

Birchington Parish Council

Live Streaming

The Parish Council has piloted recording of meetings of the Full Council, as well as several Committee Meetings. These recordings have not been published, but have been used to test the process.

The Council now needs to decide the way forward.

Please be advised that ChatGPT has been used to create this report to inform the Parish Council of the pros and cons of live streaming meetings, as well as best practice considerations should the Council decide to take this forward.

Pros of Live Streaming Parish Council Meetings

- **Transparency & Accountability** – Streaming meetings allows residents to see council decisions in real-time, fostering trust and openness.
- **Increased Public Engagement** – More people can follow discussions without attending in person, thereby improving public participation.
- **Accessibility** – Residents who are elderly, disabled, or have other commitments can stay informed.
- **Record Keeping** – A video archive provides a reliable record of proceedings, useful for reference and dispute resolution.
- **Combatting Misinformation** – Provides direct access to council discussions, reducing reliance on second-hand reports or social media speculation.
- **Community Awareness** – Informs residents about local issues, potentially leading to greater involvement in local affairs.

Cons of Live Streaming Parish Council Meetings

- **Technical Challenges** – Requires a stable internet connection, good audio and video quality, and someone to manage the stream.
- **Privacy Concerns** – Members of the public who speak may not wish to be recorded, and GDPR compliance is necessary.
- **Risk of Misuse** – Clips could be taken out of context, leading to misunderstandings or reputational damage.
- **Costs & Resources** – Equipment, software, and staff time may be needed to set up and maintain the service.
- **Inhibited Discussion** – Councillors may be more cautious in debate, leading to less open discussion.
- **Trolling & Abuse** – Online platforms may attract disruptive comments or abuse towards councillors and staff.

Best Practices for Live Streaming Parish Council Meetings

Legal & Privacy Considerations

- **GDPR Compliance** – Ensure that the council follows data protection laws. Inform attendees that the meeting is being recorded and streamed.
- **Consent for Public Participation** – If members of the public speak, clarify whether their contributions will be included in the stream.
- **Clear Policy** – Adopt a streaming policy outlining how recordings will be stored, how long they'll be available, and what happens in case of technical failures.

Choosing the Right Platform

- **YouTube Live / Facebook Live** – Free and widely used, but may require moderation.
- **Zoom / Microsoft Teams** – Useful if you want to allow interactive participation while keeping control over who speaks.
- **Dedicated Council Website** – Hosting videos on the council website allows better control over access and archiving.

Equipment & Technical Setup

- **Camera & Microphone Quality** – Invest in a good webcam and microphone to ensure clear video and sound. Position cameras to capture the full meeting without obstructing participants.
- **Stable Internet Connection** – Use a wired connection if possible to prevent buffering or disconnection.
- **Backup Recording** – Always record the meeting locally in case of streaming failures.

Moderation & Public Engagement

- **Disabling or Moderating Comments** – If streaming on social media, decide whether to allow public comments. Assign someone to moderate discussions if needed.
- **Code of Conduct** – Establish guidelines for how the public can interact during live meetings (e.g., no disruptive behaviour).
- **Accessibility Features** – Provide subtitles or transcripts for those with hearing impairments.

Post-Meeting Considerations

- **Archiving** – Store and organize recordings so they can be accessed later by residents. Ensure they remain available for a reasonable period.
- **Summaries & Highlights** – Provide written minutes or short highlight clips to improve accessibility and engagement.
- **Feedback & Review** – Ask residents for feedback on the live streams to improve the process.

Additional information:

BPC Draft Policy – Recording Meetings.