

# Holding Virtual Surgeries

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There are many tools for online meetings, and you should use what you're comfortable with and what works with your council or personal IT equipment, but my preferred method is Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)).

What I have found is that rather than advertising virtual surgery times, I have offered to constituents that I am available to conduct video conferencing during normal "physical" surgery times. If they aren't available during any of my advertised surgery times, I then offer to do a virtual surgery as I would a home visit, at a time that suits them. I'll be considering how I offer these now that my physical surgeries have been cancelled for the foreseeable future.

My process so far has generally been:

1. Advise constituent who asks when my surgeries are, that I am happy to undertake a video conference and ask for thoughts, but make clear, they have to let me know in advance.
2. Suggest "Zoom" and get constituent's **email address**, back up **phone number** and send them a link to the app / website (they can connect through their internet browser on a PC though if they can't download or use the app).
3. Determine whether they are available during one of my advertised surgeries (where I know I will have signal or Wi-Fi) and book them a slot.
4. When I am on Wi-Fi – I use my laptop. When I have no Wi-Fi and good signal, I use my phone. I do have the app on my council iPad but I find it requires more setting up with contacts etc and I don't have admin rights on council device. It will depend on your council's policies.
5. The app is self-explanatory, but it does help to set up some defaults. I always join with my camera and microphone muted and then turn them on. I also add the setting to have a "tone played when person joins" turned on – that means you can start with their microphone on mute too and get on with other work in case you are waiting for them to join.

6. Always set a limit on time, so suggest 10 mins, knowing it could be more. A good thing with the free version of zoom is that meetings are limited to 45 mins.
7. There is an option to add a password, which I always do, just to be sure. It doesn't have to be an overly complicated password. Just don't use the same ones that you use for anything else and change for each surgery!
8. If the constituent doesn't want to use Zoom because they use something else, that is ok with me but Zoom is good because no one can add you or start calling you, like they can in other apps i.e. Skype or Hangouts etc.
9. Use a mobile phone headset or other headset/mic combo for privacy reasons, if you can, and treat your body language and facial expressions as you would in real life and be mindful of them.
10. That's pretty much it – but happy to help anyone (from any party/none) if they want to have a go and get ready for a shift in working.

Zoom is particularly ideal for multi video conferencing, and I have done everything from training, to fitness class, to speaking to all members of my household at once about what chores they still haven't finished!

During these difficult times, elected members will have to find new ways of working and be open to trying things. Set-up some tests with friends, loved ones or other members in your party/council and once you're confident with the software, start using it with constituents.

Out of necessity this week, one of our more rural community councils even met by video conference, actually in that case, using Microsoft Teams. The age demographic was as it usually is in Community Councils, and with a day's notice and no prior training, we managed it.

My experience shows that it can be done, and my advice is to give it a try!

Good luck!