

Hampshire County Council

Member Meetings in EII Court

Risk Assessment for COVID – 19

Apart from where exemptions for self-isolation apply, measures listed within this risk assessment continue to apply to all meeting attendees including those that have received a negative test result or have been vaccinated (either 1 or 2 doses plus a booster dose), or have natural immunity (based on proof of a positive PCR within the past 180 days)

Overview

At the start of the Covid-19 crisis, the Government introduced regulations that enabled the holding of remote County Council meetings. That legislation expired on 7 May 2021 and formal meetings of the County Council must now be held physically in person. Other Member events such as Executive Member Decision Days can compliantly be held remotely or in a “hybrid” manner (with some in the room and others joining electronically). HCC will consider the most appropriate and legally compliant method of holding meetings in its undertakings.

As an Employer, Hampshire County Council (HCC) recognises it has a duty to protect both its employees and visitors when using its buildings (including its events and meeting facilities). This duty extends to the risk created by Covid-19.

This document sets out HCC’s overall risk assessment from Covid-19 for HCC Member Meetings, held in the Queen Elizabeth II Complex in Winchester, in line with issued [Government guidance](#). A list of key Member Meeting rooms and their maximum capacities is noted in this document.

This risk assessment states the standard approach for member meetings at a high level, but meeting organisers will be responsible for considering the specific requirements of their meeting and its attendees, following the appropriate [Covid-19 workplace guidance](#).

It is therefore recognised that for some events, arrangements will vary from the general approach detailed within this document. Where this is the case, an event specific risk assessment will take primacy in terms of necessary control measures.

This risk assessment sits within the overall hierarchy of control and aligns with the principles laid out in HCC’s overarching Corporate Office Accommodation Covid-19 risk assessment and the HSE direction on [“What to include in your Covid-19 risk assessment”](#).

All risk assessments, and therefore controls resulting from them, are live documents which are likely to change should new information become available (either centrally or locally) to inform changes in our undertakings or interpretation of the risk.

HCC will store risk assessments appropriately within its document filing structure so that they are available as required for Members, staff, the public, contractors and partner organisations. The aim of this is to provide a flexible approach that allows the County Council to continue to meet statutory requirements and be open and transparent.

The standard precautions implemented during Member Meetings are detailed fully within the Risk Management Controls section, focusing on:

- Keeping the virus out of the building
- Maintaining good ventilation
- Cleaning
- Minimising touch points
- Reducing contacts between building users
- Encouraging good behaviours
- Communication and collaboration
- Emergency responses

Keeping the virus out of the building

Building users (including meeting attendees) must not attend EII Court if they are displaying Covid symptoms, are awaiting a test or have been required to self-isolate (unless exempt). All meeting attendees are strongly encouraged to take a Lateral Flow Test no more than 12 hours prior to the meeting

NB: from 10th January 2022, if an LFT is positive you should report the result and self-isolate immediately

In response to the Omicron variant, Government Guidance was updated to reflect that anyone who has been identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19, and who is not legally required to self-isolate, is now strongly advised to:

- take a rapid lateral flow test every day for 7 days, or until 10 days after their last contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 if this is earlier
- take this daily rapid lateral flow test before they leave their home for the first time that day
- self-isolate immediately if any of these tests are positive

Maintaining good ventilation

Recognising the important role that mechanical and natural airflow plays in minimising Covid-19 transmission, HCC is following the guidance of HSE and CIBSE (Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers) for ventilation in its buildings.

Meeting attendees are encouraged to use doors and windows appropriately to let fresh air in.

More information on ventilation in key Member meeting rooms is noted later in this document.

During winter months, HCC will follow HSE advice on balancing ventilation with keeping people warm.

Cleaning

Cleaning remains important and HCC will continue to follow applicable guidance. Meeting attendees should maintain good hand hygiene (washing hands regularly and using hand sanitiser where available) and make use of the surface wipes/spray located in the rooms to keep surfaces and equipment clean during meetings.

Minimising touch points

HCC have taken steps to minimise touch points in its buildings, including the installation of infra-red release buttons are installed for “wave to open” on some doors.

Meeting attendees can help keep others safe by minimising the items or surfaces they touch and by following guidance to self-clean and maintain good hand hygiene. When moving around the building, attendees are encouraged to take regular routes to minimise the number of doors handles, handrails etc they come into contact with.

Reducing contacts between building users

At a national level, the Government removed most legal restrictions imposed through the pandemic on 19th July 2021, including the requirement to socially distance or limit social contact between people from different households. Capacities in HCC buildings **including meeting rooms** and communal areas have therefore reverted to those applicable for their normal use, in compliance with other legislation including fire regulations. Consideration will be given to meeting room layouts (within the capacity available) by making use of side-by-side seating and offsetting those face to face, to the extent that this is possible.

Meeting organisers may give consideration to limiting attendees in the room, the duration of meetings and making use of digital tools to enable delegates to join electronically (where applicable and compliant with legislation), to reduce physical contacts between attendees in consultation with the Chairman of a Committee/Panel.

