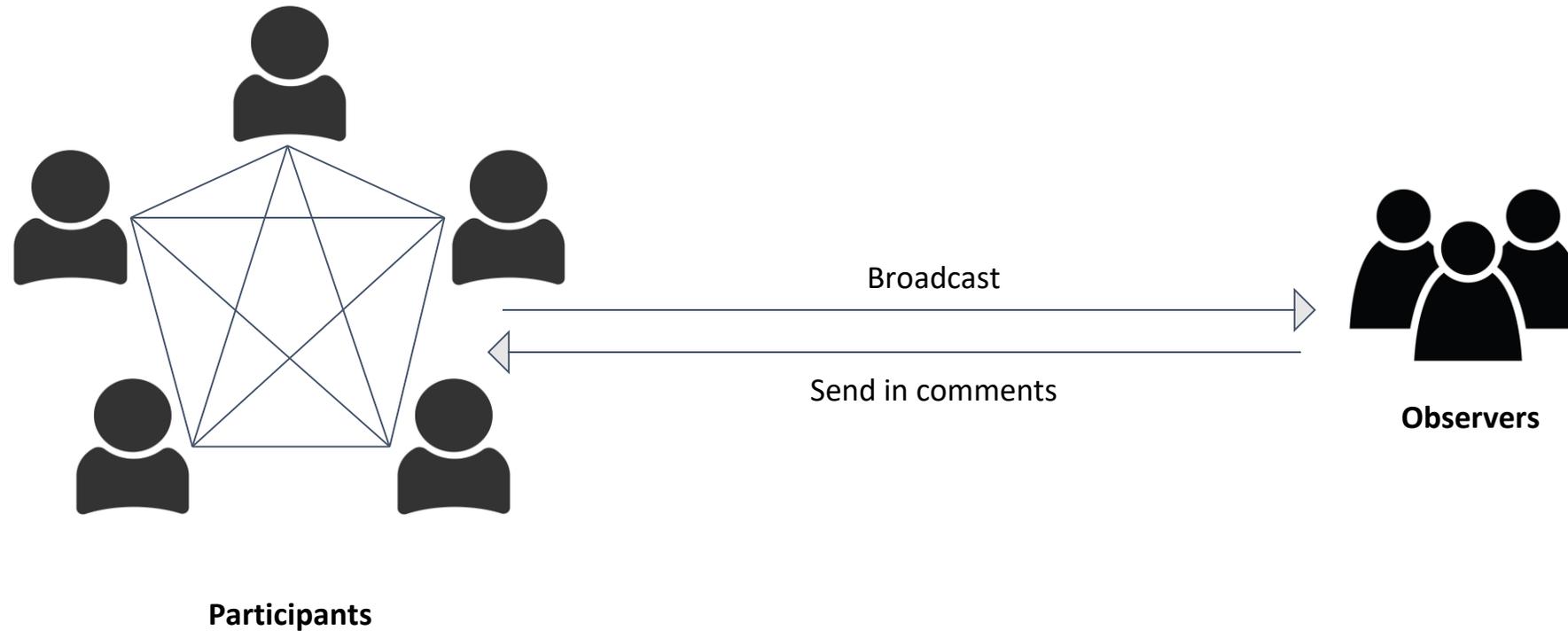
Common requirements are to be able to:

- Enable contributions from people using a wide variety of devices, not all of whom are on the council network.
 - Be accessible to participants, members of the public who wish to speak, and to those who just wish to observe.
 - Recognise and give special controls to both a committee clerk (moderator) and a committee Chair.
 - Allocate different levels of access to people logging in (based on whether or not they are a councillor, an officer, a member of the public who has registered to speak or just an observer of the meeting).
- The Chair and the Clerk need to:
 - Pause (adjourn) the meeting
 - Switch on each active participant's microphone when they are invited to speak and to switch them off afterwards
 - Mute someone speaking at any time
 - Mute everyone speaking except themselves at any time
 - Switch some active participants and the observers off, so they are paused and have neither 'live' visual or audio feed whilst the committee deliberates in private or the clerk or a lawyer present gives the committee advice. NB. Deliberation for Licensing committees often takes up to 10 minutes.
 - The officers present / clerk need to be able to give presentations and display documents (maps and plans etc) and to speak over them.

