

**COUNCIL BUSINESS
COMMITTEE**

6.00 P.M.

10TH DECEMBER 2024

PRESENT:- Councillors David Whitaker (Chair), John Livermore, Sarah McGowan, Jean Parr, Paul Stubbins, Sue Tyldesley (Substitute) and Jason Wood (Substitute)

Apologies for Absence:

Matthew Black (Vice-Chair) and Suhir Abuhajar

Officers in attendance:

Debbie Chambers

Senior Manager Democratic Support and Elections
and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Phillip Abel

Democratic Support Officer

13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 19 September 2024 were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

14 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR

There were no items of urgent business.

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16 ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS - CONSULTATION RESPONSE (Pages 3 - 7)

The Committee was asked to note the Government's online consultation on Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings and consider making a response on behalf of the City Council.

After noting the consultation and agreeing unanimously to formulate a response at the meeting, the Committee discussed each question in turn and prepared answers for all relevant questions, which have been appended to these minutes.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the Committee notes the Government's consultation on Enabling Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings.

- 2) That the Council's response to the Government consultation on Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings, as appended to the minutes, be submitted on or before the deadline of 19 December 2024.

Chair

(The meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Phillip Abel, Democratic Support - email pabel@lancaster.gov.uk**

1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

An elected member of a council body

- A council body
- A member of the public
- A local government sector body

The proposal for remote attendance

The government intends to legislate to give local authorities the flexibility to allow elected members to attend formal council meetings remotely. We believe that this modernising measure of providing broad flexibility to enable remote attendance will have the dual positive impacts of diversifying the representation of those willing and able to stand for elected office and enhance the resilience of local authorities in the face of local or national emergencies.

The intent is that this legislative change would give local authorities the flexibility to allow members to attend remotely.

2. Do you agree with the broad principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?

Yes

If you answered 'No' to question 2, select 'Continue' and go directly to question 4.

3. If you answered 'Yes' to question 2, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?

Please tick all the options below that correspond with your view and use the free text box for any other comments.

- Any formal meeting allowing remote attendance should have at least two thirds of members in physical attendance
- Members should only be able to attend council meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies
- There should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance

In exceptional circumstances, such as a local or national emergency, the two thirds of members in physical attendance requirement may need to be waived.

4. If you are an elected member, can you anticipate that you personally may seek to attend some of your council meetings remotely?

Yes /No/I am not an elected member

4a. If you answered 'No' to question 4, please explain your answer below:

Explain your answer

4b. If you answered 'Yes' to question 4, please indicate below which of the following options best describes your likely pattern of attending meetings remotely:

Very occasionally/ From time to time/ Regularly but not always/ All the time

5. If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of a council as a whole, what proportion of the council's current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year?

Less than 10% /More than 10% but less than 50%/ More than 50% but less than 90% /Most of them 90% to 100%

6. The government recognises that there may be cases in which it is necessary for councils to hold meetings fully remotely. Do you think there should be limitations placed on the number of fully remote meetings councils should be able to hold?

- Councils should be able to allow full remote attendance at up to half of council meetings within a 12-month calendar period
- Councils should only have the flexibility to change a meeting from in-person to online, or vice versa, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances

- Councils should not have the flexibility to conduct fully remote meetings to ensure there is always an in-person presence

Add any other comments that you have

7. Do you think there are there any necessary procedural measures that would help to ensure a remote or hybrid attendance policy is workable and efficient?

Tick all the options that correspond with your view and use the free text box for any other comments.

- Councils should be required to publish a list of attendees joining the meeting remotely and give notice if a meeting is being held with full remote attendance
- Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings
- Councils should be required to make arrangements to ensure restricted items (where a council decision is taken in private to protect confidentiality) are managed appropriately and to require remotely attending members to join from a private location

On the first point, we would be in favour of publishing in the minutes who attended remotely and in person but would not be in favour of doing that before the meeting.

8. Do you think legislative change to allow councillors to attend local authority meetings remotely should or should not be considered for the following reasons?

Tick all the statements below that apply to your point of view.

Should be considered because:

- It is a positive modernising measure It would likely increase the diversity of people willing and able to stand for election in their local area, making councils more representative of the communities they serve

- Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance

Tried and tested and worked well during COVID 19 Pandemic however we would prefer a 'by exception' or hybrid arrangement rather than fully remote.

Should not be considered because:

- Councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings
- It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils
- It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings

Add any other reasons that it should be considered

9. In your view, would allowing councillors to attend formal local authority meetings remotely according to their needs particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics? For example, those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

It would benefit members/ It would disadvantage members/ Neither

It would help people with health issues and caring responsibilities that may be variable.

Proxy voting

Proxy voting is a form of voting whereby a member of a decision-making body may delegate their voting power to another representative to enable a vote in their absence.

It is possible some members may find that, due to their personal circumstances, they are temporarily unable to participate in meetings even if remote attendance provisions are in place. Provisions for proxy voting could provide additional flexibility to those who really need it on a time-limited basis, allowing affected members to indirectly exercise their democratic duty, participate in their local authority's governance, and ensure that their views are taken into consideration. In the context of local authorities, the representative would have to be another elected member of the local authority.

10. In addition to provisions allowing for remote attendance, do you consider that it would be helpful to introduce proxy voting?

Yes /**No**/ Unsure

11. If yes, for which of the following reasons which may prohibit a member's participation in council meetings do you consider it would be appropriate?

Please select all that apply:

- Physical or medical conditions
- Caring responsibilities
- Parental leave or other responsibilities

Add any other reasons

12. Are there circumstances in which you feel proxy voting would not be appropriate?

Add your comments

13. If you think proxy voting is appropriate, are there any limitations you think should be placed upon it?

Add your comments