Attendees can minimise the number of different people they come into contact with by limiting the time they spend in the building before and after meetings, avoiding congregating/mingling at meetings, considering the areas of the building they use, avoiding making unnecessary journeys around the building and using consistent routes.

Encouraging good behaviours

Signage that encourages positive behaviours is displayed.

HCC’s approach to uptake of the vaccine for presence in the corporate buildings remains that of encouragement (not enforcement) and signposting appropriate educational resources that may be helpful.

From Friday 10th December 2021, HCC reinstated the requirement to wear face coverings when attending a County Council office and moving around buildings (including moving around a meeting room), except when seated at a desk or where exempt.

Asymptomatic testing is not a requirement for HCC corporate building users, beyond those who are already part of a specific targeted programme such as in social care. However, building users and meeting attendees are encouraged to make use of the free [rapid lateral flow tests](#) are widely available to order or collect. [Rapid lateral flow coronavirus \(COVID-19\) tests - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Communication and collaboration

HCC Members will be updated on the standard precautions as noted within this risk assessment. Meeting specific risk assessments (if applicable) will be issued to attendees within joining instructions.

HCC has refreshed its communications to visitors to reflect the introduction of the Government's Plan B.

HCC welcome feedback and invite meeting attendees to update meeting organisers with comments or concerns.

Emergency responses

Although Covid - 19 may introduce new risks into the buildings, meeting organisers should ensure their delegates are aware of other emergency precautions including fire evacuation and first aid.

Hazard

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a type of virus called SARS-CoV-2. As this is a new virus it could affect a significant proportion of the population as there was no natural immunity, although a national vaccination programme is now well progressed. Given the widespread prevalence of COVID -19 in the population, the opportunity and therefore frequency of exposure, if uncontrolled, will be significant.

Who is at Risk?

COVID-19 can make anyone seriously ill and can in some cases result in death, although the link with hospitalisation and death is significantly reduced through vaccination.

During HCC Member meetings, there are several user groups identified who could be at potential risk of exposure to the virus due to their attendance at the meeting:

- HCC County Councillors
- HCC Officers
- HCC Building support staff (inc. Facilities Management, Events and HC3S Catering staff)
- External contractors (inc. external audio-visual contractors)
- General public (inc. members of the press and anyone making a deputation or attending a meeting as an observer)

Some people remain at [higher risk](#) including people over the age of 50, people with certain health conditions and pregnant women.

Significant Findings

The expiry of legislation on 7 May 2021 that enabled the holding of remote County Council meetings means that formal meetings of the County Council must now be held physically in person. Other Member events such as Executive Member Decision Days can compliantly be held remotely or in a "hybrid" manner (with some in the room and others joining electronically). HCC will consider the most appropriate and legally compliant method of holding meetings in its undertakings.

Covid – 19 poses a significant risk to both HCC Members, staff, visitors and others. To control this risk in the Queen Elizabeth II building (including its events and meeting facilities), HCC will follow National Government advice and guidance throughout its undertaking.

Emerging evidence suggests that protection from symptomatic illness from the Omicron variant is conferred following two doses of a Covid-19 vaccination, followed by a booster dose. Two doses alone does not appear to confer protection against symptomatic disease from the Omicron variant. From Monday 13th December the NHS are offering the booster vaccination to all individuals aged 18 and over. Individuals are eligible for a booster 3 months after their second dose.

Meeting organisers will consider the specific requirements of their event and its attendees, following the appropriate Covid-19 workplace guidance. Where this is the case, a meeting specific risk assessment would be implemented and would take primacy in terms of necessary control measures.

Covid-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing symptomatic disease, however there continue to be other precautionary measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 and these are noted within the following control measures.

Member Meeting - Risk Management Controls

Reducing contact:

- Where legally compliant to do so and technology permits, meeting organisers will consider whether physical attendance may be reduced with participants joining electronically.
- Meeting organisers will give consideration to the necessary duration of meetings.
- Seating arrangements around tables will be largely on a side-by-side basis, and where face-to-face or across tables, these will be offset to the degree possible.
- Attendance should not exceed maximum capacity of the room.
- Use of face coverings is mandatory but supported for those who choose to wear one particularly when moving around or seated face to face / across tables
- Attendees are encouraged to consider, and minimise, the number, proximity and duration of contacts whilst attending meetings
- Some Council meetings will offer a live YouTube stream of the meeting to enable remote viewing by general public and press
- Large w/c facilities with cubicles available in Podium of QEII Court and EII South
- Considerate queuing encouraged for refreshments via QEII Coffee Shop

Managing hygiene & transmission risk:

Ventilation

- Where installed mechanical fresh air ventilation systems will be maximised in line with CIBSE guidance
- Fresh air purge (all doors open fully before meetings)
- Natural ventilation – Windows and doors to be open throughout meetings where safe and appropriate to do so

Cleaning

- Cleaning regime of communal areas in line with government guidance on [Covid-19 cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#)