Typical user requirements

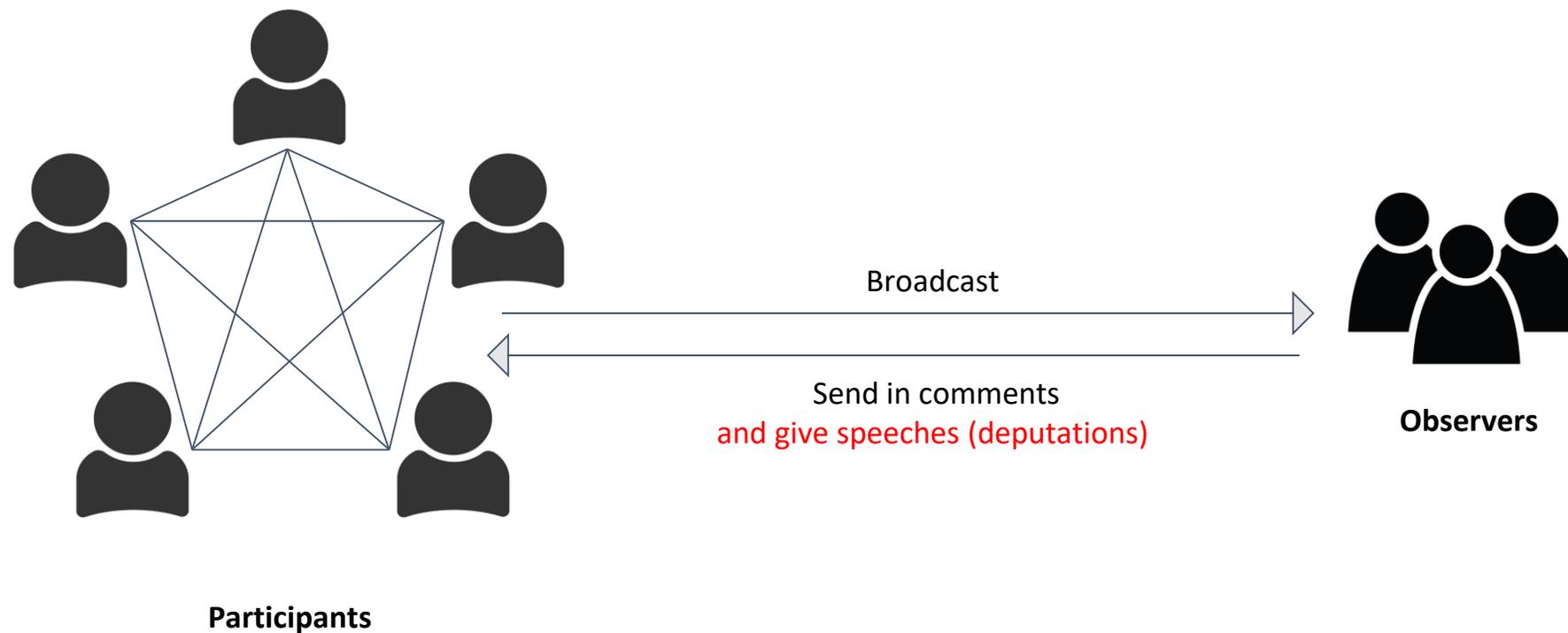
A traditional video conference meeting enables full participation, conversations and screen sharing between all participants.

The user need covered in this document is to additionally enable an audience (“observers”) to watch proceedings and pose questions of the main participants.



Typical user requirements

Some types of meetings, such as planning meetings, may additionally wish to enable select members of the public to give a speech or 'deputation'.



The Technology

Google Hangouts Meet, Microsoft Teams and Zoom all offer functionality that can support observers.

Google Hangouts Meet offers a “Live Stream”.

Zoom refers to this as a “Video Webinar”.

MS Teams calls it ‘Live Events’.

Each platform also enables observers to pose written questions, typically through some form of chat function.

Most councils will already be set up to use at least one of these platforms. Steps and links to guidance videos on how to set up this kind of online meeting are covered in this deck.

We recommend you contact your ICT team for assistance in getting started.

Additional tools can be used. We suggest keeping them as simple as possible to ensure ease of use, reliability and accessibility.

For voting

- Participants could use any form of collaborative document to record their vote.
- If your council uses Microsoft products (e.g. Word), you can share a document for others to edit (i.e. vote) in real-time by clicking on the ‘Share’ button in the top right hand corner. See guidance [here](#).
- Councils using G-Suite (i.e. Google products) can do the same with [Google docs](#).

For questions

To support a live Q&A by observers, platforms like [Slido](#) enable observers to ask questions and indicate which questions they feel are most important.

The Process

Making this kind of meeting work well online also requires some adaptation to process.

Before the meeting:

- If any documents need to be referred to during the meeting, share them with participants in advance and ensure that every page and slide has a number.
- If it's appropriate for observers to be able to see the documents as well, post links to each document on your council website. Your ICT or digital team can help you do this.

