

4 June 2020

Response to Request for Information - 1662725

Virtual Meetings During the Unprecedented Covid-19 Pandemic

I can confirm that the information requested is held by Wolverhampton Council. I have detailed below in blue the information that is being released to you.

Request

1. What measures have you introduced when there is a need for a site visit?
During the initial phase of lockdown officers were not visiting sites. Since early May where information cannot be obtained electronically or virtually, some site visits have been undertaken but only where it is safe for the officer and the customer. A conversation takes place before attending to ascertain if access to the site can be undertaken without going indoors, can the visit be undertaken unaccompanied, is the customer displaying symptoms or is anyone in the household displaying symptoms or being sheltered. If it is safe to do so, the officer will attend and maintain 2m distance at all times. If the officer feels unsafe at any time, the meeting is abandoned, the customer is advised of this at the beginning of the meeting.
2. Understanding the need for social distancing and the current government lockdown, how is the Authority satisfied that site notices have been adequately carried out with many people self-isolating?
Site notices have been posted in line with legal requirements. Site notices are posted in publicly accessible locations so social distancing and self-isolation has not been an issue.
3. Are decisions which would normally be decided by a committee being carried out by virtual meetings with all the necessary parties involved? How are the public, objectors/agents and speakers being incorporated into the revised planning decision process?
The first planning committee after the announcement of lockdown was cancelled. We have yet to undertake our first virtual planning committee, it is on 2nd June 2020 and will take place on teams, with all participants involved having access on teams.

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4. Are you still carrying out face to face committee meetings/on site meetings with social distancing rules applied? Or are you using another method of decision making, if so please advise details of this.
[Meetings with architects/agents/residents are taking place on teams. Planning committee is not able to visit sites so are relying on photographs of the sites \(where necessary\). If Members are not comfortable in making a decision based on that level of information, the application will be deferred until such time as it is safe for Members to visit the site.](#)
5. Regarding the use of virtual meetings if you are using these methods is there a particular app or software package you are using? How are agents/public being incorporated or notified of these meetings where necessary?
[See earlier responses. If teams is not available customers can use teleconferencing.](#)
6. We assume that staffing levels have changed as well as changes to the protocols you adhere to, are there any changes in the way applications are being decided? Have new temporary powers been given to heads of departments?
[There are no staffing changes.](#)
7. Are there any other changes in your working practices which you feel would assist us in providing a better interaction between us and your departments, if so please provide details.
[There are no changes to our current working practice.](#)

Please quote the reference number 1662725 in any future communications.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to:

Information Governance Team
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Email: foi@wolverhampton.gov.uk

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If you are still dissatisfied with the Council's response after the internal review you have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner, contact details can be found on their website: www.ico.org.uk

I will now close your request as of this date.

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