- All meeting room tables will be sanitised in advance of meeting (further desk wipes available for personal use)

Hygiene

- Hand sanitising stations through building
- Desk wipes available for additional personal clean as preferred
- Fresh water handwashing with replenished soap and hand towels in w/c facilities
- Elimination of touch points where practical including infra-red red release buttons for “wave to open” on some doors and (as applicable) individual push to talk microphones for each attendee
- Agendas and meeting documents issued electronically and attendees to view via personal devices
- Attendees are advised to bring their own drinking water/other refreshments

Other

- Attendees encouraged to undertake an LFT no more than 12 hours prior to a meeting and from 11th January, if the test is positive you should report the result and self-isolate immediately
- Meeting attendees advised to not attend where they:
 - have symptoms of COVID-19; you should book a PCR test as soon as possible and self-isolate until you receive the result
 - have been advised to self-isolate as part of the government's [test and trace](#)
- County Councillor and HCC Officer contact tracing via confirmed attendance records
- QR codes for use of general public and press for Test and Trace purposes at visitor receptions

Communication and collaboration:

- Communication of this risk assessment to all HCC County Councillors, on first issue and when amended
- Meeting specific Covid-19 risk assessments (if applicable) to be issued to all County Councillors with agenda and joining instructions
- Summarised precautions included within County Councillors joining instructions
- Hants.gov.uk meeting page to encourage viewing remotely via live YouTube stream rather than attending in person (where applicable)
- Signage that encourages positive behaviours
- HCC and Public Health campaigns that continue to promote uptake of testing and vaccination

Emergency Response:

- Consistent HCC approach to Covid -19 risk assessment
- HCC expertise including Health & Safety, Public Health and Fire Safety
- Qualified first aiders following Government Covid-19 guidance for First Responders
- Reviewed, updated and communicated fire strategy plans
- Reviewed, updated communicated emergency procedures and evacuation plans

Meeting room capacities:

Meeting Room	Ventilation type	Maximum
Council Chamber	Mechanical ventilation system (extract) Natural ventilation from some windows Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to corridor and door to public gallery	100 Chamber 24 Public Gallery
Ashburton Hall	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Natural available by opening Fire Exits Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to Podium	200 (Theatre)
Wellington Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Natural ventilation from some windows Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to anti-room and stairwell	24 (Conference)
Chute Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Natural ventilation from some windows Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to corridor	20 (Conference)
Portal Room	Mechanical ventilation system (extract) Natural ventilation from some windows Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to corridor	20 (Conference)
Mitchell Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Fixed external glazing (windows do not open) Further airflow can be created by opening main doors to Podium	70 (Theatre)
Nightingale Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Internal room (no external windows) Further airflow can be created by opening main door to Podium	14 (Conference)
Denning Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Fixed external glazing (windows do not open) Further airflow can be created by opening main door to Podium	18 (Conference)
Mountbatten Room	Mechanical ventilation system (supply and extract) Fixed external glazing (windows do not open) Further airflow can be created by opening main door to Podium	18 (Conference)

Useful links:

Government Guidance on working safely during Coronavirus

[Offices, factories and labs - Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

HSE Guidance on “What to include in your Covid-19 risk assessment”

[Risk assessment - Working safely during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/covid19/risk-assessment/)

Public Health England data

[COVID-19 vaccine surveillance report - week 28 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/531117/covid-19-vaccine-surveillance-report-week-28.pdf)

Vaccines for clinical risk groups

[RCGP VE riskgroups paper \(khub.net\)](https://www.khub.net/RCGP-VE-riskgroups-paper)

Current Hampshire Data

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/corprhantsweb/Covid19/Keep-Hampshire-Safe-Infographic.pdf>

People at higher risk

[People at higher risk from coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/)

When to self isolate (including exemptions)

[When to self-isolate and what to do - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/covid-19/when-to-self-isolate/)

How to avoid catching and spreading Covid-19

[How to avoid catching and spreading coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/covid-19/how-to-avoid-catching-and-spreading-covid-19/)

General Government guidance on preventing the spread of Coronavirus

[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-how-to-stay-safe-and-help-prevent-the-spread)

Covid-19 Cleaning in non-healthcare settings

[COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-cleaning-of-non-healthcare-settings-outside-the-home)

Hampshire Home Testing Kits

[Home test kits | Health and social care | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/health-social-care/home-test-kits)

NHS Test and Trace

[NHS Test and Trace: what to do if you are contacted - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-what-to-do-if-you-are-contacted)

Version Control

Revision	Date	Reason
Initial issue	October 2021	Initial issue to all Members & link included on Speaking at a County Council meeting About the Council Hampshire County Council (hants.gov.uk)
First Revision	7 January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting current “Plan B” Government guidance • Updated guidance on Lateral Flow Testing if contacted by Test and Trace • W.e.f 10 January 2022 requirement to report a positive LFT result and self-isolate immediately • HCC requirement to wear face coverings when moving around buildings (including meeting rooms) • Updated “Significant Findings” section re: Omicron Variant and vaccination