Before the meeting, all participants should be made aware of the following etiquette:

1. Join the meeting promptly to avoid unnecessary interruptions.
2. Mute your mic when you're not talking
3. If possible, switch off your camera when you're not speaking (to save bandwidth).
4. If you'd like to speak, turn your camera on.
5. Only speak when invited to by the Chair.
6. State your name before you make a comment.
7. If you're referring to a specific page or slide mention the page or slide number.

Chair and Clerk

Chairing an online meeting:

- If referring to specific documents, clearly state the document and page number.
- Be very directive! Invite specific participants by name to speak or to respond to a point.
- If you're not sure who would like to speak next, invite participants who would like to make a point to turn on their camera. You can then invite them by name in turn.

Role of the Clerk

- Committees should have a clerk / moderator to make notes to create the formal minutes.
- For the smooth running of the meeting, it will help if the moderator can assist the Chair in spotting who wishes to speak.
- If using a collaborative document to take votes, the Clerk can take responsibility for sharing the relevant document and calling out the result.

Voting

Voting can be done in one of two ways.

Using Process (simplest)

- The simplest way to record a vote is for the Chair to perform a roll-call of all committee members and ask them to state their vote, which can be captured by the Clerk.
- If all participants can be seen on the video conference, they could alternatively indicate this with a hand signal:

Thumb up = Vote For

Thumb down = Vote Against

Flat hand = Vote Abstain

Using Technology

- An alternative option is to enable participants to write down their vote.
- In advance of the meeting, the Clerk should give exclusive access to participants to a collaborative document such as a Google doc, which all participants can edit at the same time (see slide 6).
- That document could be laid out as follows:

VOTE Name / Number

FOR

[Participants type their names]

AGAINST

[Participants type their names]

ABSTAIN

[Participants type their names]

Taking Deputations / Speeches from Members of the Public

Some meetings will need to enable members of the public to share their views, for example during a planning meeting. Again there are two ways of doing this.

Simplest Option: Share views in writing in advance

- There is no legal requirement that committees must accept oral input from the public.
- Instead, committees could make it clear in advance of the meeting that all submissions must be made in writing.
- This could be done by sharing an email address to which they can write, or by creating a simple [Google Form](#) through which participants can submit their views.
- Ensure that the deadline for making submissions is made very clear.
- Submissions could be read out by the Clerk or Chair during the meeting, or chaired by combining them into one document.

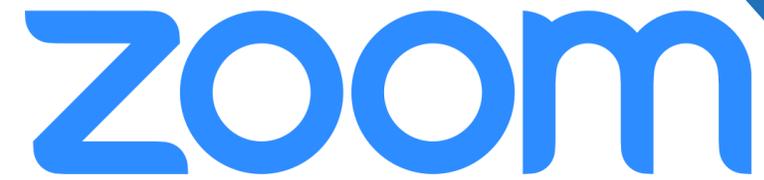
Advanced option: Add as participants

- It is common practice for members of the public who wish to speak at a committee to give advance notice.
- Those wishing to speak could be added as participants rather than as observers to the meeting.
- In effect, this may require requesting their email address in advance of the session so that they can be sent the joining link for participants.
- Presentations from the public would be handled in the same way as contributions from committee members.
- They should be informed of the meeting etiquette and directly invited to speak by the Chair.
- The Chair should be clear on the time limit for speaking, and give participants' notice when they have 1 minute / 30 seconds remaining.

Tools for broadcasting online meetings



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Zoom Video Webinar

[Read Zoom's webinar guidance](#)

1. Select 'Webinars' from toolbar on far left
2. Click 'Schedule a webinar'
3. Fill in the form with your preferences
4. Scroll down to the 'Invitations' section to invite
 - a. **panellists** (these are your fellow committee members)
 - b. **attendees** (these are the observers)
5. To start the webinar, Sign in to the [Zoom web portal](#) and click 'Webinars'
6. Find the webinar, and click 'Start'.

LOTI Comments:

Zoom Video Webinar is a popular platform that can work well with participants using lots of different devices. It comes with the ability to host polls and Q&As.

Zoom Video Webinar can broadcast to up to 10,000 view-only attendees, depending on the size of your webinar license.





Microsoft Teams

[Read Microsoft's Live Events guidance](#)

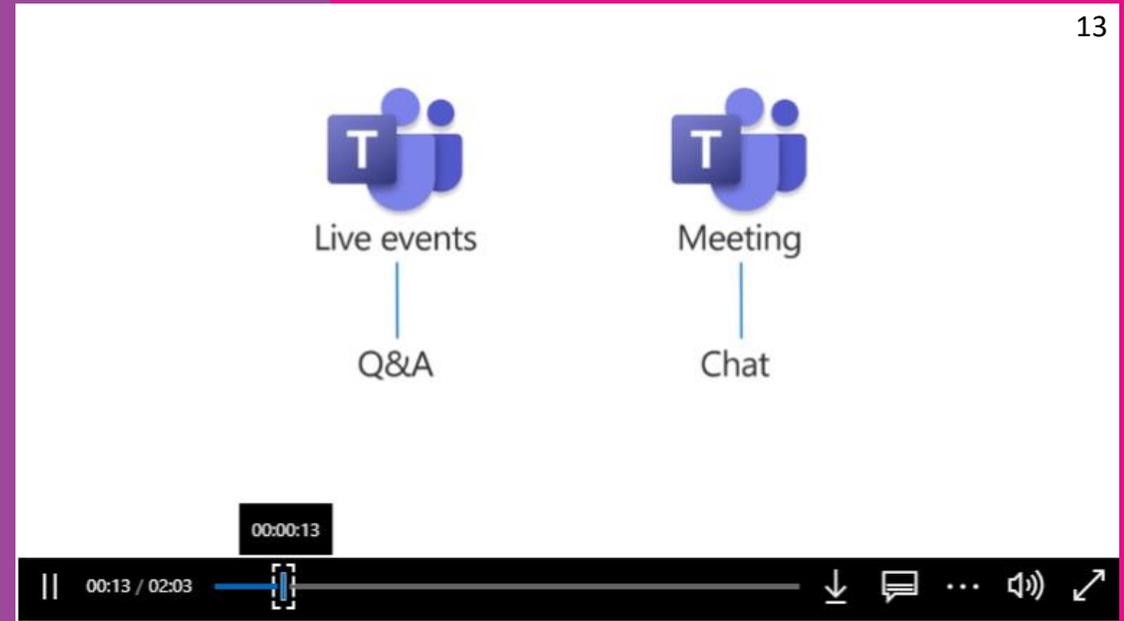
Steps:

Microsoft has helpful guidance videos on how to:

- [Plan and schedule a Live Event](#)
- [Produce a Live Event](#) (i.e. how to control who is presenting and viewers see)
- [Attend a Live Event](#)
- [Moderate a Q&A during a Live Event](#)

Other useful links:

- [Getting Started with Live Events](#)
- [Live Events Assistant Program](#)
- [Live Events best practice](#)
- [Live Events Training Series](#)
- [Live Events in Detail](#)
- [Live Events for the professionals](#)



How MS Teams meets the user requirements

Enable contributions from people using a wide variety of devices, not all of whom are on the council network.

A: Yes. Teams does this as a cloud service natively as long as the permissions allow guests or anonymous join.

Be both accessible to participants and to members of the public who are not taking an active role but observing.

A: Yes. If it's a live event you can make it public and many people can view this event as attendees online with a browser etc.

To recognise and give special controls to both a committee clerk (moderator) and a committee Chair.

A: Yes. Teams Live event provides the respective presenter, producer, attendee role for this.

The committee clerk (moderator) needs to be able to allocate different levels of access to people logging in (based on upon whether or not they are a councillor, an officer, a member of the public who has registered to speak or just an observer of the meeting).

A: Yes the producer(s) of the event can manage this.

How MS Teams meets the user requirements

The Chair and the Clerk need to:

Pause (adjourn) the meeting

A: Just take down the stream (live-feed) from public viewing as the producer and then resume when needed as you control the content presented.

Switch on each active participant's microphone when they are invited to speak and to switch them off afterwards

A: Yes

Mute someone speaking at any time / Mute everyone speaking except themselves at any time

A: Yes, one can do this as a producer.

Switch some active participants and the observers off, so they are paused and have neither 'live' visual or audio feed whilst the committee deliberates in private or the clerk or a lawyer present gives the committee advice.

A: Yes. One can take down the live feed content from the public and just display a holding slide. Then maybe have decision makers in a separate meeting on Teams with forms for voting etc. This could be done outside of the Live stream over Teams, then you'd resume the live feed content when needed.

The officers present / clerk need to be able to give presentations and display documents (maps and plans etc) and to speak over them.

A: Yes. Anyone who needs to talk / present during the event just needs to join and be made a presenter role by the producer.



Google Hangouts Livestream

[Read Google's Guidance on Live Streaming](#)

1. On your [Google calendar](#), click 'Create'.
2. Select 'More options'.
3. Click 'Add conferencing' and select 'Hangouts Meet'.
4. To [live stream](#), click the down arrow and select 'Add live stream'.
5. 'Add title' and 'Add guests', if you know their contact details, to your meeting.
6. On 'Join Hangouts Meet', click to down arrow to 'View conference details'. Copy and share these details for wider circulation of the invitation.

LOTI Comments:

Google Hangouts is fully integrated with G Suite, so you can join meetings directly from a Calendar event or email invite.

